SPARTA

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BOOKS

Sparta

Introduction

After so many centuries, the name of Sparta still conjures up glorious memories of an example of austere virtue. This city embodied an ideal of military courage, frugal living, obedience and discipline, all too apparently accompanied by a complete disdain for the complexities of the world.
intelligence and elegance of speech. A somewhat off-putting ideal, which could not fail to arouse aversions! On the Acropolis in Athens, Renan, enamoured of all the games of thought over which Pallas Athena presides, proclaimed his hatred for Sparta, "mistress of dark errors". At least he implicitly acknowledges that she has taught the world something, even if he himself is loathe to do so. Other thinkers were more docile to the lesson of Sparta: in constructing his ideal city, Plato borrowed many features from the city that was still alive, but had already fallen into decay, and which presented Greece with a face that was both proud and gloomy.

The interest that philosophers and political theorists have shown in Sparta from an early date does not make it any easier for them to understand Sparta's history.
not the task of the historian. They have misunderstood the past; they have linked it by a line that is too straight to a line that is too long.
The present was distorted by the inadequacy of observation and the blurred line between reality and ideal conceptions. The most staid of Greek minds, Aristotle, was not exempt from these theoretical views, which were to prevent him from accurately following the various stages of the State.
the true aspect of contemporary Sparta. The further we go back in time, the worse the situation becomes. Underneath the thick sediment of moral dissertations and
The character of the authentic Spartan becomes stale and disappears. Sparta as a state is no more than a shadow, or a shadow of a shadow: the city forged by the ruthless legislator Lycurgus continues its theoretical existence, to which the facts no longer provide even the half-effectiveness of their denial.

It would therefore be easier to write a romanticized history of Sparta, or to boldly attach, 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 realised in the Europe of our time, than to pretend to rediscover the truth about the origin and development of singular institutions of which we are aware.
have only a very incomplete knowledge of it. Yet this is the task we have set ourselves here. In the Greek world as a whole, which is so different from our own, Sparta has its own physiognomy which we must try to explain, without detaching it from the world to which it often seems to be opposed.
A study of this kind is sure to show that the Dorian city retained its originality by nurturing among all its people a passionate faith in certain collective beliefs, the immutable value of which can still be celebrated today [In the old Latin language, pietas, on the other hand, belonged to the realm of the sacred, primarily designating the relationship that Roman man had with the divine.

The first was the relationship between the gods, and the second was the relationship between the gods and other realities linked to the world of tradition, including the State itself. Towards the gods, it was a matter of calm and dignified veneration: a sentiment
of belonging and, at the same time, of respect, of grateful agreement, of duty and adhesion too, as a reinforcement of the feeling that gave rise to the stern figure of the pater familias (which also explains pietas filialis). Pietas could also be manifested in the political sphere: pietas in patriam meant loyalty and a sense of duty towards the state and the party. In some cases, the term also connoted iustitia. Anyone who does not know pietas is also a pietas in patriam.
the unjust, almost the godless, the one who wants to ignore the place that is his and that 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 would not say that this observation is of secondary importance to us; but it can only be of significance if we have first examined, without preconceived opinions, the nature and form of an evolution that only well-defined conditions have made possible.

It is now generally accepted that Sparta first participated in the general development of archaic Greece before withdrawing into itself and developing, for the purposes of its own defence, the rugged organisation that made it great. No doubt Sparta did not achieve this organisation all at once. But if the dates that mark its development are too often uncertain, they all belong to a period prior to that in which classical Greece flourished. On the other hand, what we might call the reform of Sparta consisted in part, like all reforms, of nothing more than an interpretation and adaptation of the past, to which it was intended to give a new meaning.
definitive character. This is why it has been said that in the fifth century BC, the organisation of the Lacedaemonian state already appeared to be an anachronism.

It is notable, however, that the institutions of this state have been regarded by so many Greeks as one of the purest creations of the Greek genius, attached to tradition. Let us, as we have said, leave a great deal to idealisation. The common opinion of antiquity must be taken into consideration more than our doctrinal preferences. The development of democracy, which the city of Athens represents, not without its shortcomings, is countered in Greece not only by material forces, but also by ideal tendencies whose roots go deep into the Hellenic spirit. It was not the philosophers or the aristocratic parties who invented the idea of a privileged class of defenders of the State; Sparta was not the only city to attempt to realise it. Circumstances created the antithesis of Sparta and Athens. When we study Sparta, we should not forget that the Greeks, who put the state at the service of their own people, were the first to do so.
They firmly believed that, sheltered by Lycurgus' legislation, freedom 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 and prose writers, make to Sparta and Laconia, two geographical names come up again and again: Eurotas and Taygetos. The river where Spartan ephebes bathe, the mountain at the foot of which live "the race of Heraclides".

The famous Eurotas is one of the most important rivers in the Peloponnese, but it is second only to 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, Belminatis, which had long been owned by the The River Lacedemonian first flows through a mountainous region, enters the plain five kilometres north of Sparta, exits the Sparta basin via a narrow valley through hills of schist and limestone, and then reaches the sea via a marshy plain. It is fed mainly by springs that flow out of the Taygetos and never dries up. At the height of summer, cool streams of water flow over a wide gravel bed where oleanders grow.

Taygetos, which forms the western boundary of the Sparta basin, is a vigorous massif, elongated from north to south, perhaps more imposing than Olympus, home of the gods and throne of Zeus. Its crenellated ramparts are several storeys high and seem to be set back from one another. Its advanced foothills first form a confused mass of hills that invade the plain and are cut by deep gorges. Above them, a few areas of forest and rock faces whose escarpment appears to be the only way to get to the top.
dizzying. Finally, there is the series of peaks, jagged and almost always snow-covered, culminating at two thousand four hundred metres. The mountain range stretches for more than a hundred and fifteen kilometres, from the plateau of Arcadia to Cape Matapan; but the main mass overlooks the conch of which Sparta occupies the northern extremity, the region that Homer called "hollow Lacedemonia".

To the east lies another range, less elevated and less illustrious than the Taygetos, the Parnon, which continues the Arcadian ranges to the south. The terraces that precede it almost touch the left bank of the Eurotas and dominate it by around a hundred metres. Their reddish colour is a real eye-catcher. They were inhabited in prehistoric times. The Parnon itself has no prominent peaks, but it is a continuous block which, at the height of Sparta, is not crossed by easily accessible passes. Further south, the eastern coast of the Peloponnese is easily reached.

Sparta is usually reached by the northern route, which starts at Tripolis, capital of the district of Arcadia, a city that dates back only to the 14th century AD. The road passes through Tegea and enters the mountains. After the Clisoura gorge, you come to Taygetos, then the plain of Sparta with its surrounding hills, olive groves, well-cultivated fields, orange, fig and mulberry orchards and cypress trees. Vines ripen on the hillsides.

This rich plain, located almost entirely on the right bank of the Eurotas, is only eighteen kilometres long and ten kilometres wide. The shadow of Taygetos extends over it an hour before sunset, spreading a sudden coolness. We have often noted the contrast between the softness, a little
of this abundantly irrigated depression and the salutary harshness of the mountains. Sparta has set up camp on a few mamelons that barely touch the plain, but has managed to escape its pernicious influences.

The middle valley of the Eurotas formed the centre of Laconia, which included other districts, usually less favoured. The rugged region between Taygetos and Parnon, which bordered the plain of Sparta to the south, was very deprived. 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 offshoots of the Parnon and Taygetos rivers, were poor. The coast of the Gulf of Laconia was poorly suited to maritime traffic. Along the plain of Helos, it was low and flat.
marshy; the harbours that opened up in the two mountainous peninsulas were away from
all communication. Sailors feared the approaches to Cape Malée and Cape Ténare
(Matapan). However, before the arrival of the Dorians, a sanctuary of Poseidon had been established near the latter; and, opposite Cape Malea, the island of Kythera was a staging post for pre-Hellenic navies. The Lacedemonians, who were becoming more and more a land-based people, at least had the scale of Gytheion on the Gulf, which they used as a war port.

Geographical conditions only partly explain the characteristics that we recognise, at least from the sixth century BC onwards, in the Lacedaemonian state. Neither the isolation in which it lived, nor the almost exclusive practice of warfare and hunting by the Spartans, nor agriculture by the lower classes, can be justified by considering the context in which the state was formed and the resources at its disposal. Laconia is surrounded by mountains, but it has access routes to the north and east. In the west, in an effort to conquer, the Lacedemonians even crossed the
Taygetos. Agricultural produce is the country's main source of wealth; livestock can be raised on the high plateaux of Taygetos and game abounds; but there is no shortage of marble, iron, wood or clay. There were greater opportunities for export trade than in other parts of Greece, but these were deliberately neglected after being exploited for a time.

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We must say a few words about Messinia, whose destiny has been for several centuries inexorably linked to that of Laconia. Beyond Taygetos, it occupies the south-western corner of the

Peloponnese. Its almost proverbial wealth, which attracted the covetousness of its eastern neighbours, was due above all to the plantful fertility of two alluvial plains: the lower plain, crossed by the Pamisos and extending as far as the Gulf of Messinia; the upper or northern plain, watered by several tributaries of the Pamisos, where Stenyclaros, the capital of the ancient kings, is said to have been located. The vegetation was the same as that of the Spartan plain, but even more luxuriant. Today, thanks to the mild climate, even banana trees can be grown here.

The two plains are separated by a row of hills. At the western end of this threshold stands the legendary Messinian mountain of Ithoma, a natural acropolis whose steep slopes made it easy to defend. From the main summit, which rises to eight hundred metres, the view extends over the Arcadian plains to Taygetos and northwards to the mountains of Arcadia, Lyceum and Erymanthus.
The fortified town of Messène was built on the south-western slopes of Ithoma in the 4th century.

The whole of western Messinia was hardly developed at the time of Spartan domination. The mountainous region between the plains and the coast was pastureland and hunting ground. Along the coast, a few fertile but remote cantons were cultivated. There were a few Periec towns that may have occupied the sites of Mycenaean settlements, but the site of Homeric Pylos, the city of Nestor, was abandoned. The deep harbour covered by the island of Sphacteria was hardly frequented when, during the Peloponnesian War, an Athenian general settled on the promontory of Coryphasion or Pylos, which ends the bay to the north. However, this bay, which in the 19th century became famous for the Battle of Navarin, is an excellent anchorage for a large fleet.

The development of Messinia was halted by the conquest. No more than in Laconia, the conquerors did not exploit all its resources. Their main objective was to acquire arable land. So the possession of this new country, which could have offered maritime outlets to the Gulf of Messinia or to the West, only reinforced the tendency of the Lacedaemonian state to stick to an exclusively agricultural economy. But geography played only a small part in this.

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Greece is divided into small states: Laconia, with the addition of Messinia, measures 7,500 square kilometres. That's three times the size of Attica. Sparta therefore had a territorial base that enabled it to play a leading role. Between its own domain and that attached to the cities

The distinction is made in law, as we shall see. Sparta maintained it because of its political constitution; but the cities and their territory are dependent on it.

The city itself was vast: the historian Polybius estimated its perimeter at forty-eight stadia, or around nine and a half kilometres, and said it was twice the size of Megalopolis, the great city of Arcadia. Archaeological explorations carried out between 1906 and 1910, and again between 1924 and 1929 by the English Archaeological School of Athens, revealed the layout of the defensive wall at various points, which dates back to 188 BC as a whole, with the oldest parts dating back only to the end of the fourth century, when Sparta was an open city.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, Maurice Barrès travelled around the site where "the Sparta of Heroes" once stood; he looked for the tomb of Leonidas and, "over thirty irrigation channels, through half-marshes, amidst arbutus and succulents", tried to recognise, between the Eurotas and the Magoulitza,
the site of the ancient Platanistas, where the ephebes and virgins of Lacedemonia exercised. Then he wrote discouragingly: "Nothing authentic can be found on the undulating mounds of Sparta
". Late remains of Roman buildings and Byzantine walls could be seen among the olive trees,
debris of churches. The layout of the theatre was recognisable: it was at least a landmark, since it was set against the lower acropolis of Sparta. From the top of this acropolis, Châteaubriand had already tried to identify the miserable ruins scattered around him, combining his archaeological study with the romantic meditations inspired by the solitude of these illustrious places and the passionate evocations that the memory of Leonidas aroused in him.

If the research of the English School, limited and hampered by the crops and fruit trees that cover the plain, could only clarify a few points of topography and unearth a few
These buildings, including the famous sanctuary of Artemis Orthia in the Marais (Limnai) district, have at least made it possible to go back beneath the Roman remains to Sparta's most distant past. It would be pointless to discuss the location of the various districts of the city here, or to attempt to give an itinerary by following the description of Pausanias, a traveller of the second century AD. Such an attempt would appear premature. But we will retain what we can learn from the excavations about the ancient life of the city.

The settlement of Laconia and the Dorian migration

At the origin of the Lacedemonian state, as at the origin of all the states of ancient Greece, there is the obscure problem of the populating of the Balkan peninsula. What distant migrations brought to the southern Peloponnese the men who, in classical times, had the Eurotas valley as the centre of their domination? What peoples did they meet there? What degree of civilisation did
reached these peoples? What was the attitude of the newcomers towards the first occupants? These are the essential questions that need to be answered, using all the resources of archaeology, ethnology and linguistics alongside ancient tradition. It is far from possible to answer them with any certainty.

Ancient tradition, despite a few discrepancies, is fairly uniform and fairly simple, too simple to be sure. It linked the Spartans to the Dorians, whose arrival in the Peloponnese it dated to a time somewhat later than the Trojan War. Prior to this, they had wandered in Macedonia, Thessaly and the whole of northern Greece, where a tiny state, Doride, not far from Delphi, remained as a reminder of their passage. They had even made a first unsuccessful attempt on the Peloponnese with their leader Hyllos, son of the national hero Heracles. The second expedition, commanded by three chiefs, Téménos, Aristodémos and Chresphontès, who were related to Hyllos, was known as the Return of the Heraclides. It resulted in the occupation of three cantons of the Peloponnese,
Argolida, Laconia and Messinia, which were divided between the Dorian chiefs. The defeated, who did not In the end, they were driven back into the mountainous regions or reduced to a kind of serfdom. The Lacedaemonian state, where the conquerors maintained the integrity of their race and the principle of their superiority with particular rigour, would represent the Dorian spirit in all its purity. Herodotus, despite his sympathy for Athens, goes even further: between the Dorians and the Hellenes, he establishes a sort of
equivalence. The Spartans thus came to personify that primitive Hellenism which, towards the end of the second millennium BC, brought new order and genuine regeneration to Greece amid the chaos of the indigenous populations.

There is no doubt that the reality is infinitely more complex. Without studying the succession of peoples and civilisations in prehistoric or protohistoric Greece as a whole, let's look at the Peloponnesian area, where the Dorians settled, and see what archaeological research has taught us.

Since the resounding discoveries made at Mycenae and Tirynthe, it is well known that the Argolid was the main centre of the so-called Mycenaean civilisation, in which new elements, apparently of a northern nature, mingled with the still predominant influence of Minoan Crete. It is difficult to explain the mixed nature of this civilisation without resorting to the hypothesis of the penetration into the Peloponnese of immigrants from a northern region who settled among a population that was undoubtedly Mediterranean. This penetration, the details of which are unknown to us, predates the so-called Dorian invasion. It may have begun as early as the beginning of the second millennium BC.

There is reason to believe that the newcomers were Indo-Europeans who brought with them their language, some of their techniques and perhaps also their own organisational methods. They were called Achaeans after an ethnic group used by Homer, but they were also called Proto-Hellenes to show that there was no racial difference between them and the Dorians or Hellenes who came later.

There is no shortage of remains of Mycenaean civilisation in the Eurotas valley. While the site of Sparta itself has not yielded any documents dating from before the ninth century BC, to the east, on the Menelaion hill overlooking the left bank of the Eurotas, Terapne was inhabited before the Dorian era. The same is true of Amycloea, a few kilometres south of Sparta. Two masterpieces of Mycenaean goldsmiths have found gold goblets depicting the hunting and domestication of wild bulls in a domed tomb discovered at Vaphio, not far from Amycloea. It is therefore certain that the Achaeans preceded the Dorians in Laconia; their capital may well have been Amyllacea, which for a long time stubbornly resisted the new wave of invaders.

From the Homeric poems, which are the oldest literary monument in Greece, we would like to draw some conclusions about this Achaean state on the banks of the Eurotas; but neither the Iliad nor the Odyssey give us an exact picture of the Mycenaean world: reminiscences of a very distant past are combined with features borrowed from contemporary reality. Menelaus, husband of the divine Helen, reigns in Laconia
he stayed in Sparta or Lacedemonia, where he was visited by Ulysses' son Telemachus, who had come from Pylos in Messinia. He led against Troy, in sixty ships "those who held the hollow Lacedemonia, those of Pharis, Sparta, Messa pleasant to the doves, and those who inhabited Brysées and the charming Augées and Amyclées and Hélos, city of the sea, and Laas and Œtyle". All this epic geography is obscure and apparently incoherent. And Menelaus, king of Sparta, can hardly be considered a faithful representative of the Achaean monarchy. The Dorians had already passed through here, and on the western coast of Asia Minor, where the Homeric poems were written, there is implicit knowledge of their settlement in the Peloponnese, which distorts the traditions of the heroic era in which the Trojan warriors were supposed to live, fight and die.

These conquerors, to whom we give the somewhat conventional name of Dorians, we
appear as the backbone of the invaders who, in successive waves, descended to the depths of the Peloponnese. As well as states that had already been formed, they found peoples with a complex civilisation, the result of centuries of cross-fertilisation.
These are the pre-Hellenes, thought to have originated in Asia Minor, and the proto-Hellenes, whose Indo-European character is hardly in dispute. The struggles that marked their penetration of Laconia remain obscure. Perhaps they arrived from the east, after crossing the Isthmus of Corinth and occupying the Argolid, crossing the Parnon via the Clisoura gorge, which is still used by the modern road from Tripolis to Sparta. Of the two Mycenaean towns, one, Thérapné, whose houses show traces of

In classical times, there were only sanctuaries on the heights of Menelaion. The fate of Amycloea was better: it was annexed after a prolonged conflict, but the former inhabitants were granted equal rights. The conquest of the entire territory
between Taygetos and Parnon must have been a gradual process. To the south, at the mouth of the Eurotas,
Helos, in its marshy plain, was finally subdued, and the ancients linked to this obscure
the origin of the name Hilotes given to the inhabitants enslaved by the Dorians.

The name Lacedemonia, which Homer uses to designate a territory as well as a city, can be used to refer to both a city and a territory.
date back to Achaean times. Its etymology is entirely uncertain. The Dorians adopted it and later the state they founded was officially called the State of the Lacedemonians. The very city at its centre was called Lacedemonia or Sparta. This last name does not seem to predate the arrival of the last invaders: their ethnic pride is expressed in the term Spartans by which the inhabitants grouped together in the capital city, the only ones soon to enjoy the rights of the Spartans, were called Spartans.
civic values in all their fullness, opposed the other inhabitants of the region. Sparta, which perhaps means the city of sown lands, is said to have originated from the union of four villages on the plain where the Dorians had first spread out and whose names have survived to designate districts of the city: Pitanè to the north-west, Mesoa to the south-west, Cynosoura to the south-east and Limnai to the north-east. Some distance to the south, Amyclées became a political and religious dependency.

The social differences observed later in Laconia are readily explained by the conquest. Periecles and Hilots, whose inferior status we shall see, are said to represent the vanquished, who were treated unequally according to the circumstances of their submission to the conquerors, some accepted as citizens with lesser rights, others deprived of all rights. In fact, we fail to demonstrate that the Periecles were not Dorians and that the servitude of the Hilots resulted exclusively from a land grab for the invaders. It has not been possible to identify any differentiating feature between the dominant class and the rest of the population that would justify such a hypothesis. The very language used by both groups is the Dorian dialect and, if this cannot be taken as incontrovertible proof of their common origin, we must at least acknowledge that there is no positive argument to cast doubt on this commonality. From the end of the second millennium, when we usually place the Dorian migration until the time when we know the system of
In the Lacedaemonian state, many political and economic factors may have determined the social system that emerged.

Already the Achaean state must have been far from presenting a very coherent ethnic unity; but, while it is admitted that the Indo-European immigrants had merged there without difficulty with the natives [This is only a supposition by the author, which is not based on anything and the opposite is the most plausible and
likely], it is believed that the new clans that arrived later were fiercely careful from the outset not to mix their blood with foreign blood. It is certain, however, that from a religious point of view, they have

largely borrowed from their predecessors [Which proves nothing]. On the other hand, some of the families who held eminent positions in Sparta were not of Dorian stock. At the end of the sixth century BC, in Athens, a Spartan king, Cleomenes, was refused entry to the sanctuary by the priestess of Athena on the grounds of his origin, when she replied: "I am not Dorian, but Achaean".
As we shall see, what characterised the dominant caste in the Lacedaemonian state was not origin or descent, but the uniform education they had received [This is only an opinion based on nothing that seems to contradict the truth]. There is no evidence that in the early days these immigrants, whose numbers we do not even know approximately, were stricter about the necessary purity of the race [And there is no evidence to the contrary].

It cannot be denied that a certain conception of Dorian virtues, represented essentially by Sparta, had already been forged in the fifth century BC.
to project this idealized image of pure and proud warriors into the past. The very idea of a Dorian race, whose features can be depicted, is singularly arbitrary. Some historians have gone to great lengths to describe these northern barbarians as disciplinarians, aristocrats by nature, hostile to the vain games of thought, who were called upon by a quasi-providential mission to renovate Mycenaean civilisation, weakened by too many concessions to the effeminate influences of Crete. We must abandon hypotheses that are all too preoccupied with dangerous preoccupations. Even if the history of the origins and early history of Sparta cannot be reconstructed without formulating certain hypotheses, we shall endeavour, in choosing them, not to give in too much 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].

Lacedemonian expansion

More and more struggles, a gradual but continuous territorial expansion, this is what the ancient testimonies tell us about the early days of the Lacedaemonian state, i.e. the whole of the beginning of the first millennium BC. Such is the extent of legend that the historian hesitates to enter the almost inextricable thicket of fabulous tales and heroic genealogies.

Even before completing the conquest of the Eurotas plain, the Spartans launched offensives to the east and north. In the east, they soon overran Parnon and advanced towards the coast through the high country of Cynuria, where they came into conflict with Argos. This was the beginning of a tenacious hostility in which

For centuries, the coastal region and the eastern foothills of Parnon, Cynuria and Thyreatides, were disputed between Sparta and Argos.

When it comes to rivalries between states, the origins of which are lost in the mists of time, the question of responsibility can scarcely be asked. The ancient admirers of Sparta considered that the primitive pact by which the Dorian kings, established in the various regions of the Peloponnese, had promised each other mutual aid and assistance, had first been violated by the kings of Argos and Messene, who were unfaithful to the Dorian spirit both in their internal government and in their relations with their brothers of race. This retrospective view is of no value. The Dorians of Argolid certainly had periods of power and expansion and were able to claim a hegemony over the Peloponnese that the epic itself seemed to confer upon them. For a time, they owned the entire eastern coast of the Peloponnese as far as Cape Malaya, and held the island of Kythera. It was only in the sixth century, after a series of alternations, that the tide of battle turned against them. Held in respect and diminished, they would be full of hatred: their sulky policy would always be contrary to that of Sparta, even though Sparta represented the general interests of Greece. Thus an irremediable fate sowed early in the Peloponnese the seeds of a division that was fraught with disastrous consequences.

To the north, the Spartans came up against the Arcadians, either in the north-west, up the high valley of the Eurotas, or in the north-east, through the desolate plateaux surrounding Sellasie, they reached the pass of Clisoura and descended towards the plain of Tegea. Arcadia, the mountainous region at the heart of the

The Peloponnese does not seem to have been affected by the Dorian invasion; it retained its ancient inhabitants and perhaps even took in a significant proportion of the populations that inhabited the Achaean states. The people have preserved their language, a Greek dialect once spoken as far away as Asia Minor, at a time when Mycenaean civilisation was flourishing on both sides of the Aegean Sea. The rites they practised, which often took on a mysterious character, were simply a continuation of very ancient religions. Although the newcomers could scarcely think of flushing them out entirely from the isolated and difficult regions where they had found refuge, they at least wanted to possess the outskirts and fortify their borders against any offensive return.

No continuous mountain range separates the domain of the Laconian Eurotas from that of the Arcadian Alpheus. The regions of passage, Belminatis and Skiritis, once considered Arcadian, were held by the Spartans. The Arcadians were weakened by their own divisions. Retarded by the political forms favoured by the very nature of their country, they grouped together in small autonomous communities or villages, all too often hostile to one another. The common worship of the Zeus worshipped on Mount Lyceum united them only by a very loose bond. When the cities were formed, rather late in the day, they tended to pursue their destinies separately: Tegea, which was the oldest, Mantinea and Orchomena were generally on opposing sides. It was not until the

It was in the sixth century that the first outline of a confederation, marked by a uniform currency, is thought to have emerged. It did not last long, however, and Sparta did its best to maintain the internal dissensions that provided it with insurance against the danger from Arcadia.

Thus, to the east and to the north, through the interplay of historical circumstances, the details of which escape us, Sparta encountered enemies; she had to guard against ever worrying threats, either because she had provoked them by the desire or the need to acquire new lands, or because, in conflicts of ambition where wrongs were shared, inexhaustible grudges had been formed in which neighbouring peoples vainly used up most of their strength. In the West, at least, nature seems to have to have provided for the security of the Lacedaemonian state: it erected the gigantic barrier of Taygetos, a rampart with massive battlements whose extremities need only be held to be safe from invasion. But here the Spartans have defied nature; beyond Taygetos, they have enslaved Messinia. It is no exaggeration to say that this conquest fixed their destiny.

To mark the stages, we need to consult the map at the same time as referring to these traditions which, as we have said, are more legendary than historical in nature. To the south, after reaching the sea at Helos, the Spartans, turning south-west and following the coast beyond Gytheion, were able to infiltrate the Tenare peninsula and cross the southern foothills of Taygetos to reach the Messinian coast. They then headed north as far as the town of Pherai, already mentioned by Homer and located on the site of present-day Calamata. This gave them a foothold on the southern plain of Messinia.

It is doubtful that the Spartans used the breach as an early passageway.
This wildly beautiful Langada de Trypi is a favourite route for modern travellers on their way from Sparta to Calamata. But further north, the steep face of the Taygetos breaks off over a width of three or four kilometres; from the Laconian city of Tripolis, it was possible to enter the two eastern cantons of the Aigytis and the Dentheliatis, behind the central chain of the Taygetos, and then to cross either the upper plain or the lower plain of Messinia. This was the main route of the Lacedaemonian attacks.

Even during the Dorian migration, the invaders must have been familiar with these passes: it is said that the Heraclid Cresphontes took up residence on the Stenyclaros plain, which corresponds to the upper plain of Messinia. Among the Dorian kingdoms, Messinia is mentioned alongside the kingdoms of Lacedemonian and Argian. It is possible, however, that Messinia was not deeply gilded: in any case, the Spartans who coveted its rich soil were quick to consider the

inhabitants as of a despicable stock. At least they imposed a harsh yoke of servitude on them without scruple.

In the second century AD, the periegete Pausanias summarised for us the Alexandrian epics of Myron of Priene and Rhianos of Crete, in which the Messenian wars were recounted with an affabulation in keeping with the laws of the genre. The hero of the first war was Aristodemos; the centre of the resistance was Mount Ithoma, which dominated the two plains of Messinia; fabulous feats were performed around this acropolis. After just twenty years, the Messenians succumbed and their lands were confiscated. Those who did not resign themselves to leaving their country had to farm it for the victors.

Henceforth, the Spartans must have had their fill of conquests: to bring this first subjugation of Messinia to a successful conclusion, which ended towards the end of the eighth century, they had stretched every nerve. They may well have felt the need to create an organisation capable of resisting the opposing forces that their very action set in motion. Within its excessively extended borders, Sparta would have enemies no less dangerous than those on the periphery of its own domain. Far from disarming them through concessions, she would always claim to dominate them through the superiority of her weapons. Before looking at the extreme measures Sparta took to ensure this superiority in every case, we must try to imagine the early Spartan state in the new and almost joyful power of the impetus which, without regard or restraint, led it towards numerous annexations.

Sparta's first institutions

Greek historians and philosophers of the classical era regarded Sparta as a city governed for centuries by immutable laws. As a result, they shed little light on the growth of the Lacedaemonian state. At most, they indicated that, at the outset, in the very distant past, it had been torn apart by internal dissensions: it would have been necessary, not without difficulty, to remedy the
a thousand ills plaguing society. To sketch out the broad outlines of a development
Although Sparta's development as an inner city was not without its troubles, there are certain similarities between its evolution and that of other Hellenic cities.
Was the civilisation of archaic Sparta the same as that of contemporary Greece? On the other hand, it is necessary to mention the conservative spirit which manifested itself in Sparta with greater intensity than elsewhere and which is marked in the institutions, even when they were adapted, more or less systematically, to new ends.

Until the time of Roman domination, this state retained its monarchical form. Genealogies begin with mythical ancestors; their beginnings are suspect, but at least they provide a framework and ensure the continuity of the royal houses. From the sixth century BC onwards, the kings retained only remnants of their primitive powers: they never lost certain privileges that go back a long way in history and give a glimpse of the absolute nature of the primitive monarchy.

Their origins are complex: the kings of Sparta may have started out as warlords, leading the armed bands that gradually occupied the whole of Laconia and extended beyond its natural borders. But their authority had to be reinforced by the traditions in force in the country where they settled. Now that we know more about the prehistory of Greece, we are forced to admit that from the second millennium BC, forms of government were in operation there, far removed from the rudimentary simplicity imagined at the dawn of civilisation. The palaces of the Cretan Minos and those of the masters of Mycenae and Tirynthe were the residences of strong rulers whose powers were enshrined in religion. The Dorian kings, descendants of Heracles, were in part the continuators of dynasties that they had dispossessed, while the monarchy retained features that recalled the warrior period of migrations.

In Sparta, royal power was always exercised simultaneously by two individuals, representatives of two great families, that of the Agiades and that of the Eurypontides. This dual kingship, shared between two families, is peculiar to this city: no satisfactory explanation has been found for it ["The couples formed by the Spartan kings were not conceived by Lacedemonian thought as consisting of two homologous elements : a study of the names of the two dynasties and an examination of the facts attributed to each of the kings, particularly in Pausanias' overviews, reveal that a bipolar opposition governed the representation of the Agiades/Eurypontides pair: the former dealt with all the problems of Spartan political life concerning relations with the outside world; the latter dealt with problems internal to the city. This is a model
highly structured, generating an indefinite number of variants. This structure is part of a
(see Bernard Sergent, La représentation spartiate de la royauté, https://www.persee.fr/doc/rhr_0035-1423_1976_num_189_1_6283)]. The Dorians seem to have been originally divided into three tribes: Hylleis, Dymanes and Pamphyloi, which probably corresponded to military divisions. Did two tribal chiefs who played a leading role oust the third and reign side by side? Or did one of the kings represent the former sovereigns, masters of the city of Amyclées, which retained its independence for so long? The latter hypothesis would explain the traditional rivalry between the two royal families: there was never any matrimonial union between them. But, for
In other respects, they claim the same divine descent and the origin of their prerogatives seems to be the same.
identical.

Alongside Heracles, Sparta had as its protectors and patrons two other sons of Zeus, the twins born of Leda whose symbols, two wooden beams, were carried onto the battlefields: they were the Tyndarides or Dioscuri, Castor and Pollux. The terrestrial monarchy reflected this duality to some extent: although the kings did not incarnate these divine essences, they owed them a special character which, even after the fall of the monarchy, was still evident in the funeral honours paid to them. The death of a king was announced by horsemen throughout Laconia. In Sparta, women went through the streets banging cauldrons. All the families had to take part in the state's mourning: Spartans, periecles and hilots gathered on the Agora, beating each other and lamenting. It was said that the deceased king had been the best of kings. After the funeral, the Agora was sprinkled with flour and assemblies and elections were suspended for ten days. According to Xenophon, in this way Sparta showed that it regarded its kings not as men, but as heroes.

Military and religious powers, to which judicial powers are closely linked, are held equally by kings by virtue of their divine investiture. They decide on peace or war: anyone wishing to oppose an expedition ordered by them would be treated as sacrilegious and ostracized from the city. They march at the head of the army and are the last to leave the battlefield. A corps of one hundred elite men formed their guard.

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

Not only do they have their own domains, but it appears that they once had an eminent right over the entire soil of the State. It is interesting to note that in every litter of sows, one offspring was reserved for the kings. This is a survival worth noting: in the past, they must have enjoyed many benefits, which enabled them to maintain a whole people of companions, those who were called their laos.

When a wandering tribe settles in a stable location, the companions of the military chief soon become his vassals. All the chief had to do was assign them estates, the royalties for which he had previously collected, and which now became their prerogative. In this way, a nobility was born, endowed with income and enjoying a privileged status, but also subject to military obligations and preserving the customs of the old companionship. This nobility was not necessarily a closed caste or a hereditary class. The king was free to take in whomever he wished, regardless of origin.

to have in his entourage. He may retain the usufruct of their land from owners who owned the land when the tribe was established and who are thus placed on the same footing as the chief-king's companions.

We are reduced to more or less plausible conjectures concerning the political role that may have been played alongside the kings, either by the members of this apanage nobility or by all the warriors who took part in the conquest. The earliest evidence of the constitution of Sparta is provided by a document that is as curious as it is obscure, and which Plutarch has preserved for us. He calls it a rhetra, which is literally a law or prescription. It is said to have emanated from the god of Delphi and, in Sibylline terms, would have paved the way for a legislator who, according to Plutarch, was none other than Lycurgus: "Found a sanctuary of Zeus Skyllanios and Athena Skyllania; distribute the tribes; round up the districts (obai);
institute a Council, thirty elders with the supreme chiefs; from season to season, assemble the assembly (apella) between Babyca and Cnakion; thus consult and dissolve...". One last phrase, unintelligible without corrections, seems to have defined the rights of the people who had the final decision. Later, a king introduced an amendment: "If the people decide wrongly, the elders and the supreme chiefs will adjourn the session".

It's hardly surprising that the exegesis of such an enigmatic text should have led to results such as contradictory. The very authenticity of the rhétra has been contested by good arguments; yet in verses by Tyrteus, which there is hardly any reason to suspect, there is something like a poetic paraphrase:

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

This is at least the outline of a constitution that would go back as far as the eighth or seventh century BC; but it remains strange that at such an early date, the people were already given such power that it subsequently became necessary to limit it. Many other points remain obscure. What are these tribes we are talking about? If they were the tribes that grouped the families, they had existed since for a long time. On the other hand, the institution of local tribes in the eighth century seems an anachronism. The arrondissements (obai) seem to correspond to the ancient villages where the Spartans gathered. The rhétra has sometimes been regarded as the organic law of the city born of the union of these villages. In any case, it presupposes that the Lacedemonians had consciously worked on their political organisation, which has been seen as a mark of their genius, but which is surprising if one is not determined from the outset to recognise them as a predestined people.

The Council of Elders would continue to play an essential role in Sparta. The elders were never heads of family clans. The very name of the Council remains ambiguous, as it takes two forms, Gerochia and Gerousia, and while the origin of the latter is certain (the Gerontes refer to the "elders"), the former is not.
vieillards), it is not certain that the former is merely a dialectal variant and does not mean "old men". the assembly of the privileged", the word géras being applied to a legal privilege, an honorary share reserved for certain individuals. If you like, we can recognise in the primitive Gerochia a sort of council of the crown, whose members were chosen arbitrarily by the kings from among the great vassals. Rhétra would have set the number at twenty-eight, to which were added the two kings qualified as chiefs. supreme. It was a first limitation of royal arbitrariness, perhaps a first conquest of the right to vote. This was a prelude to a gradual decline in the authority of kings.

As for a plenary assembly of all free men able to bear arms, its existence could already be inferred from the similar assemblies mentioned in the Homeric poems or which continued to be held in certain parts of Greece, for example in Macedonia. The Spartan apella, mentioned in the rhétra, must have derived from this. It is planned that it should meet at
regular dates, in a place named after a stream, the Cnakion, and, it seems, a bridge, the Bridge of Babyca. Whatever the powers of the primitive apella may have been, obscure forces were not responsible for them.
will never allow it to flourish. Sparta may have had parts of democracy, but it will never obey the law. to a democratic assembly.

In the primitive state, more than the political institutions, it would be important to know the ways of distribution and occupation of land and the conditions of people. Almost insoluble problems that
At the very least, we must be careful not to mask it with theoretical constructs. Plato, giving a view of the arrival of the Dorians in the Peloponnese, thought that they had achieved equality of property at the first attempt. He wrote confidently: "The land was divided without dispute between the Dorians and the Greeks.
their debts were still neither considerable nor old". The very wording of this passage shows that the philosopher was blinded by the preoccupations of a time when the equitable distribution of landed property and the abolition of debts were the watchwords of all the reformers of the
society. The division of land into equal or equivalent parcels was not accepted as an immediate consequence of Dorian immigration. The system established did not favour all conquerors in the same way. The conquered land was divided into large estates and small plots. On the other hand, while the fate of the former rural populations was by no means enviable, the total dispossession of the vanquished
is almost entirely confined to Messinia. The general enslavement of farmers from the very beginnings of the Lacedaemonian state is based on a questionable assumption: the condition if
The special status implied by the term hilote is the result of a long evolution. A class of small tenants, of free condition, was able to group together both the least advantaged of the victors - who were undoubtedly the most numerous - and a large contingent of peasants who had already been living on a piece of land.

We have to confine ourselves to these very general considerations, since we do not know the social state of the country.
Predorian Laconia than the exact number of newcomers. To take a comparison that
In order to understand this, we need to consider the many questions raised by the settlement of Barbarians in Gaul after the great invasions of the fourth and fifth centuries. Starting from the fact of the conquest, without exaggerating or overstating its significance, we can probably recognise in primitive Sparta a powerful monarchy with a feudal character, a class of vassals representing a military element with a privileged status, and small landowners of various origins, whose rights were perhaps subject to certain restrictions and were not identical. Slaves, serfs or colonists from the subjugated population must have worked the large estates. Finally, there was a place for craftsmen: excavations have yielded at least some specimens of their work. In short, the Lacedaemonian state probably differed little from the other states of archaic Greece.

The warrior spirit of the Spartans is not enough to explain the need for conquest that drove them to cross the borders of Laconia on all sides: the population of the country must have grown considerably. Emigration to the Dorians, Melos, Thera, Cos, Rhodes and as far as Doride
of Asia-Minor was no doubt a palliative to the scarcity of land. It was then that Messinia was attacked, but it seems that social conditions had already begun to change in the Eurotas valley by this time. The brutal annexation of Messinia was carried out for the benefit of a class that reaped the main benefits.

In classical times, the term "Lacedemonians" was used to describe both full citizens living in the city of Sparta and others who were obliged to perform military service and were deprived of all political rights in Sparta, but who lived in other cities in the territory where they were free to govern themselves. These are the periecles (literally: inhabitants of the periphery). The distinction between the land owned by the periecles and that reserved for the Spartans, or full citizens, was rigorously established in the constitution of Lycurgus.

This distinction seems to have already existed at the time of the conquest of Messinia. There, the expropriation of the vanquished was rigorously enforced. About a century later, the poet Tyrteus was able to say of the Messenians: "Like donkeys weighed down by heavy burdens, they had to bring their masters half their harvests". The whole heart of Messinia, at the foot of Ithoma and Taygetos, was divided into estates, cultivated by the enslaved Messenians. The southern coast and some parts of the western coast were excluded: there were Periec cities such as Pherai, Asine, Methone and Kyparissia.

So what were these Periecs, in Laconia as in Messinia? There is no ethnic difference between them and the Spartans. There is therefore no reason to think of them as Predorians who had been allowed possession of their cities and a certain autonomy by the conquerors without being completely assimilated. The theory seems all the more untenable given that the periecles were established on the borders of the Lacedemonian state: the protection of their own territory would thus have been left by the Spartans to
non-native subjects. What is more likely is that Dorian groups, organised around chiefs, established themselves among the Achaean communities that already formed centres of habitation. Relegated to the extremities of the country, weaker than the group established in Sparta, and also possessing poorer quality land, they fell into a relative dependence on the main agglomeration, which no doubt weighed little on them. In their own cities, a social hierarchy had undoubtedly been formed; but we must be wary of believing that genuine Dorians were always at the top of this hierarchy: the proportion of the indigenous Doric element must have been very high and class distinctions were not based on a long-forgotten origin.

Sparta, the residence of the kings, was the political centre of the Lacedemonian state. The apanaged nobility
In the early Middle Ages, a group of kings who held the rich lands of the plains established themselves around the kings. Her influence continued to grow, and she increasingly restricted royal authority, following the same process as elsewhere in Greece. She wanted estates for her sons, who were now numerous, and it was she who, not content with the poor cantons taken from the Arcadians and Argians, wanted fat Messinia. War and hunting were also her occupations: it was still the time of knightly warfare when the
Elite fighters, mounted on chariots, met their opponents in duels on the banditry front, while the bulk of the army remained spectators. Relief vases unearthed in Sparta depict these war chariots. The noble cavalry simply continued the traditions of chariot warfare.

The Spartan nobility had traditions dating back to the time of the migrations. In the past, companions sat at the royal tables: the practice of eating together was not lost and would later spread. In general, communal life had remained the rule; in the many expeditions that the Spartans undertook after they had become sedentary, this was the rule.
practice could only grow stronger. The noble life, that is to say the life of warriors, sharing the same meals and the same lodgings, united in preparation for battle, in the labours of war and in the pleasures of peace, would be the model that would always impose itself on the conscience of the Spartan.

Originally, there was nothing austere or gloomy about this way of life, which was by no means exceptional in Greece and was quite natural. So it was reserved for an elite. If it is impossible to evaluate the military caste, other elements made up the majority of the population.

the population of Sparta and satisfied their needs, which were many and varied. In the period before Lycurgus' reform, we are told, the Spartans enjoyed luxury: this means that
industry and commerce were practised without restrictions. However, before showing what Sparta may have been like in the past and the striking contrast it appears to present with classical Sparta, we must attempt to retrace this political and social reform, the consequences of which were not immediately perceptible on the economic and intellectual development of the city.

Tyrteus

The conquest of Messinia had already shown the preponderance of the Spartan nobility, who had become the most powerful in the region.
allocated the best and largest share of the spoils. At the very end of the war, a singular episode reveals deep-seated troubles. A whole generation, born of free unions during the war, were deprived of their civil rights; after trying in vain to regain them, these "sons of virgins", as they were called, had to emigrate. They went to found Taranto in Italy. This gives us a glimpse of the existence of a
A class of malcontents and, at root, a land grab for the benefit of an oligarchy.

But the situation seems to have worsened, especially in the second half of the seventh century, when Messinia, harshly exploited, rose up against its oppressors. In the meantime, the Lacedemonians had not stopped fighting their neighbours, with varying degrees of success. The Argians 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, located in the territory of Pisa. When the Messenians revolted, they could count on a great deal of help: Pantaleon, king of Pisa, and Aristocrates, king of Orchomenes in Arcadia, joined them.

The leader of the Messenians was Aristomenes, to whom Messenian tradition, revived in the fourth century, attributed prodigious feats. For a long time, he was the balance of Sparta's fortunes: "On the plain of
Stényclaros and all the way to the top of the mountain, Aristomenes pursued the Lacedemonians". These verses, which, according to poetic legend, the women of Messinia sang as they threw flowers at him, evoke the memory of the hero's triumphant returns. At the Battle of the Ditch, the king of Orchomena, who had sold out to Sparta, was the cause of his defeat. The Messenians then retreated to the outskirts of Arcadia, to the almost inaccessible hill of Hira: they are said to have resisted there for eleven years, but not without leaving this refuge and wreaking havoc as far as Laconia. After the fall of the fortress, they
were welcomed by the Arcadians; others emigrated to Magna Graecia and Sicily. Aristomenes would be died at Ialysos de Rhodes.

This second Messinian war is associated with the name of Tyrteus, whose war songs exalted the courage of the Spartans. A few fragments have survived: they are the first specimens of patriotic poetry. As such, they were repeated throughout Greece, and the force of their inspiration is still felt today.
is still sensitive to the souls of today. But also, in the history of Sparta, these appeals to the soldiers have a singular value: they bear witness to a period when the harsh and powerful ideal of the city seems to have been developed.

Where did Tyrteus come from? The Athenians have claimed it: at the request of the Spartans, who were in despair over their setbacks and advised by an oracle, they sent them this man who was at once a leader, an educator and a poet, who led them to victory, taught them to train their youth and, through his war poems, taught them bravery. These were the words of the orator Lycurgus, speaking from the Athenian rostrum the day after the disaster of Chaeronea (338 BC). This public testimony is not enough to guarantee the truth of a tradition in which the pride of Athens is all too clearly expressed. If Tyrteus came to Sparta from outside, like so many other poets, it was undoubtedly from Ionia, where, among the other Muses, the warrior Muse was resounding and inspiring Callinos at the time.
of Ephesus. In any case, he became a Spartan by adoption; he seems to consider himself a citizen of Sparta.
he created the Spartan soldier for posterity.

"Everyone should stand firm on his own two feet,

Let him fix his feet on the ground, bite his lip with his teeth.

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

Under the belly of his vast shield. Let his

right hand brandish the strong spear,

Let him wave the fearsome egret over his head".

In this description, many features are borrowed from Homer, and it was in the language of the Ionian epic, not in the Dorian dialect, that Tyrteus composed his warrior elegies. However, Tyrteus introduced a new concept that had scarcely been glimpsed in Homer: that of the citizen-soldier.
fighting side by side with his comrades in arms to defend the soil of his homeland. A profound change has taken place in the Hellenic world: as a result of the transformation of tactics, individual exploits have a much lower value than the disciplined and coherent strength of united combatants.

This revolution in the military art seems to have taken place in the 7th century BC. From then on, the heavily armed infantryman, the hoplite, decided the outcome of battles; the role of the cavalryman was no longer more than secondary. The duels that the Homeric heroes used to engage in, after drinking copious amounts of insults, disappeared from the dark plain where Ares was rampant. Two compact groups clash, advancing and retreating without ceasing to present a united front, coordinating their movements for as long as the superiority of the opposing forces remains.
military strength of one of the two has not been asserted. Then the battle line is broken, the vanquished flee and the victors are pursued, if their pride is not satisfied with the mere rout of their adversaries.

Aristotle had already noted that the new tactics had led to political changes, including
the accession of a greater number of people to the government of the State. We'll come back to this later. In the poems of Tyrteus, in connection with the intense effort imposed on the Lacedemonians as a whole by the Messenian revolt, a definition of virtue is given that no longer applies to an elite of heroes, but to all citizens. Only a few verses allude to what is at stake in the struggle: the subjection of the Messenians appears as a matter of right; the territories conquered by the ancestors, over three generations, have become a sacred heritage. Sparta not only risked losing this precious acquisition, it also suffered defeat and was threatened, it seems, even in its own domain. A civic ideal can thus be forged in a war that began with conquest and despoilment.

The theme develops quite naturally:

"It is a fine thing to die, falling in the front line, as a good-hearted man fighting for his country. To leave one's town, one's fertile fields, to beg, dragging one's mother, one's old father, one's grandchildren, one's young wife with one, is the most abominable fate... So let us fight courageously for this land, let us die for our children without sparing any more of our lives."

The duty is the same for everyone, but it is particularly incumbent on the young, who must be ashamed to see their elders, whose knees have lost their suppleness, fall before them. The fervour of the whole city surrounds the warrior who has 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 a respect that is the hallmark of the city.
unanimous. Courage in the face of the enemy is the supreme virtue before which all the advantages that man can enjoy are eclipsed.

Tyrteus' verses reflect the needs of a time of trial: he preaches a narrow morality and
It demands of individuals a self-denial that can only be achieved intermittently, in a violent outburst of the soul. A law had prescribed that at the time of an expedition, all the citizens were to be summoned before the king's tent and the poems of Tyrteus were to be read to them. But if, at the moment of danger, they were thus reminded that the city demanded total sacrifice from them, in everyday life, the ideal that inspires Tyrteus was not relegated to the obscure depths of the conscience. A whole system of customs, mores, traditions and laws seems to have been restored or introduced, as if by design, to make the individual subservient to the community and to oblige him, as Tyrteus wanted, to place nothing above warrior virtue. This is what is known as Lycurgus' constitution.

Lycurgus

We must resign ourselves, however much we may regret it, to seeing Lycurgus as nothing more than a name and a symbol [More precisely, Lycurgus' existence is considered semi-legendary]. Of course, there is no denying that the strong will of certain individuals may have had a decisive influence on the development of Europe.
and change their destinies. On the other hand, in the institutions of Sparta, we often believe
the deliberate aim of adapting to a clearly conceived purpose customs and practices which
date back to the most remote antiquity. It is tempting to think of a genius as a legislator who knew how to preserve from the past all that could serve the greatness of his people and at the same time protect them from the danger of pernicious innovations.

The Greek theorists who speculated on the constitution of Sparta clearly understood Lycurgus' role. By the fifth century, there was such a marked contrast between Sparta and Athens, whose political and economic transformations were leading it towards a completely different type of society, that they thought that the ancient legislator had deliberately gone against the grain of the ideas that were already prevalent in most Greek cities at the time. It would have been easy to believe that Sparta had remained attached to the customs of yesteryear, while in Athens there had been a growing alteration of customs.
ancestral traditions. Such a sentiment was not foreign to the Greeks, who were inclined to celebrate the good old days. However, the most widespread opinion seems to have been that a deliberate effort at reaction, countering the influences that had begun to exert themselves in Sparta as in the rest of Greece, erased the initial effect of these influences to give the city a quasi-archaic physiognomy.

But the very uncertainties of the ancient authors, no less than historical data, oblige us to
conclude that it is as difficult to determine the period in which Lycurgus lived as it is to define his own contribution to the establishment of a system that cannot have been built from a single piece.

Do we want to put Lycurgus back, as Herodotus and Xenophon invite us to do, to the beginning of the first millennium BC? Or, at least, if we agree with Plutarch that the rhetoric about
or, with Aristotle, that he saw the start of the Olympiads (776 BC), can we place him before the first Messinian War? If so, we would have to curtail his work considerably and recognise that what we are accustomed to seeing as his hallmark, in particular the training [Or, rather, education] of his children, was not his work.
In fact, we are caught in a dilemma: the regime attributed to Lycurgus did not have to be completed until the sixth century. In fact, we are caught in a dilemma: the regime attributed to Lycurgus must not have been completed until the sixth century. If we follow tradition and place the alleged
If we deviate from it, we are led to arbitrary combinations. If we deviate from this, we are led to arbitrary combinations. One such hypothesis, recently put forward, is that in the sixth century, the ephorus Chilon put Lycurgus under the name and patronage of a past legislator,
a whole series of reforms which he inspired and which gave the Spartan state the rigid framework of a modern state.
as we know it.

On the character of Lycurgus himself, Plutarch, who has studied the ancient writings, declares that nothing can be said with certainty: "His origin, his travels, his death and above all the laws and constitution he is said to have established are reported contradictorily". It was not even known to which of the two royal families he belonged: from that of the Eurypontides, he passed into that of the Agiades. He himself would not have
never been king, but tutor to a young king. Various intrigues led him to leave Sparta; he learned about the sound laws of Crete and the defective regimes of Ionia. Recalled to his homeland, he relied on thirty notables and 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 policing of a state, he voluntarily adhered to these unwritten rules which seemed to emanate from a divine source. Plutarch tries, without much success, to put some order into the details of Lycurgus' institutions: the creation of the gerousia, the division of land, the ban on gold and silver coins and luxury industries, the institution of public meals, the regulation of marriage and the education of children, and so on. To ensure the immutability of such fine laws, he swore an oath to his fellow citizens that they would abide by them. until his return, went to Delphi, obtained the sanction of Apollo and, without returning to Sparta, killed himself by abstaining from all food. The Spartans erected a temple to him where, every year, sacrifices were offered to him as to a god.

Like a god. Even when he was alive, the Pythia hesitated whether to call him a man or a god; but, she added:

"I'd rather call you a god, Lycurgus.

It is tempting, on the basis of this statement, to deny the personal existence of Lycurgus, about whom it is clear that nothing was known. His life is as lacking in precise facts, of a graspable reality, as it is rich in legislative measures, accumulated to his credit. A human legislator would succumb under his weight; would Lycurgus be no more than a divine hypostasis? The theory has been supported, and there is no paradox in supporting it.
Nor does it matter. The face of Lycurgus cannot be revived or enlightened for us; he cannot escape the sanctuary where he was venerated by the Spartans to become in our eyes a historical figure and the architect of a regime of frugality and virtue, such as J.-J. Rousseau and, following him, the men of the Revolution took pleasure in imagining.

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In the absence of an individual will, it was thought that the persevering action of a class would have led to slowly but surely, the Lacedaemonian state, a robust organism that seemed to be entirely defensive. The nobility, which had restricted royal power, was initially shaken by the Messinian revolt, but emerged with a new prestige, due to an incomparable ability to reform and adapt. A will to dominate and a warlike instinct possessed and drove it. It understood the new laws of war and gave up the war horses and chariots that had been its pride and joy.
Whereas in the other Greek states, the mounted nobility left the main burden of defence to a peasant militia and, as a result, was increasingly forced to give up large parts of its authority, the Spartan nobility organised itself into heavy infantry and maintained both its military preponderance and its right of command. At the same time, they had to submit to an iron discipline that extended to every moment of their lives and, through this agreed constraint, they became the living rampart of the city. This would be the dazzling manifestation of an aristocratic caste which, in virtue, would be similar to the religious and military orders of the Middle Ages.

There is no doubt that the city of Sparta had a military and social organisation which imposed a singular self-sacrifice on its members and instilled in them, through constant surveillance and appropriate training [or, rather, education], along with the physical qualities required of a good soldier, the cult of bravery, respect for leaders and obedience to the laws of the city. But while this may have been at least in part the ideal of an aristocracy, we must recognise that it did not remain the monopoly of an aristocracy. The verses of Tyrteus had already shown us this; other facts, too often neglected, confirm it.

Firstly, the number of Spartans living in the city were subject to the same obligations.
and therefore enjoy the same rights. It is not known at what time they took on the name Egaux.

(Homoioi), of Peers, 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 given are dubious: even at the beginning of the fifth century, Sparta seemed capable of providing 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 Eurotas. Since no distinction of principle now appears between these comrades-in-arms, it must be admitted that at a certain period, an assimilation no doubt imposed by imperious demands, of which we have echoes for the time of Tyrteus, made the nobility disappear. Or if you like, in a certain sense, all the citizens of Sparta became part of an enlarged aristocracy, adopting its customs and sharing its privileges, but not without modifying 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: the land is pooled and divided into strictly equal lots, so that at harvest time, all over Laconia, the millstones are the same size, "as in an inheritance that several brothers would share
". What seems likely is that the reconquest of Messinia provided an opportunity to allocate plots of land to a number of Lacedemonians whose services had been required to subdue the rebels. The war must have caused cruel losses: it was therefore able to bring about a reorganisation of land ownership that tended towards a degree of equality. We are told of a division of the land into 9,000 lots (cléroi) and although the figure has been disputed, it seems clear that the representatives of the old nobility were joined, in a high proportion, by newcomers, like them, who formed the phalanx of hoplites. Until then, these newcomers had been freeholders, cultivating the land themselves; but a new hierarchy was established. Some became soldiers who devoted themselves solely to the profession of arms; others were reduced to the status of hilots and fed the new warrior caste.

Plato, with marvellous intuition, recognised in his Republic that a new state was born when "those who formerly defended their fellow citizens as free men, friends and fosterers, reduce them to the condition of serfs and slaves and continue to occupy themselves with war and the care of defence." This is what he calls the timocratic state, which is the prototype for the states of the future.
Lacedaemonian and Cretan. It is characterised by respect for magistrates, by the aversion of the men of war to agriculture, manual arts and lucrative trades, by the establishment of communal meals and the practice of gymnastics and war exercises, but also by a penchant for violent and simple men, made for war rather than peace, full of esteem for the tricks and stratagems of war and accustomed to always having weapons in their hands. The description is
striking exactitude, and, as Plato saw, by transposing his observation onto an ideal plane, the morals of the classical Spartan are only poorly explained by his original nature.
above all the result of a social transformation that had far-reaching consequences.

A democratic movement was at the origin of this transformation: perhaps it was led by the ephors, those five magistrates whose origin is uncertain, but who were always considered to be the representatives of the people even though they enjoyed autocratic power. He ended up, as he
This was often the case in Greek antiquity, with the creation of a wider class of privileged individuals in which a new hierarchy was formed. At first, it was limited to Sparta: the other cities, which were nonetheless part of the Lacedemonian state, the periec cities, had their own conditions in relation to Sparta, which was the leading city. They provided hoplites, but they were initially organised in separate formations alongside the Spartan militia.

In Sparta, this militia adopted at least part of the traditional habits of the nobility, the communal life, the communal meals, the communal exercises, which have such clearly archaic features. This explains the ambiguous nature of Sparta's institutions, which on the one hand are deeply rooted in the past, but on the other seem artificially adapted for the purposes of social preservation. Did the adaptation take place by insensible degrees, or did energetic wills at different times translate the aspirations of the warrior class into decisive action? It is impossible to say, but it seems incontestable that this adaptation was not completed until the end of the sixth century, or even the first half of the fifth century, when the frightening separation between the military class and the rural population that supported it became apparent.

There is a point to be made here, and it will be made clear later. Respect for chiefs, which Plato considers appropriate to
the timocratic state, seems to have led the Spartans to abandon their rights easily into the hands of a narrower oligarchy whose action we think we can discern again and again. There is an element of mystery here
- and almost terror - in the constitution of Sparta: the free citizens are led
tyrannically and accept it. Of all the enigmas to be found in this strange city, this one is well worth investigating.
a closer look.

The Spartan: education and family

Let's not forget the external features that Athenian verve was able to brighten up: the long beard, the thick hair, the coarse cloak and the club that the Cynic philosophers later borrowed. A
To foreigners, the citizens of Sparta surprised and often offended by their quiet confidence in their superiority. They were known to be incomparable soldiers; their civic pride commanded respect; their simplicity of mind was often offset by a gift for repartee that Plato admired. "If you happen to converse with the most ordinary of the Lacedemonians, you will often find him mediocre in what he says; then, in the course of the conversation, there he is, unexpectedly, throwing out a striking word, brief and full of meaning, like a skilful archer: the interlocutor no longer looks like a child before him.

In order to preserve the qualities now considered Dorian through the generations, they did not rely on nature or on example, which is only an adjunct. Harsh constraint and laborious exercise shaped souls and bodies. The development of civic virtues was an ideal that the Spartans were not the only ones to set themselves in ancient Greece. Each of the tiny
The States of which it was composed, born in struggle and continuing its existence in the midst of bitter rivalries, tend to demand of their members extreme subordination to the community. But nowhere is Only in Sparta did the State's control over the individual begin so early and become so absolute.

This sovereign right is asserted from the moment the child is born. It is not up to the father of the family to make the final decision as to whether he will raise the son who has just been born. A council made up of the elders of the tribe intervenes; the child is presented to it. If he is judged to be weak or counterfeit, he is mercilessly thrown to the
Apothetes, the abyss next to Taygetos. The father was only allowed to feed the offspring, which showed the promise of a hoplite. Up to the age of seven, the child is left in his mother's care. Then he was taken away from home; the ties that bound him to his family were, if not broken, at least considerably loosened. He would live in a group with children of his own age, learning the military profession and becoming a citizen.

Spartan education attracted the attention of educational theorists as early as the fourth century BC. Their conception of it was not at all historical, not only because they related it wholesale to an ideal pedagogue, Lycurgus, but above all because they understood it as a machine painstakingly designed to curb individualistic tendencies. The study of
Ancient societies have sufficiently shown that the individual only gradually and with difficulty emerges from the communities that initially 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, is based on a primitive fund of institutions where from time immemorial those who counted in the tribe were supervised and trained.

The Spartan child, according to the ancient system, passes through a series of age classes whose names are defined. Without getting bogged down in the details of this classification, which runs from the age of seven to twenty, we can identify stages that seem to have been considered essential in the life of the child and which correspond to changes in the discipline to which he was subjected. First of all, under the supervision of the paidonomist and young men, the children organise themselves among themselves and have a leader of their own age, a "gang" leader (agélè or boua, expressive names that apply to herds and cattle). They get used to playing, working together and obeying without murmuring. The age of twelve marks the first step in this complex hierarchy, where the agogè makes its influence felt more and more.
This was the beginning of a period in which, under the direct and constant command of older leaders, they were able to take control of the company,
the young boy, out of infancy and now peaceful, dressed in a simple coat, lying in a

Dormitory on a reed mat, reprimanded for every offence, copiously whipped, underfed, trained in boldness and also in cunning by stealing extra food as best he could.

It was also during this period that the amorous, if not sensual, relationships between children and adults began to be authorised, as they necessarily seemed to be linked to the communal and separate lives of young males. The law and public opinion allowed them, but apparently imposed certain limits that are difficult to define [On the alleged pederasty of the Spartans, see James W. Neill, La déesse mère et ses homosexuels, note ix bis, https://elementsdeducationraciale.wordpress.com/2016/12/22/la-deesse-mere-et-ses-homosexuels/]. A close relationship was established between the lover and the child he had singled out.
solidarity; the lover served as both tutor and role model, and these bonds of such a special nature, found among other Dorian peoples, created an emulation that served to further develop warrior value.

The transition from childhood to adolescence took place around the age of sixteen, at the time of puberty.
adolescents, known by the general name of irènes, were also divided into age groups. They went through a series of initiations that took the form of endurance tests and were also marked by dances and masquerades, which we will find as an essential element of Sparta's festivals. One of these events is particularly well known: the fustigation of the ephebes at the altar.
of Artemis Orthia. In its spectacular form, however, the event appears late; it may not predate Roman times, when attempts were made to revive the ancient discipline by emphasising its brutality. In ancient times, it was a struggle between two groups of ephebes to steal cheese, rustic offerings placed on the altar. So this is one of those battles between
This was one of the abductions and beatings that punctuated Spartan education and pitted antagonistic groups against each other in a rivalry of resistance. On the Platanistas, a square shaded by plane trees and criss-crossed by canals, ephebes also engaged in regular fights, which they dated back to Lycurgus.

A final test, undoubtedly the strangest for our mentality, preceded the moment when the young Irene would be counted as a man. This was the famous cryptid about which there has been so much discussion. It seems to have included a period of retirement during which the young man led a vagabond life outside the city; he lived by petty theft and concealed himself from all eyes; at night, he could surprise the hilote lingering in his field and kill him. Ethnographic parallels have made it possible to compare cryptids with widespread primitive practices, whereby young men who had reached manhood would
retreat to the forest and only return to the community after shedding blood. Hunting with
hilote was undoubtedly regulated in Sparta and perhaps only practised by an elite among the Irene. Despite the uncertainties that cannot be entirely dispelled, we can see here the primitive barbaric background from which Spartan education originated.

In the course of this communal life, which was particularly harsh and frugal, the child, and then the young man, had to practise certain exercises and learn certain things. The whole system had been gradually worked out with a view to acquiring the virtues of war: it was intended to imbue the young The Spartan style was the indelible mark of which all members of the military community prided themselves. Since the phalanx dominated the battlefields, overall movements had been the basis of all tactics. If the Spartans excelled at executing seemingly complicated evolutions, following their leaders without fail and reforming their ranks in the tumult of battle, it was because, recruited at a very young age, they were all subjected 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 no different 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 everyone draws extra strength and exalts their pride.

There was little room for intellectual training. According to Plutarch, the Spartans learned their letters only when they needed them; but they were trained in a biting and not without grace way of speaking, in which few words contained much meaning. In fact, they were inculcated with notions of traditional morality in the form of short, sharp sentences, often versified, and the judgements they made had to conform to this model. The self-confident wisdom of the primitive and simple is readily expressed in aphorisms, the very words of which seem to clash and sparkle: eloquence and philosophy imitate this clatter. This is the origin of this
the famous literary terseness that the Cynic philosophers cultivated with relish. The child of Sparta, subjected to a categorical imperative that knew no slackening or accommodation, could feel no embarrassment in formulating in no uncertain terms a conception of honour and virtue for which an oral catechism, transmitted from the elders to the irenes, provided him with all the elements.

The age group system was not limited to children and adolescents. Up to the age of thirty, young warriors were subject to certain restrictions: even if they were married, they continued to live in common; they were forbidden access to the agora and it is not certain that they enjoyed full political rights. Family life did not begin until after the age of thirty, still hindered by the custom of public meals. At the age of sixty, freed at last from military service, Spartans could become members of the Gerousia: they still spent most of their time in gymnasiums and gymnasiums.
conversation. He attends the children's games and the ephebes' fights, stimulates them to emulation and sets them noble examples. He enjoys a prestige and authority that no one questions. In the religious ceremonies [or, rather, rites] where age categories were simplified, a tripartite hierarchy was established, reflected in three choirs. The old men would sing:

We were once valiant warriors. Made men took

up :

We are: who wants to try it? The children's

choir concluded:

One day, we'll be much better than that!

*

Communal meals in which only men took part are indicative of a society in which the sexes were strongly separated. We have seen the aristocratic origins of this practice. But the male population of Sparta adopted the custom, so that a person ceased to be a citizen in his own right from the day when, for whatever reason, he stopped taking a seat in the messes where warriors and former warriors sat. Children are only admitted as listeners, to receive good examples and hear noble words, or to learn to put up with mockery.

Regularly, people enter at the age of twenty. Each table, made up of fifteen guests, has a right of co-option; as it corresponds to a military unit, it is natural that the closest possible union has been sought. But the ages seem to have been mixed as in the phalanx, and the principle of
The distribution cannot have been entirely arbitrary. Everyone contributed their monthly share: barley flour, cheese, dried figs, wine and a little meat, all in set quantities. You could bring game, the product of hunting, or parts of victims when a sacrifice had been offered. But the favourite dish was said to be the famous black brouet that the old men preferred to any other food: it was a sort of spicy stew with pork, blood, vinegar and salt as ingredients.

This communal meal, at which the kings themselves had to appear, only took place once a day, in the evening, and was not prolonged by drinking. Those who had a regular home, i.e. men over the age of thirty, went home without light. Once they had crossed the threshold of the
At their court, private and family life would have begun for them, if it is true, as Denys of Halicarnassus stated, that the State had no concern for what was done in the homes.

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Ancient Sparta did not ignore the family or private life; but it is indisputable that the institutions
The Spartans did little to strengthen the family or develop private life.

Male children were taken from their mothers at an early age and lived in common; the men formed a society, meeting at least once a day to eat together, and were happy to meet in rooms of their own. The separation of the sexes gave women a unique position, quite different from that which they occupied in other Greek cities.

Even then, the girls weren't living inside a gynaeceum: they were practising physical exercises outside; in races, wrestling and dances, they were hardening themselves to fatigue. Their freedom of movement was astonishing: a tunic open at the side barely veiled their bodies. In some ceremonies, they were naked, and if the good Plutarch judges that this nudity had nothing of
Many Greeks, however, were more severe. The poet Ibycus joked about Spartan girls showing their thighs. Euripides exclaimed: "Even if she wanted to, a girl cannot be wise in Sparta; with the young men, abandoning the house, bare thighs and flowing tunics, they share the stadiums and the palaces, an intolerable thing for me.

In fact, young girls were not usually mixed in with the boys: they practised amongst themselves; at festivals, they formed separate choirs. There was a kind of antagonism between the two sexes: there was occasionally exchanged taunts and jibes. To a certain extent, the young men's communal life was matched by a communal life for the girls: the two groups only clashed in a few ceremonies.

Marriage practices and women's lives also show this kind of emancipation that goes hand in hand with the separation of the sexes. The wedding, preceded by the abduction of the bride, was furtive and did not mark the beginning of family life. The bridegroom shies away from the communal table and secretly joins the woman with whom he is uniting. Then he retires and, as usual, goes to sleep with the young couple. For a long time, he continued to get to know his wife secretly and by night. He had children before
to have really made a home.

A Spartan was not allowed to remain celibate: every year, an infamous ceremony was held to mark the occasion.
who had not married. A good citizen was expected to have children, but the

The marriage bond remained rather loose. The Spartans liked to say that adultery was unknown among them; in reality, there was no vigorous community reaction against marital offences. Let's go back to Plutarch: "They didn't care," he says, "about resorting to murder and war to ensure that unions were strict, excluding any sharing. The old husband of a young woman was allowed, if he had affection and esteem for a handsome and good young man, to introduce him to her and then recognise the offspring of this generous blood as his own. It was also lawful for an honest man, admiring the merit and fecundity of another man's wife, to get to know her with her husband's consent, to sow this excellent soil and thus have good children born of an irreproachable cross". The intention was clear: it was not to ensure the continuity of the family, but the vigour of the breed. On the other hand, it did not seem strange that three brothers
had the same wife in common. If we consider it to be a notable exception that a king of
Sparta had two legitimate wives, and irregular unions with women of inferior status were the norm. were common. The state of the family in Sparta was far removed from that of other Greek cities [It would be interesting to know when these practices began and whether they are likely symptoms of degeneration].

A legend surrounds the women of Sparta, irreproachable matrons and heroic mothers. On this point, Plutarch was already at odds with Aristotle, who was a less well-informed judge. The philosopher - and I mean Aristotle - bitterly criticised the extreme freedom enjoyed by Spartan women. While men never escape the grip of discipline, the sports education of young Spartans, which should have turned them into Amazons, seems to have stopped abruptly with adolescence. Along with the Spartan pride they seem to have shared with the men, women were left with a taste for independence and even a desire for command. For
According to Aristotle, the Lacedemonian state was almost a gynecocracy because of the empire that women exercised over their husbands. It is true that economic circumstances ensured that Spartan women were in a privileged position around the fourth century BC. But it is clear that very early on, women took on a dominant role, especially in their own homes, but also in the state, with the voluntary consent of the men who were busy with their war exercises, hunting and the routine of their military societies: the consequences of this will be seen later [This pernicious situation was partly responsible for the decline of Sparta. See David Astle, Sparta, Pelanors, Wealth and Women, https://elementsdeducationraciale.wordpress.com/2015/10/18/sparte-les-pelanors-la-richesse-et-les-women/].

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Sparta is therefore the type of city where family groups were of secondary importance. Social distribution was based on a principle that often contradicted that of the family. Age and sex create distinctions which, far from fading with time, seem to have been maintained over time.

systematically maintained, sometimes even reinforced by legislation. Some comparisons were already obvious to the ancients. Sparta was a vast camp of warriors or a beehive where the common interest grouped the bees closely around the leaders [the comparison is inappropriate given that the beehive is a matriarchal society, whereas Sparta was a patriarchal community]. But the beehive evokes the idea of productive activity; the ideal of Sparta is turned in another direction. The State itself is set up as a 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 work and military talents, demands an organisation of society which allows them, not without personal abnegation, to devote themselves entirely to this work and to develop these talents exclusively.

Property and the lower classes of the State

Spartan citizens had no right to trade or to practise a trade; they were even forbidden to work the land. The Homeric hero, Ulysses for example, knew how to draw a straight furrow with his strong hand; the Spartan warrior does not touch the soil. The land must feed him, but he cannot cultivate it. To ensure his subsistence, the soil must be properly managed, and other men must relieve him of all those occupations that are considered incompatible with the profession of arms.

In most Greek states, land ownership was reserved solely for citizens, who farmed it directly or leased it out. In Sparta, a distinction was made between the land of the citizens and the land left to a population that did not exercise political rights within the state, one cultivated by serfs, the hilotes, and the other, on the outskirts, held by the periecles.

Geographically, the land reserved for the citizens can be delimited, albeit with some approximation. This is not only the fertile area situated in the middle and lower valley of the Eurotas, between Taygete and Parnon, reaching as far north as the cantons of Pellana and Sellasie, perhaps including a few coastal districts at the mouth of the river, but also the entire heart of Messinia. In the whole of this domain, there were hardly any settlements; the citizens' land was divided into plots or cleroi. assigned to the Spartans. They did not live there, but were concentrated in the city. They should be regarded less as landowners than as soldiers who receive land dues for their upkeep, the amount of which is determined.

Many precarious calculations have been made based on this quota, which is given to us by Plutarch. No inequality of performance would have been taken into account: year in, year out, every Spartan

was to receive 72 medimnes of barley for himself and 12 medimnes for his wife, about 4,000 kilograms in all; fruit, especially olives and grapes, in proportion. Even if we accept the accuracy of the figures given for barley by Plutarch, we can at most estimate the area of sown land needed to produce this fee, i.e. four hectares. Everything else is
The total extent of the cléros and the number of serfs who lived on each of them are uncertain. The very surface area of the land shared between the citizens could not be fixed by indisputable figures: the differences range from simple to double. It is better to confess ignorance.

If we want to define the Spartan's legal rights over the cléros, we come up against many uncertainties here too. The eminent property of the State seems to be implicated in certain restrictions placed on the rights of individuals: the prohibition on alienating or pledging cleros; the prohibition on deriving an income from it in excess of that which has been fixed once and for all and considered sufficient to ensure an honourable existence, but without ostentation. Moreover, according to the best-established tradition, the cléros was hereditary; still, it is unclear whether it passed entirely into the hands of the eldest son or whether the younger children enjoyed it in common with the eldest, insofar as the estate allowed everyone to pay their share for communal meals. But a text by Plutarch throws up a new indecision: each child recognised as worthy of existence was assigned a lot from birth; the very heredity of the cléros was in question.

It would be futile to investigate the legislator's intentions here: it is well known that the system gradually led to disastrous consequences. Even before an express measure had authorised the free disposal of the cléros, the institution was ill-suited to the purpose of coherent legislation. If the main aim was to maintain a class of warrior-citizens to ensure the defence of the State, it was necessary to free oneself from the hereditary principle or at least to correct and limit it by preventing the transmission of a cleros to a daughter made two lots fall into the possession of the same citizen. It seems that in Sparta, whatever has been said, no precautions were 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 exempted from taxes. But if one of the three sons was unable to contribute to the common table, he was inexorably excluded from citizenship. There was an internal contradiction here that later theorists have seen clearly. It must be attributed above all to the family spirit which, although counterbalanced in Sparta by other tendencies, worked to the detriment of the essential principles of the State.

The cléros produces an invariable income, paid in kind, from which the Spartan deducts the required proceeds.
for participation in the common mess. It seems that this is hardly more than a fifth of the income. Visit
He must also be able to feed his wife, young sons and daughters, and procure the manufactured goods that are essential for himself and his household. He is forbidden to trade: but he must practise the exchange or

obtain a monetary equivalent for its superfluous foodstuffs. Gold and silver coins are prohibited. There was only an iron currency, inherited from the past, which was heavy and inconvenient and had to be used for domestic purposes. This made trade with other Greek countries extremely difficult. Local production was sufficient for consumption.

But the development of private property was never systematically hindered. If, in the land of the citizens, restrictions tended only imperfectly to prevent the formation of a large property, there remained the other parts of the Lacedaemonian state where one could acquire land at will. We do not know the details of the means by which the Spartan citizen, who was supposed to be no more than a warrior, managed to enrich himself: but behind a facade of uniform frugality, we can see great differences in fortune, the secret luxury of a minority and the greed of the majority. There is a kind of snobbery of simplicity, and the State demands nothing else. An ideal was formed, nurtured by an appropriate education, the ideal of a warrior class, who worshiped physical vigour and wanted to disregard all refinements in clothing or food. The narrow-minded Xenophon still fell for it, but Plato detected some hypocrisy. The Spartans' art of "gathering voluptuous things in secret", which he denounces, is no doubt not a recent import: he brings back the superman of
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 is at the top of the social ladder. At the very bottom, there is the hilote, whose status is linked to the soil regime that we have recognised in the land of the citizens. The cléros, subject to a fee for the benefit of a privileged class, is cultivated by a peasant class that does not even enjoy freedom.

Although no distinction can be seen within this class, which is not well known, its origin is perhaps not uniform. The Messenian hilots were reduced to their fate by the conquest. In Laconia, on the other hand, the hilots do not necessarily represent the entire former enslaved population. It has often been remarked that serfdom was not based solely on the "right of the spear". It could lead to economic change when small landowners, too heavily burdened, became dependent on their creditors. In Sparta, however, there was a
However, as certain indications suggest that hiloticism did not immediately follow the Dorian conquest, the intervention may have come rather late, perhaps after the first Messenian war,

to impose a fixed form on a state of affairs. To decide this, we would need further insights into the first centuries of Spartan history.

Hilots are not slaves. Efforts have even been made in vain to prove that a personal bond of dependence existed between the hilots of a cléros and the person who received the rent. As far as we can define their status, we will see them preferably as tenants attached to the land and, for everything else, as slaves.
most of their precarious rights, depending more on the community than on individuals.

Some hilots are attached to the domestic service; as such, they have sometimes been described as "domestic servants".
slaves. But they did not usually live in a master's house: they had their huts on country estates and worked mainly in the fields. This work brought with it a personal profit: once they had paid the fixed fee that went to a Spartan citizen, hilots were free to do as they pleased.
freely of the surplus. Any improvements he makes to the farm will be for his own benefit.

The master of an estate may not take a hilot from it by selling him; nor may he free him. The State reserves the right to do so and uses it in the event of war, when it has employed hilots in the service of the ost, among the light troops or hoplites, and wishes to reward their bravery. But there is a fear of encouraging their valour. The dilemma was posed by Aristotle: "If you let them off the leash, they become insolent and demand rights equal to those of their masters; if you hold them roughly, conspiracies and hatred ensue". Sparta did not escape this dilemma: while the hilots of Laconia, perhaps insensitively accustomed to serfdom, often showed solidarity with their masters, those of Messinia, brutally under the yoke and ever more suspicious, never ceased at every opportunity to rally to the enemies of their masters.

These Messenians were no doubt particularly targeted by the strange declaration of war that the ephors addressed to the hilots at the beginning of each year. We have already seen that during the cryptid, young Spartans could kill with impunity those who fell into their hands in the dark of night. There is also mention of the ignominious treatment to which the hilots were occasionally subjected: they were forced to get drunk in order to display all the turpitude of drunkenness before the eyes of the young men; they were only allowed to sing obscene songs and perform grotesque dances. The Spartan's apprenticeship to bravery was matched by the methodical debasement of a people of serfs, as if in a diptych.

This picture can be pushed to the dark side: some of the practices reported to us are
These are apparently exceptional and can no doubt be explained by customs or rituals that escape us. In addition to these picturesque details, we would like to know the legal status of the hilotes. One naturally thinks of the serfs of the Middle Ages; but the comparison, which was inaccurate from the outset, since the serf attached to the glebe did not appear in France until late, cannot be made in any way, for lack of documents. We have neither customary law nor charters of emancipation. On each cléros, did the hilotes form a sort of community with a chief responsible for the payment of taxes? prescribed? What were their family rights? Antiquity paid very little attention to this lower category, which the historian Ephorus sees, in a way, as slaves of the state. It is above all the harshness of the Spartans, where "slaves knew the maximum of slavery". It was customs, not institutions, that made the hilote an outcast; fear contributed to this.

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All around the land of the citizens, the land of the periecles, which mainly comprised mountainous or coastal regions: to the north, the cantons bordering on Arcadia or which had been torn away from it, to the east, the edge of Parnon and all the territory ceded by Argolidus: Cynuria, Skiritis,
Thyreatides and the island of Cytherea, to the south the peninsulas of Tenare and Malea, and in Messinia, the southern coast and various points on the western coast. In all these areas, soil yields are generally lower 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 poor that they could barely live there. There is something of an error of perspective here. We have already seen that the Periecles could not be equated with the ancient Achaeans. The distinction between Spartans and Periecans was made primarily because the former, in their settlement,
had been more favoured than the others; it became clearer later on and determined an inequality politics.

It seems that the land of the Periecles was subdivided, as was the land of the citizens, and that hilotes were found there. But cities and towns abounded, each undoubtedly the centre of a fairly small area: there were as many as a hundred of them. They were autonomous from Sparta, which did not even appear to intervene through its representatives in their administration, but they were politically dependent on Sparta. The periectic hoplites formed corps in the Lacedemonian army and were obliged to take part in any expedition that the magistrates or assemblies of Sparta decided to undertake.

We have no information about participation in the right of citizenship in periectic communities. The class that supplied the hoplites may have had a marked preponderance: but to what extent did they submit to the training [education] that made the Spartan hoplite so excellent? Alongside them lived merchants and craftsmen; but, if the Periec cities had to acquire a monopoly of industry, trade and navigation, it does not follow that the representatives of these professions, forbidden to the Spartans, were treated on an equal footing in these cities. The regime
seems to have been more liberal than in Sparta; but the Periec cities are Lacedemonian cities and the example of the capital could not fail to have an effect on them.

In Sparta, the periecus had no rights; he did not take part in the assembly; he could not hold office; even in the army, he was barred from the higher ranks. Everything happens as if in the State
But in principle, this aristocracy was an entire city that had turned in on itself and refused to accept newcomers into its midst. It is therefore natural that, in the land of the citizens, a periec could not acquire property that would have qualified him to become a Spartan. On the other hand, on the territory of the periecics, the Spartans retained rights: not only were estates reserved there for the kings and gods, but on various occasions, the Spartans settled entire bands of foreigners driven from their country there: people
from Asinè or Nauplia in Argolida, inhabitants of Aegina. They were even able to acquire rural property on an individual basis; and as the strict rules governing land in the Eurotas valley do not seem to have been in force among the periecans, they took advantage of this greater freedom to provide their descendants with an appreciable income in addition to their inheritance.

The periecans, those second-class Lacedemonians, did not seem to suffer from their fate. They resign themselves for a long time to political inequality. The military superiority of the Spartans was not enough to
explain this apathy. It is likely that the internal regime of the Periec cities contributed greatly to this. Solidarity was established between the Periecan and Spartan hoplites and fostered a social hierarchy in the cities with which the beneficiaries were content. Dependence on Sparta, which only took the form of military service, did not weigh heavily on a class which undoubtedly also had a military tradition. The spirit only changed with the growing egoism of the Spartan oligarchy.

The political constitution: Kings and Ephors

As a result of their education, the Spartans were docile and respectful of the authorities. This disciplined people seemed to be suited to political institutions of a certain simplicity. In fact, the organs of Spartan government had rudimentary features, but these did not exclude the complications of historical development or mystery. One often has the impression that hidden springs are at work.

the whole machine and that the assemblies or magistrates obey a direction whose source escapes us.

The political theorists who praised the Spartan government, Plato and Aristotle alike, recognised a happy blend of institutional forms that served to preserve the state. Democracy and aristocracy were combined. The authority of kings was limited to a fair measure; among the magistrates who controlled it, some were chosen by the people, others could be chosen from among the people. Each class therefore had a share in the government; this was a condition of stability.

For a long time, the Spartan state enjoyed unquestionable stability, which distinguished it from all the other states of the Hellenic world. It is doubtful whether this stability was the result of a harmoniously balanced constitution. Plato's lyricism does not conceal the antagonisms that can be found in it, even though these antagonisms should merge into an agreement over which a divine will presides.

A god," he wrote, "watched over you, Lacedemonians, and foresaw the future; he implanted a dual kingship in you, instead of a single monarchy, and thus moderated its power. Then a being who was both a man and a god saw that your authority was still swollen; he therefore combined the moderating virtue of old age with the presumptuous strength of birth: the suffrage of twenty-eight old men, in the supreme decisions, counterbalanced the power of kings. A third saviour came along: he saw that, in spite of everything, authority was still insolent and overbearing, and he put a brake on it, the power of the ephors...".

In this way, the stages of constitutional development are traced; at the end, we arrive at the balance of power that was achieved by successive miracles. We have already seen that the various saviours who may have intervened in the destiny of Sparta are now, alas, no more than elusive and almost unreal personalities. It remains true that the authority of the Council of Elders and the Ephors grew to the detriment of royal authority, itself weakened by the conflicts between the two associated kings. The fall of the kings was not achieved without a struggle. The most obvious fact, which dominates the whole history of Sparta, is the great opposition between the kings and the ephors. In the fifth and fourth centuries, the power of the ephors was sovereign. But in the second half of the third century, a king rose up to denounce the usurpation. He saw the abolition of the ephorate as a return to the constitution of Lycurgus, who would not have known about this magistracy.

The list of ephors goes back to the middle of the eighth century. And no doubt magistrates of this name existed before this date, since they are found in other Dorian states or in very ancient colonies of Sparta. It is unclear what their original role was. One attractive theory is that, in
Originally, they were religious officials, observers of the celestial signs, already invested with a rather fearsome power if it is true that, every nine years, kings could be suspended from office when the signs were unfavourable. This religious supervision came as no surprise in Sparta, where recourse to the gods, and in particular to Apollo Pythianus, was so frequent. It is also easy to understand how the ephors were gradually able to acquire greater rights of supervision, arbitrate disputes between the two royal houses and even represent the kings in their absence. In the end, the ephorus Asteropos would have succeeded in giving them a power before which the kings themselves would bow. Unfortunately, this ephorus is still one of those uncertain figures, with no date and no history, who populate Sparta's past: his 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 formed a college of five annual members, a number that seems to correspond to that of the communities or ôbai that made up primitive Sparta. However, there is nothing to indicate that each community had a delegate in the college. Whatever the initial method of appointing the ephors - some texts suggest that they were once appointed by kings - in classical times, they were elected from among all Spartans who had full rights as citizens. All these eligible citizens apparently had to be electors; but the very process by which the election was carried out is described as childish by Aristotle. Perhaps it was an acclamation, as in the case of the Ancients, as we shall see. In any case, the ephors seem to represent the democratic element in the constitution: they would therefore have been the defenders of popular rights against the kings.

But in Sparta, the people were men accustomed to hierarchy and military command. They did not exercise over the magistrates they appointed the strict and ever-worried control that is exercised in ordinary democracies. They let them develop autocratic habits and discretionary powers. Authoritarian traditions were perpetuated in the college of ephors, and met with little resistance. The ephors mercilessly supervised the kings; but they controlled the public and private acts of citizens with no less rigour.

On behalf of the people, the ephors bind each king, on his accession, by a solemn oath, which may be 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 trust: the ephors, who alone among all citizens do not rise before kings, can reprimand them or fine them; they intervene in their private lives and guarantee their political action. Even in the
In the military sphere, where kings are responsible for operations, ephors are increasingly tending to

their authority. They sent formal instructions from Sparta; later, two of them will be delegated to accompany the king to his camp.

As far as the citizens were concerned, they were the implacable guardians of social discipline. Their first act on taking office was symbolic: they issued a proclamation instructing the Spartans to "shave their moustaches and obey the laws". Laws, in a country where people avoided putting measures in writing The whole system of customs and traditions governed even the outward appearance of individuals. Reprimands and fines punished the most minor offences: the ephors dispensed them without control or appeal. They supervised the education of children, the relationships between men and boys, and the conduct of men, but rarely that of women, whom Lycurgus himself, it is said, had been unable to subject to the yoke of the law. On the other hand, the control of the ephors extended to all civil servants, who were at their mercy and owed them accounts as soon as they left office. They themselves were accountable only to their successors, who were bound to them by a deep sense of solidarity. Censors of morals, judges and police at the same time, administrative inspectors, the ephors exercised in a continuous manner, despite the annual change of persons, an authority which in ancient times was already referred to as tyranny. The formalities which, in the case of a citizen, precede capital sentences, do not seem to apply to periecles. The
raison d'Etat authorises the removal by the shortest possible means of any suspicious hilot. It also allowed the ephors to expel any foreigner whose stay in Sparta appeared to be detrimental to the city's interests.
and maintaining the social ideal that is its strength and pride.

It is surprising that in Sparta a college whose membership changed every year and whose members were often obscure citizens played such a formidable role. In Aristotle's time, the ephors were in the service of the oligarchy which, little by little, had monopolised all landed property. Poor, they were open to corruption; the life they led contrasted openly with the frugality imposed on the people and with the misery that afflicted the mass of Spartans. Democratic revolutions would be fought against them. But in the sixth and fifth centuries, the ephors were neither the agents of a then non-existent nobility nor the representatives of an aristocratic ideal. Insofar as we can follow the development of their authority, they imposed themselves not only against royalty, but also against any nobility of race or fortune. It is under their aegis, it seems, that the egalitarian community that inhabits Sparta was born. For a long time, they actually expressed their more or less conscious wishes. The annual election did 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 children, the communal meals, were kept in force by them. Cicero compared them to the tribunes of the plebs, but they were more like the all-powerful delegates of a military people, who, imbued with respect for tradition, imposed it by coercion if necessary, but more often than not won the voluntary submission of their fellow citizens, who were imbued with the same faith.

A singular example of a society giving itself guardians who are its masters while they are in charge. Should we admit 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 been able to discipline themselves? This is one of the enigmas of Sparta. We need to see whether the bodies that hold, among other things, legislative power imply the existence of such a minority, and how its formation might be explained.

The political constitution: People's Council and Assembly

The rhetoric that Lycurgus is said to have brought back from Delphi did not name the ephors: it recognised the powers of the Gerousia or Council of Elders and the Assembly of the People or Apella over kings.

As we have already seen, the Gerousia was to comprise twenty-eight members, plus the two kings who sat by right and were represented in their absence. The first requirement was age: members had to be released from military service, i.e. have reached the age of sixty. Secondly, the
The title of senator was to be reserved for merit: it was, as both Demosthenes and Aristotle declared, "a prize for virtue". It has been thought that wealth and birth went into the composition of this virtue: members of a narrow aristocracy alone could therefore have been members of the Gerousia. But, suddenly
Of course, this was not always the case. The oligarchic nature of this Council is mainly due to the fact that its members, once appointed, were irremovable: they remained in office until their death.

However, we must recognise that the very system of appointment did not rule out manoeuvring. and the monopolisation of the office by a political clan. First of all, there was intense competition, where ambitions were unleashed and votes were fiercely solicited. The people's assembly made the choice, not by vote, but by acclamation. Near the place where the assembly was held, men
They could neither see nor be seen, but they could hear the clamour of the voters. Each candidate appeared before the people in an order determined by the drawing of lots. The judges, unaware of this order, noted on tablets the intensity of the acclamations that greeted each of the candidates, designated by their presentation number. The candidate who received the loudest applause was declared elected. It is all too clear that this archaic procedure, scornfully described as puerile by Aristotle, was open to a great deal of fraud. The judges' decision seems to have been final, even if the impartiality of their judgement was not without suspicion.

The Gerousia studies and prepares the bills to be submitted to the People's Assembly; if the amendments made by the Assembly to these bills seem inappropriate, it can disregard its own proposals. To a certain extent, it shares the right of initiative with kings and ephors. It does not have the right to convene the assembly; this right belongs to the ephors, who have also been responsible for convening the Gerousia since the kings lost this prerogative.

The Gerousia has judicial powers: it has jurisdiction in all cases involving the death penalty or loss of civic rights. The ephors brought the accused before it. Together with the ephors, it forms a High Court that judges kings.

There is not a very clear dividing line between the various orders of power - executive, legislative and judicial. The Gerousia is directly involved in the government of the State. It decides on all important matters and is responsible for the city's highest interests. The authority of the elders is defined in almost the same terms as that of the ephors: they are the absolute leaders of the masses. They were not accountable to anyone. "In Sparta, the price of virtue is to become the master of government, together with your fellow men".

There appears to be close collaboration between the elders and the ephors. Yet conflicts of authority could easily have broken out. The extreme respect enjoyed by the elders in Sparta must have played a part in this concert of wills in which they represented par excellence the hold of tradition. The presence of the ephors mitigated somewhat the gerontocratic character of this Council, while the Council, which was renewed only slowly, brought to the successive ephors that unity of direction which we were surprised to find among them. The association certainly did not protect the leaders of the Spartan community from a narrow-mindedness that worked to Sparta's detriment. For
having put too much faith in the wisdom of the old, for not having recognised with Aristotle that there is an old age of the mind as there is an old age of the body, the city has become ankylosed, pushing the "old man" to the limits of its own power.
social conservatism to the point of fanaticism and ultimately confusing the interests of an increasingly restricted class with the interests of the State. But the initial relinquishment of essential rights to the ancients, a remnant of a distant past when the social prestige of the old man was immense, was accompanied by a nobility and gravity that marked Spartan society and that still shines through in the moralising anecdotes of Plutarch.

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We can be brief about the assembly of the people, the Apella. Perhaps the "people" of Sparta had, in almost mythical times, the right to make sovereign decisions; but they soon let it slip from their grasp and, for centuries, did not try to regain it. The assembly, deprived of all initiative, was led by the ephors and the elders.

It was restricted to the Spartans: the Lacedemonians of the Periec cities did not take part. Even so restricted, it may originally have had a large number of members, all those Equals who, from the age of thirty, had full civic rights. Lycurgus' rhema set the area between the bridge of Babyca and the Cnakion as their meeting place. We don't know what the situation was: all we know is that there were no buildings anywhere. No porticoes, no sanctuaries; nothing that
resembled an agora. People sat on the ground and deliberated in the open air. Later, the assembly met in a circular room, a kind of odeon, which adjoined the agora. The building, called Skias, dates from the 6th century, but several centuries may have passed before it was used for this new purpose.

The kings presided over the assembly; the ephors succeeded them. Regular sessions, perhaps monthly, were scheduled, but occasionally the ephors called extraordinary assemblies.
Decisions were proposed by the kings, the elders or the ephors: in the discussion that ensued, they alone spoke. No written law has ever laid down this custom, but it is nevertheless obediently observed. Voting is by acclamation; sometimes those of the same opinion are invited to move to the same side. This is an exceptional procedure intended only to make a vote more obvious. The vote of the assembly does not bind the authorities: the Gerousia can always decide contrary to the wishes expressed by the people.

As we have seen, the election of the principal magistrates was also by acclamation, with no checks or guarantees of any kind. From this point on, it is quite clear that the Appella has no effective role in government or administration. Its sluggishness was the immediate consequence of the extraordinary powers given to the magistrates. Under certain conditions, the Appella is allowed to act in ways that usually reinforce the authority of the chiefs and, at least, never endanger it.

In an emergency, even when very serious decisions had to be taken, the assembly of the people could be replaced by a "small assembly", referred to only once, at the beginning of the fourth century. Sometimes, too, a sort of citizens' committee appeared to debate issues of peace or war that concerned the whole state. As the recruitment of the Gérousia also seems, in reality, if not in law, to have taken place within a limited circle of citizens, we are led to believe, as has already been indicated, that a small number of men held the reins of authority. It goes without saying that their action is not exercised in accordance with clearly defined constitutional principles.

defined. This is why Sparta has always been averse to any constitution that is logically constructed and operates in the open, according to duly drafted rules.

An oligarchy was at play in the fourth century, but it was already a time of decadence. Wealth had prevailed. But we cannot reject out of hand the evidence that, in Sparta's heyday, everything was given on merit. This may be an idealisation, but there must be some truth in it. Merit in Sparta was above all military merit. The selection of leaders and masters from among equals must have been based first and foremost on military merit.

The sole aim of Spartan education was not to make all citizens equally suited to military tasks; it was to train an elite. We need to quote Xenophon here: "Lycurgus judged that, if he could set the young men against each other in a rivalry of virtue, they could reach the pinnacle of virile valor... From among them, the ephors chose three who were accomplished; they were called hippagretes. Each of them writes down a hundred names on a list, indicating why he prefers some and others.
rejects others. Those who do not obtain this honour are at war with those who excluded them.
and those who have been chosen in their place; they keep an eye on each other to see if any offence is being committed.
is committed to honour. Thus is born that rivalry so dear to the gods, the principle of civic virtue". The three hundred young men under the command of the hippagretes are called hippeis (horsemen or knights), even though they are an elite troop fighting on foot. The name is reminiscent of the ancient nobility. In the democratic community of Equals, the new knights seem to form a nobility based on merit. And since in Sparta there is a close link between civil authority and virtue
As a result of the war, they naturally had to take a predominant place in the State. A hierarchy was established early on; over time, the very principle of this hierarchy may have been spoiled. But it is easy to see how, at all times, Sparta has had a de facto oligarchic government.

Old and new aspects of Sparta

If we seek to define the deeper meaning of the transformation that took place in Sparta from the Messinian War and continued until a date that we can only guess at.
To be precise, it could be said that the body of privileged people has been enlarged, but a system of obligations and constraints has been introduced or reinforced for these privileged people.
on the other classes of the population. It is only natural that such a system should have altered even the appearance of the city and given a particular character to the manifestations of community life.

The aristocracy that had prevailed in Sparta seems to have combined the practice and love of war with 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. A whole raft of facts about archaic Sparta leads to this conclusion
Archaeological research has made a significant contribution.

Little is known about the buildings that may have decorated the city in the 8th and 7th centuries BC. On the acropolis, the temple of Athena Chalkioikos, at least the site of which has been found, was decorated with bronze reliefs by the Laconian sculptor Gitiadas. On the banks of the Eurotas, the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia contained only a modest temple and an altar. The city's appearance is easy to guess. Thucydides, at the end of the fifth century, wrote: "If one day Lacedaemonia became deserted and all that remained of it were the sanctuaries and the foundations of the public buildings, posterity would find it hard to believe that its power had been equal to its reputation". An Athenian of the time of Pericles might have been surprised by this humility. But, in the seventh century, what city in Greece had a
monumental ensemble? Like Sparta, the cities were made up of a cluster of villages where the tombs of the dead often mingled with the dwellings of the living. There was as yet no research
austerity in the architectural simplicity of Spartan buildings.

There was also a Spartan art, the origins of which can be traced back to the 8th century in the form of votive offerings.
unearthed in the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia, on the acropolis or on the Menelaion hill.
The most precious are ivory figurines and plaques; others are made of bone or lead. The
The representations vary endlessly: divinities, warriors, animals. An overflowing imagination, sometimes strange, complex creations. At the same time as the rest of Greece, Sparta underwent
the influence of the East. Neither the ring of mountains that surrounded it nor the difficult access to the Laconian coast prevented it from reflecting the successive fashions in which the Greek world indulged.
The factories of Corinth imported their pottery to Sparta as early as the 8th century. And Sparta, while following in their footsteps, was able to produce original pottery, first with geometric decoration, then with oriental motifs,
This pottery was long thought to have been brought back to Cyrene before the numerous specimens unearthed in
Sparta itself, have revealed their undoubted origin.

Thus, under the authority of kings or the aristocracy, Sparta welcomed innovations and maintained close relations with the outside world. The ruling class took a large part in the Panhellenic competitions as soon as they were founded. The first victory by a Spartan competitor at Olympia dates back to 720 BC, and thereafter, Lacedemonians abounded in the list of winners. At the same time, Sparta's religious festivals, celebrated with splendour, attracted foreigners. Choral lyricism, which took off there, seemed to develop thanks to musicians and poets from abroad, not only from Crete, a Dorian country that had always had affinities with Sparta, but also from Asia Minor. A

At the origin of the Gymnopédies festival, Thalétas of Crete was named; but the first winner of the Carnéia festival was Terpandre of Lesbos, the inventor of melodic music.

We like to think of the poet Alcman as one of the representatives of this civilisation, in which native characteristics blend with distant influences. He was originally from Sardis in Lydia, but settled in Sparta, where his job was to train the choirs of young girls who sang and danced in honour of the gods. He composed parthenias, or virginal songs, for them: mythical heroes have their place; but the alternating choruses also playfully celebrate the beauty and merits of the two coriphae, Agido and Agésichora. Graceful comparisons abound. There is nothing hieratic or stilted about this poetry. According to the ancients, Alcman knew how to make harmonious use of the rather rough Spartan dialect. In fact, he created a composite language, foreshadowing all Dorian lyricism. Compare him to the courtly poets of the Middle Ages: like them, he had to appeal to an aristocratic class.

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However, another poet, scarcely more recent than Alcman, sounded a different note in the latter part of the seventh century. He is Tyrteus, who appears to us as the herald 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 break with its past in one fell swoop.

Large-scale sculpture, which developed mainly in the 6th century, was represented by statues and votive and funerary bas-reliefs. Towards the middle of the century, Ionian influences are thought to have come to the fore, giving greater depth to the rather thin and dry figures. This was a time when Sparta seemed keen to build monuments worthy of its gods and called on foreign artists. The Samian Theodore built a rotunda near the agora, called the Skias, a religious building that survived the earthquake of 464 and was later used for assemblies. In Amyclaea,
Bathycles, from Magnesia on the Meander, was not only commissioned to decorate the altar-base supporting the statue, but also to build a complex series of porticoes and chambers around it, with caryatids, acroteria, columns and other features.
superimposed friezes depicting a thousand mythical themes. It is not our task here to determine the exact contribution of the Ionians. What we must remember is that in the 6th century, there was a Spartan plastic art, that in this field Sparta, as we have said, "gave and received", that while it brought in foreign artists, artists from Laconia went to work in other Greek cities. In the 5th century
only then will we see the impoverishment.

In the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia, renovated around the year 600, the succession of votive offerings continued uninterrupted. Pottery, inspired by the Corinthian style with black figures, produced its finest products in the first half of the 6th century: deep bowls made of pinkish clay, decorated on the outside with garlands of palmettes or lotuses, and on the inside with scenes featuring figures: such as the beautiful bowl known as the
of Arcésilas, where a painter from Laconia, who had travelled, depicted, with many picturesque details, the king of Cyrene attending the weighing and loading of the wool. By around 550, however, Laconia, deprived of its models from Corinth, was no longer producing anything more than mechanical reproductions of ancient motifs: its production may well have come to a halt in the last years of the 6th century.

The spread of Laconian pottery, which was particularly abundant in the 6th century, is instructive: it is found not only in the Peloponnese and Central Greece, but also in the islands, Samos, Rhodes, as far afield as Asia Minor, Africa, southern Italy, Sicily and southern Gaul. We will see that around the same time, Sparta maintained political relations with distant countries. It still had
imposed no absolute restrictions on foreign trade.

The old aristocracy had certainly left the monopoly to men of inferior classes; but while disdaining craftsmen and traders, it was far from showing them hostility in principle. This was the attitude that the warrior-citizens of Sparta were to adopt, albeit gradually. A law attributed to Lycurgus stipulated that only the axe should be used to make the floors of houses, and the saw for doors: all luxury industries were outlawed. Remember
the forced exchange of iron money, which hampered all transactions. These are all testimonies to the same state of mind, which, towards the end of the 6th century, was fatal to all intellectual and artistic life.

What remained was religious life and the festivals that marked it. Sparta's piety was renowned: its connections
with the oracle of Delphi, which had inspired the legislation, still maintained it in
attachment to a devout [or, rather, ritual] tradition. Of all the cities, it was the most exact and scrupulous in fulfilling its duties to the gods: history provides ample proof of this.

The Dorians had not been content with the gods they had brought back with them: many of those they had brought with them were also gods.
who had long been worshipped in the south of the Peloponnese feature in their Pantheon. The Tyndarides or Dioscuri, hatched from a divine egg, were born at the foot of Taygetos before the Dorian immigration. The great sanctuary of their sister Helena, worshipped 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 had received it from their predecessors. This god had his own temple in Sparta, but his main place of worship was at the tip of the Peloponnese, at Cape Tenare. Sparta unhesitatingly adopted both the native divinities and the

outside divinities. It is not known where she got the cult of Athena, which she installed on her acropolis in the
It was the "bronze house" that earned the goddess her name of Chalkioikos. Heracles, who is not Dorian, but who became the ancestor of the royal houses of Sparta, came from Argos.

There was also syncretism: the ram-god Carnos, who belonged to the Dorians, became a hypostasis of Apollo. At Amycloea, Hyakinthos was a pre-Hellenic god of vegetation, a god who died and was reborn. Apollo took his place, but his tomb remained sacred and served as a pedestal for the statue of the new god. Artemis was a complex personality who received many epithets. In the sanctuary of Eurotas, discovered by the English excavations, it is called Orthia, which could mean : the one who stands upright. Artemis and Orthia may never have been completely confused, and the latter is thought to be more Dorian. Before her, the ephebes underwent a famous test; they also took part in competitions in which the prize was an iron sickle.

For all these divine persons, the Spartans seem to have given up early on modifying or embellishing the representations housed in the temples. They confined themselves to a few more or less crude cult images. It has been noted that a characteristic feature of their religion - and one that brings it closer to the Roman religion - was the ease with which they worshipped abstractions: Fear, Death, Laughter. Symbols and attributes placed next to immutable effigies satisfied their religious imagination. Hélène never deviated from the hieratic pose. The type of twin Dioscuri, on foot or on horseback, symmetrically opposed, does not vary; but "in some cases, a jar stands next to them, an emblem of the domestic abundance they know how to maintain; in other cases, crude Dioscuri stand next to them, an emblem of the domestic abundance they know how to maintain; in other cases, crude Dioscuri stand next to them, an emblem of the domestic abundance they know how to maintain.
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 to have the funeral snake crawl alongside the jar, the crude pillars and the offerings. Such is the image of Castor and Pollux, which many ex-votos still present to visitors today in the small museum of Sparta" (F. Chapouthier).

Thus, in religious life, however intense it may have been, sculpture did not find the opportunity to flourish or renew itself. The other arts, which in Greece more than anywhere else were closely linked to religion, were no better off.

Apollo had drawn the essential ceremonies of the Lacedaemonian cult around his divine person: the Carneia, Hyakinthia and Gymnopedia were dedicated to him. These three festivals, the second of which was celebrated in Amyclaea and the other two in Sparta, preserved archaic rites. Initiation ceremonies were combined with propitiations for the fertility of the land and the fecundity of the herds.

Strange processions marched past. Young girls were carried in processions in antique carriages decorated with fabulous animals. There were cavalcades of young boys, of
battles, dances and choirs.

Sparta gave pride of place to all forms of orchestration. Some dances were accompanied by transvestites: men disguised as women, women disguised as men, performing buffoonish movements and even licentious parades. These dances were as common in the cult of Artemis as in that of Apollo. The celebrants often wore masks. In the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia, curious terracotta copies of similar masks have been found, offered as ex-voto offerings. The features are intentionally distorted to give a ridiculous or frightening appearance. These ritual masquerades are the tenacious survivals of primitive religions [of non-Aryan origin].

There were also armed dances, the most famous of which was the Pyrrhic, which reproduced military evolutions. At the Gymnopedias, the choirs on the Agora were made up of children, ephebes and adults. The performers were naked and unarmed, but mimed scenes of battle or war.
pugilism into violent gymnastics that tested their endurance.

Songs mingled with dances. So choral lyricism did not die out in Sparta. In fact, it seems that it should have taken on a new lustre now that religious festivals expressed the soul of a warrior community and were geared towards educational purposes. But the traditional peans and hymns were enough; the verses of Terpander or Tyrteus were repeated incessantly. In the past, foreigners had been able to give the ritual songs of the Lacedaemonians a literary and musical character that gave them their own character.
ensured the value of an artistic production. Subsequently, all innovations were so vigorously opposed that an ephorus cut the strings added to the lyre by the lyric poet Timothy of Miletus.

Sparta did not seek to attract large numbers of foreigners to its festivals, since it had grown to fear them all and barely tolerated them on its territory. At the same time, its inhabitants no longer took part in the games common to Greece: their names almost ceased to appear on the lists of Olympic winners from the middle of the sixth century. Gymnastics, like music, was subjugated to the training of the warrior.

Austere Sparta decided to take the place of amiable Sparta: she would guide Greece in the labours of war, but would disdain to instruct herself and others in the arts of peace. The sanctuary of the Muses, which rises in the city, would seem a mockery if, in spite of the conception

The Greeks, who were inclined to a similar view of music, continued to regard it as an art that was dear to Lacedemonia. You only have to listen to Pindar: "There," he says, "the advice of the old men, the spears of the young men, and also the choirs, the Muse, the festivals, are excellent.
".

The festivals of Sparta still stir the imagination of poets. Euripides, who hated Sparta, evoked the solemnity of the Carneia and the night dances of the Hyakinthia. Aristophanes wrote a lyrical stanza in Dorian style in their honour: "Leave friendly Taygetos once again, Laconian Muse, come and sing to the god of Amycloea, worthy of our respect, and to the goddess of the bronze temple and the valiant Tyndarides, who frolic on the banks of the Eurotas... Leap, light, so that we may...
Let us celebrate Sparta, which loves divine choruses, its feet pounding the ground, when, like fillies, young girls leap along the Eurotas, kicking up dust with their feet". As in Alcman's time, the dancing choruses of the maidens are still the poetry of this harsh Sparta. Laconian virgins appear at the Hyakinthia; for Apollo, they perform processional dances or hyporchemes; at the festivals of Artemis Caryatis, they wear a diadem in the shape of a basket.
The dancers, dressed in fine tunics, appear to be whirling. This is how they have often been depicted in statuary: in the sanctuary at Delphi, at the top of a column forming a tall acanthus stem, three of these dancers skimmed the tips of the foliage with their light steps. But the artist who sculpted them was not from Lacedemonia.

The conquest of hegemony and the uncertainties of Spartan politics

The recapture of Messinia appears to us only as the starting point for the internal transformations that gave birth to a new Sparta. Externally, it did not mark the end of the military operations designed to further expand the domain of Lacedemonia. The struggles against Argolid and
The annexation of the whole of Arcadia was planned. Apollo of Delphi, deferentially consulted, pretended to grant at least the Tegeatid:

"Are you asking me for Arcadia? That's asking a lot; I won't give it to you... I'll give it to you...
Tegee to dance on and its beautiful plain to measure it by the line."

But the god wanted to teach a lesson to the people he loved: Apollo is almost like Jehovah here. The Lacedaemonians were defeated: their captives had to cultivate the plain of Tegea, where the task was measured out to them. Later, repeated defeats forced them to turn to Delphi once again, and this time Apollo gave them good advice.

bones of Orestes, son of Agamemnon. These precious relics at least gave them the advantage over Tegeus, on whom they imposed an alliance.

In the Argolid, the Lacedemonians definitively took away the cantons situated on the north and south sides of the Argolid.
east of the Parnon to the eastern coast of the Peloponnese. But the wars of conquest were already coming to an end: the policy of alliance, inaugurated with Tegeus, would henceforth be practised by Sparta.

The turnaround in Spartan policy seemed so complete that here again people wanted to see the action of an individual. The ephorus Chilon, who is sometimes ranked among the seven wise men, is said to have drawn up a foreign policy programme around the middle of the sixth century, in line with the domestic reforms he initiated or consolidated. Opinions on the scope of the work he is said to have accomplished are divided.
vary. Some have gone so far as to believe that, under the mask of Lycurgus, Chilon was the real author of the profound changes that gave Sparta, along with its warrior armour, the simplicity of its customs and the stiffness of its attitudes. Others, without daring to postpone until the sixth century the beginnings of Spartan education, of the equality of the Homoioi, of the frugality of communal meals and of all civic discipline, nevertheless admit that he clearly foresaw the necessity, which was imposed on a state where one class dominated, not to increase indefinitely the number of inferiors, hilots or periecles. Hence his sudden renunciation of any further expansion of territory.

Chilon has more historical consistency than Lycurgus, but all we can learn of his political activity is that he worked to overthrow tyrants outside the city and that in Sparta he is said to have put the ephors on an equal footing with the kings. It is possible that this man, the wisest in Sparta, who was honoured as a hero after his death, played a role of immense importance. He is said to have invented the famous adage in which the
supreme rule of Hellenism: Nothing too much. An admirable foundation for a policy of moderation, deliberately hostile to all new acquisitions. However, we will hesitate to draw the venerable Chilon out of the shadows to make him the victorious adversary of conquering imperialism.

A people's capacity for expansion is limited. An ardent leader, a sovereign master, can be carried away by inordinate ambitions, and for a time, whipping up energies and stretching all springs, multiply conquests prodigiously. This was not the case in Sparta: the authority of kings, who might have been greedy for glory, was jealously guarded. The big appetites were satisfied: they thought of
to retain more than to acquire. However, military strength allowed for a policy of prestige. And Sparta, by the very form of its government, attracted other Peloponnesian states to it.

The Spartan infantry may not have definitively acquired its reputation for invincibility until the middle of the sixth century. However, although Herodotus does not believe that the city's military institutions can be traced back to Lycurgus, there is every reason to believe that the new tactics of the hoplite found favourable ground in Sparta from an early date. The collective life of children and ephebes led to their recruitment into the heavily armed phalanx. The communal meal table brought together companions who would later join a military unit. The subdivisions of the army may have varied: loches or mores as superior units, under pentecostyes, triacades, enomoties, comprising a number of men that seems neither to have been the same at all times, nor to have always corresponded to what the names themselves seem to imply. But it doesn't matter. One principle remains the same: the Spartan militia is made up of small units in which the different classes of men are represented.
age groups are represented, with members bonded by close camaraderie from peacetime onwards.

It has already been said that the education of the Spartans trained them to carry out the most difficult general movements. Docile to the voice of their leaders, they moved quickly from the order of march to the order of battle, spreading out, executing half-turns and counter-marchs which Xenophon marvelled at. Dressed in a red tunic and armed with a notched or round shield, they marched into battle to the sound of the flute. On the battlefield, the skilful distribution of men according to age, strength and experience ensured the phalanx's extraordinary cohesion. But also, depending on the command, all the men belonging to the same conscription class knew how to step out of line to repel a cavalry or light infantry attack. When the regular order of the phalanx was disrupted,
the Spartan was neither astonished nor troubled; he was trained in particular to take up his
fails to fight side by side with his random neighbours.

Such mastery of the art of war belonged exclusively to the Spartans. The other Lacedemonians were not expected to possess it to the same degree, nor could they be mobilised with the same speed. For this reason, they fought for a long time in separate formations. Later, as the number of Spartans diminished, amalgamation would become necessary.

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This formidable army, which Sparta no longer used to acquire land, at least gave it the possibility of intervening either in the quarrels dividing the Greek states or which, within the Greek states themselves, were being fought over.
States, opposing rival factions, or even outside the Hellenic world. Do we realise that with this
did the city pursue a clearly defined policy?

Since the 7th century, a number of Greek cities had been governed by a special system: the tyranny. It was usually established at the expense of the aristocracy and relied on the popular elements to whom it brought material satisfaction without providing for their political emancipation. The tyrant, who often came from the noble class but turned against it, usurped power while disguising his usurpation by the exercise of some legal magistracy and prolonging himself in office while pretending to respect the forms of the constitution. In the Peloponnese, the most prosperous cities - Corinth, Sicyone, Megara further north, and then Athens - had their own tyrants. They tried to make their sovereignty hereditary, but failed to create lasting dynasties. The Orthagorids, in Sicyonia, had only five or six representatives who succeeded each other for around a century (mid-seventh to mid-sixth century). The other tyrannies were even more short-lived. In Corinth, Periander succeeded Kypselos, but his nephew was assassinated.
as predicted by Pythia, the Kypselid dynasty came to an end in the third generation. In Megara, Theagenes did not even maintain his authority throughout his lifetime. Finally, in Athens, we know that the sons of Pisistratus, Hipparchus and Hippias, met a miserable end: one fell to the tyrannicides Harmodios and Aristogiton, the other had to go into exile, take refuge with the Great King and lead the Median army against Athens.

We shall see that in Athens the intervention of Sparta precipitated the ruin of Hippias. Since ancient times, the Dorian city has been thought to have a systematic aversion to tyrants, and to have worked everywhere for their downfall. This aversion could be justified. At Sicyone, it is clear that the aristocracy considered itself to be Dorian: the Orthagorids strove to bring it down by breaking its traditions, distorting its institutions and abolishing its cults. Perhaps it was the same in Corinth. However, Sparta did not intervene in Sicyonia until late in the game, at a time when the Orthagorids had long since disappeared. It did not intervene at all in Corinth. But the two cities, where a moderate oligarchy was eventually established, were to grow closer to Sparta. The alliance forged with Corinth was to have a major impact on the destiny of the Lacedaemonian state. Corinth's mercantile interests, which were perhaps already beginning to assert themselves in the 6th century, would grow and influence Spartan policy.

Here we come to the origins of this so-called Peloponnesian Confederation, where the following are marked and fortified
the hegemony of Sparta.

First and foremost, it is a system of bilateral alliances, concluded by persuasion or imposed by force. An earlier defeat put Tegea on the side of the Lacedemonians; the other Arcadian towns
also accepted their leadership. Elidia had received assistance in its war against the inhabitants of Pisa Thanks to Sparta, it had gained control of the administration of the Sanctuary of Olympia. We know nothing of the negotiations between Sparta and the Argolid cities in rivalry with Argos, particularly Corinth. Megara, in a difficult situation between Corinth and Athens, sought Sparta's support. Despite the obscurity surrounding the progress of Spartan influence, we can say that before the end of the 6th century, apart from

Argos, irreducible, and Achaia, whose political role was non-existent, the whole of the Peloponnese was possessed or led by the Greek Empire.
by Sparta.

It would be futile to try and reconstruct the primitive pact of this last grouping: separate agreements linked to a master city cities which, without opposition, recognised its preponderance. It was a very free and flexible association, expressing a more or less lasting desire to fight side by side. It must be put to the test.

The Hellenic world was not confined to Greece itself. Dorians had settled in the south-west corner of Asia Minor, on the island of Rhodes, in Cyrene, in Magna Graecia; Taranto was a colony of Sparta. Even in the sixth century, Laconia had many links with these distant lands. Across the seas, the call of Greek voices still threatened to be drowned out by the Barbarians. It was a fine mission for Greece's first city to come to its aid and to draw all the states in its wake behind it.

But Sparta was already hesitating. As we have seen, this is the moment when its very civilisation seems to be suspending the course of history.
It was a time of normal development, closed to outside influences. Surrounded by its Peloponnesian allies,
Sparta will increasingly develop a prudent egoism that will be sincerely combined with scruples.
religious order. It is doubtful that she was fully aware of the mission that Apollo Pythianus had in store for her, and that she saw herself as the predestined guardian of an order common to the States.
Greek mysticism, based essentially on the aristocratic classes. Admittedly, echoes of a similar mysticism can be found in sixth-century poetry. But for Sparta, political considerations, domestic concerns and even individual disagreements had a more immediate impact on her attitude, which, incidentally, was not yet immutable.

Around 550 AD, Croesus, King of Lydia, who had subjected the Greeks of Asia Minor to a sort of protectorate, sought allies among the Greeks of Europe. His ambassadors, guided by Apollo, turned to the Spartans, because they held the highest rank in Greece. They were very well received; 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 Lacedemonians had no 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 help. They limited themselves to sending a ship to observe the situation; a deputy went as far as Sardis to "signify to Cyrus, on behalf of the Lacedemonians, the prohibition of
devastate any city in the Greek country; for they would not look upon the matter with indifference."
Cyrus only laughed. Had the Lacedaemonians been naive enough or too proud to believe in the effectiveness of this threat?

Twenty years later, at the request of banished Samians, Sparta waged war against the tyrant of Samos, the notorious Polycrates. After a success that they were unable to exploit, the Lacedemonians laid siege to the city of Samos for forty days, to no avail, before returning home. According to Herodotus, this was the first expedition the Dorians of Lacedemonia made to Asia. It was a failed expedition that they were in no hurry to repeat.

Corinth in particular had committed them to it: it still found strong support even in Sparta when it was time to take over.
was to try adventures. One man, among others, was prepared to take great risks, King Cleomenes, who seems to have dreamt of reconstituting royal authority. Outwardly, he was in favour of a bold policy that contrasted with the timidity of the Ancients, supported by the Ephors. A conflict
But for a time, he reigned effectively and held the forces of his constitutional opponents in check.

His activities may have been somewhat disjointed. Cleomenes embarked on numerous ventures, the chronology of which is highly dubious. If we add that the tradition concerning him seems to have been singularly malicious, we will understand that this king of Sparta, the first for us to be more than a name, is far from being illuminated by the full light of history.

He defeated Argos, perhaps at the start of his reign (around 520), inflicting a crushing defeat on the depopulated city without reducing it to Spartan dependence, and intrigued in Attica. The last Pisistratides, Hippias, still ruled Athens: he had enjoyed good relations with Sparta, but was also allied with Argos. The Pythia, won over by Hippias' political opponents, tirelessly urged Sparta to 'deliver' Athens. A first attempt failed, but Cleomenes himself entered Attica and forced Hippias to capitulate. Sparta had no doubt expected recognition from the party of emigrants it was returning to power. In Athens, however, the civil strife turned to the advantage of a democracy, albeit a very moderate one, established by a representative of the noble family of the
Alcmaeonides, Clisthenes. The rise of Athens began with freedom.

Cleomenes, by taking sides against Clisthenes, only widened the gulf between the new regime in Athens and that in Sparta. He had ordered the Athenians to expel the Alcmaeonids, entered Athens, occupied the Acropolis and banished seven hundred families. A burst of energy put an end to this intervention, which was considered an insult and almost a sacrilege. The goddess Athena herself forbade the Dorian access to her sanctuary, and Cleomenes had to evacuate Attica. He soon returned with a large army including allies of the Lacedemonians, unaware of the real purpose of the expedition. When they learned of it, the Corinthians were the first to protest and to proclaim that

This interference in the internal affairs of a city seemed to them unjust and intolerable. This principle hardly fitted in with the Spartan tendency to support aristocratic governments everywhere. Yet the other Spartan king, the Eurypontid Demaratus, seems to have supported it too, perhaps out of personal hostility to Cleomenes. He commanded the army with him: opposition from the Corinthians and the quarrel between the kings led to the retreat of the federal army.

This failure must have triggered an extremely complex crisis: a crisis in Sparta itself, where antagonism between the kings gave the ephors a free hand; a crisis in relations between Sparta and its allies. To deal with the most pressing problems, the joint command of the two kings in external expeditions was ended, and the king in command was placed under surveillance. An important concession seems to have been made to the allies, which was like the embryo of a federal organisation. The allies could not be asked to provide contingents without a prior decision by an assembly to which they delegated representatives: this body became sovereign in all matters concerning the Peloponnesian confederation, which would henceforth be provided with a real constitution. In this way, the kings were forbidden to take any warlike initiatives: Cleomenes' opponents had to rally round a measure which curbed his ambition.

The consequences were not long in coming: worried about the progress of Athens and its spirit of independence, the Lacedemonians wanted to restore Hippias. In the assembly of allies, the Corinthians lead the opposition: "Behold, you Lacedemonians are preparing to introduce the tyranny in cities. It is the most iniquitous and criminal action that can be committed among human beings. They won the vote of the majority; Sparta had to give up the idea of forcibly changing the constitution in a Greek city.

So what were Sparta's ambitions? They seemed uncertain and even contradictory. One of Cleomenes' brothers, Dorieus, left with colonists to take Libya from the Carthaginians: this
which failed, seems to have had official support. However, Ionia revolted against Darius:
Aristagoras of Miletus, who was seeking support in Greece, did not obtain an audience in Sparta. It was Cleomenes himself who refused to put before the assembly a proposal for help which he saw as nothing but folly. Athens was more generous and more imprudent. Her intervention attracted the armies of the Great King to Europe; but the combined action of the main Greek states in favour of Ionia could have achieved a different result.

On the eve of the Medieval Wars, Sparta, despite her strength, was worried and troubled. She was called upon
like Greece's referee; it does not always take full advantage of this situation
exceptional. Athens, which is not without its share of reversals and repentances

brought her commercial rival, Aegina, before the Spartan court, accused of treason against the Spartan government.
to the benefit of the Medes. This was the occasion of a new conflict between the kings Demaratus and Cleomenes:
successively, they had to go into exile. While the former sought asylum with Darius, Cleomenes remained in the Peloponnese. From Arcadia, a country that only reluctantly accepted Sparta's suzerainty, he fomented fearsome plots as far as Laconia. The hilots were getting dangerously restless. The Lacedaemonians decided to recall Cleomenes as the lesser evil, but shortly afterwards the king, who had gone mad, committed a strange suicide, mutilating himself and cutting open his stomach with a knife.

The Persians had already landed at Marathon...

Thermopylae and Platées

In the early years of the fifth century, Athens and Sparta had grown closer. In Athens, Clisthenes, the architect of the democratic constitution, had disappeared from the scene. The most prominent figure was
Miltiades, who was waiting to revive the tradition of Pisistratus, composed with the parties, but, still suspicious of the people, leaned more towards oligarchy. The Laconians had obtained a diplomatic success from Cleomenes in the Aegina affair: Aegintian hostages were taken to Athens, forcing the island to maintain strict neutrality. The Athenians thanked the Lacedemonians for having removed the threat of Aegina's pirates from their shores, and formed an alliance with them: they did not challenge their hegemony. By mutual agreement, the two cities refused the tribute demanded by the ambassadors of the Great King. Before Marathon, Miltiades expected the full support of Sparta.

This help came after the victory. Let us dismiss the suspicion that Sparta, by a calculated delay, wished to satisfy old grudges or prevent future rivalries. It could not profit from the success of the Persians, whom it had defied. The reasons given were religious: a law forbade the Lacedemonians from setting off before the new moon. Perhaps we need look no further, in which case it would suffice to admire the state of mind of the scholars who honour this religious scruple of the Lacedemonians 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 this time. Cleomenes' actions may have borne fruit, and two texts by Plato expressly accuse Messenes of having hindered Sparta's action during the days of Marathon. A strange reproach, to be sure, if we recall the state of slavery in which the Spartans were living.
was held by the Messinians, but it is significant nonetheless.

Two thousand Spartans arrived the day after the battle. They had travelled the distance in three days, eager to fight. "They wanted at least to see the Medes, so they came to Marathon and met them.

contemplated. Then they praised the Athenians and their great deed and returned home. Athens had the deserved benefit from her victory; she knew how to exploit it.

The danger from Persia had only been momentarily averted: in Athens, the far-sighted Themistocles was able to organise a strong navy. Sparta was always ready for battle, but when Xerxes rushed into Greece, the conditions of the struggle initially turned to the city's disadvantage. Against the mass of
The invaders would have had to organise successive lines of defence on ground that had been recognised in advance. The Lacedemonians, who courageously decided to cover as much of Hellenic territory as possible, groped and retreated as far as the isthmus, but not without suffering cruel losses and covering themselves in glory.

The fault did not lie with them alone. At the Congress of Corinth, held under the presidency of Sparta in the autumn of 481, a general reconciliation of the states present masked the struggles of interests or "rivalries".
ambition. They united in a defensive line by mutual oaths. The command of the land troops was entrusted to King Leonidas, half-brother and successor of Cleomenes; that of the fleet, disputed between the Athenians, Corinthians and Eginetes, also fell, by a compromise, to a Lacedemonian, the navarch Eurybiadas. But there were absentees and threats of defection. The defence plan remained uncertain. And Delphi predicted defeat.

In the spring of 480, ten thousand hoplites under the Lacedemonian Evainetos and the Athenian Themistocles set off northwards to defend the passes leading from Macedonia to Thessaly. Poorly supported by the Thessalians, who were unaware of the region, they retreated without a fight and returned to the isthmus of Corinth by sea, just as they had come.

New deliberations: it was decided to defend Thermopylae, which, from the Spercheios valley in southern Thessaly, gave access to central Greece. At the time, it was a nine-kilometre-long gorge, extremely narrow at several points, between the mountains and the sea. The eastern and western entrances measured less than 15 metres; the gorge 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 the Spercheios have altered the entire region to such an extent that it is difficult to reconstruct its ancient appearance. A low, marshy plain several kilometres long now stretches between the northern foothills of the Saromata mountains, the ancient Callidromos, and the Gulf of Lamia. But in the past, the passage was easy to guard if care was taken to also cover the mountain roads which, to the west, in the region of Asopos, enabled the Thermopylae to be turned. On the seaward side, the Greek fleet, stationed to the north of Evia, was to prevent any advance by Persian ships, which would have rendered the defence of the land passage futile.

Leonidas was given the task of organising this defence; but far from having all the forces at his disposal According to the most favourable calculations, they numbered barely ten thousand men, who had come partly from the Peloponnese and partly from Central Greece, Boeotia, Locrida and Phocis. Among them, three hundred Spartans formed an elite troop, whose small numbers were surprising.

As at the time of Marathon, religious reasons are cited to explain the low numbers of Peloponnesian contingents: Sparta was celebrating the feast of the Carneia and it was also the time of the Olympic Games, in which the whole of the Peloponnese participated enthusiastically. Here again, we must not be overly sceptical. It is wrong to accuse Sparta of reserving its best troops to defend the Peloponnese. But its error was no less serious; Herodotus admits as much
naively: she did not believe "that we would soon be fighting at Thermopylae". And while mobilisation was proceeding slowly near the Isthmus of Corinth, the gateway to Greece was about to be forced in a matter of days by an enemy ready to make any sacrifice and finally aided by a traitor.

We will not repeat in detail the events of the drama: the attack on the pass, repeated in vain by the best troops of the Medes and Persians, the skilful defence of the Lacedemonians, the departure during the night of Hydarne and the corps of Immortals guided through the mountain by Ephialtes of Malide, whose name was henceforth abhorred. Leonidas had not been imprudent enough to leave the high region of Anopaia unguarded, as it was open to surprise. He had posted a thousand Phocidians, who were used to mountainous terrain. But the Phocidians were seized by panic or allowed themselves to be deceived on the basis of their knowledge of the area.
intentions of the enemy. They withdrew south to protect their own country.

The Persians were able to pass unhindered through the folds of the Callidromos and reach the slopes leading to the entrance to the valley.
west of the pass. The defenders of Thermopylae were about to be surrounded.

They had been warned of the fate that threatened them and were unable to agree on what course to take. Most of them, we are told, left or were dismissed by Leonidas. His conduct seemed singular. Shouldn't he also have evacuated a post he could no longer hold? Spartan honour did not demand a useless sacrifice, as is shown by the example of other strategic retreats carried out by Spartan leaders. It is therefore suspected that Leonidas misjudged the real situation and did not realise the danger until it was too late. Or perhaps, out of religious sentiment, he devoted his life and that of his Spartans in the mystical hope that he would buy the salvation of his country with the blood he shed.

Leonidas was undoubtedly neither a blind man nor a mystic. He must have been imbued with Spartan principles, but the way he applied them is easily justified. It is hard to see how the Greek troops, being watched from the front by an enemy who was simultaneously manoeuvring to surprise them from behind, could have evacuated Thermopylae without covering their retreat. Leonidas entrusted the Spartans and a few allies, who had remained with him by choice or by force, with the task of holding the Persians in a fierce defence, while the bulk of the army moved off. He perished with his men: a Spartan king could not act otherwise.

We must not be distracted from seeing Leonidas as a hero by the many declamations of an outdated rhetoric, or the overly conventional representations of a painting or a sculpture fed by clichés. Let's not imagine him as a young warrior who, impatient for glory, throws himself to his death with an almost irrational impulse. Leonidas was well into his fifties when he succumbed to the Thermopylae. In fact, that's all we know about him: he had reigned obscurely for eight years. around the time he was ordered by the ephors to organise the defence of the parade. He left his name and the memory of an action that made him the ideal Spartan.

Xerxes, angered by his losses, had the body of the defeated general mutilated and exposed, contrary to Persian custom. Later, he was buried at Thermopylae, then brought back to Sparta where a tomb was built for him, near which a competition was held every year. It was not on the site where a so-called tomb of Leonidas is shown today, but near the theatre. In 1925, British excavations in this region unearthed the upper part of a statue of a warrior, bare-chested and wearing a helmet with a wide plume, his face bearded but without a moustache, appearing energetic between the cheek covers decorated with animals. This is an idealised figure, which must date from around 470 and cannot be associated with any particular school of sculpture. It was immediately referred to as the Leonidas, a name that can be retained.

For the other warriors who fell in battle and were buried on the same spot, the amphictyons of Delphi had two commemorative inscriptions engraved on steles, one common to all:

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

The other is reserved for the Spartans:

"Stranger, tell the Lacedemonians that we are lying here because we obeyed their decisions.

The poet Simonides of Keos composed a hymn in honour of the dead, one stanza of which, somewhat aptly, reads
has been preserved for us:

"Those who fell at Thermopylae had a glorious fate, the most beautiful fate. Their tomb is an altar; no flowers: remembrance; no mourning: praise. This tombstone will never crumble; time, which controls all things, cannot destroy it. In this sacred enclosure dwells the Glory that Greece bestows. Leonidas, the king of Sparta, bears witness to this: he has left behind the great monument of his valour and his imperishable renown.

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But let there be no mistake. It was when the Persians had left Greek soil that the glorious defence of Thermopylae was duly celebrated. At the time, it did not inspire courage. The flood of invaders spread unchecked across Boeotia and Attica; Athens was taken. On land, all attempts at resistance were abandoned as far as the Isthmus of Corinth. The fleet had had to leave its position north of Evia and descend into the Saronic Gulf. The Peloponnesians, who were only thinking of blocking the isthmus, did not want to risk a possibly fatal decision at sea.

The Lacedemonian navarch, Eurybiadas, hesitated. Sparta had only ten ships in its fleet, all of them manned by hilots; Corinth asked for a retreat. But Athens had the strongest naval contingent; the Athenian leader Themistocles firmly believed that in the narrow waters of Salamis, the Greeks would have the upper hand. He was alternately pressing, insidious and even threatening. He extracted a precarious promise from Eurybiadas. And when the Lacedemonian, harassed by his Peloponnesian allies, tried to break it, it was too late. The cunning of Themistocles forced the Greeks, blocked by the Persians, to fight; it was crowned by a victory of which Athens could be justifiably proud. At Salamis, the Persians had lost control of the sea: at the same time, the immense invasion had reached its extreme limit.

But Greece was not saved. While Xerxes returned to his homeland, his general Mardonios wintered in Thessaly with an army of more than 100,000 men, including the best elements of the Persian troops. In the spring of 479, he resumed the offensive. The divisions among the Greeks also provided an excellent field for his diplomacy. The Athenians had returned to their half-ruined city, but if the Peloponnesians left them to their own devices, they would be powerless against Mardonius. Now the
The Peloponnesians procrastinated: they only decided to take action when the Athenians threatened to do so.

to accept the unexpected conditions offered by Mardonios. They delayed again: they were celebrating the festival of the Hyakynthia. Athens was once again occupied by the enemy, but faced with the advance of the confederate troops, Mardonius abandoned the city, which he finished ransacking. He chose a battlefield on a plain in Boeotia, not far from Plataea, and settled there at his leisure.

The Peloponnesian army was enlarged only by contingents from Megara, Athens, Evia and Platées. It is impossible to estimate its size. The Spartans, perhaps five thousand in number, doubled by five thousand periecles, formed the main force. Each Spartan hoplite would have been followed by seven hilotes, lightly armed. General command was exercised by Pausanias, regent for the minor king Pleistarchos, the son of Leonidas. The mediocrity of his strategy was obvious: he was also handicapped by the lack of cavalry and the indiscipline of his troops. But all the tactical initiative fell to Mardonius, who kidnapped his convoys, deprived him of water and forced him to seek a new line of defence towards the slopes of the Cithéron. The battle of Plataea was fought in conditions that were deplorable for the Greeks, whose army broke up into three sections as it carried out a backward movement.

It was, however, a resounding victory: in the hand-to-hand combat that Mardonios, emboldened by the mistakes of his opponents, finally dared to engage in, the Asiatic soldiers were unable to withstand the shock of the hoplites.
The incredible endurance of the Spartans, who stood firm under a hail of arrows, then the irresistible The momentum of their massive formation decided their success. The Athenians, who had already fought bravely on the battlefield against the Thebans, auxiliaries of the Persians, were needed to remove the entrenched camp to which the fugitives had rushed. But none of the Greeks thought of dispute the exceptional merit of the Spartans. Herodotus, who was so sympathetic to the Athenians, makes this clear: "Among the Greeks, the Tegeates and Athenians behaved bravely; but the The Lacedemonians surpassed them in valour... and triumphed over the elite of their enemies". Aeschylus, the Athenian poet who fought at Salamis, had Darius predict that "on the soil of Plataea, the Dorian spear will spill a libation of blood".

A curious episode from the battle, again reported by Herodotus, shows, perhaps with excessive magnification, the extent to which a Spartan could push the point of honour. The execution of the retreat decided by the generals was compromised by the stubbornness of a detachment leader, Amompharetos, who refused to dishonour Sparta by a move he saw as a deliberate flight. A quarrel broke out between him and the supreme commander of the army; he threw a heavy stone at Pausanias' feet, exclaiming: "This is my vote: not to flee before the Barbarians". In the end, he reluctantly followed the main body of the retreating troops, was attacked by Mardonius' cavalry and succumbed. The anecdote may have some basis in truth, but the case of Amompharetos can only have been exceptional: Spartan discipline hardly legitimised such cases of conscience.

The precarious agreement between Sparta and Athens

While the Dorian hoplites were crushing the Persian infantry at Plataea and thus warding off a mortal danger to Greece, the battle at sea was opening up vast prospects for a future in which the entire Aegean would be nothing more than a Greek lake, off-limits to the Barbarians. At first, Sparta seemed ready to act: in the summer of 479, the entire fleet was assembled at Delos; the triers of Athens had joined it since Attica had been protected by the troops of Pausanias. It was now a Spartan king, Leotychidas, who was in command, and when a
Samian envoy solicited him, telling him that the Greeks of Ionia would rise up at the approach of the fleet, he gave in to this appeal, charmed, it is said, by the happy omen that the name of the solicitor was Hegesistratos, the guide of the army. The Persians evaded in vain. On the coast of Asia Minor, at Mycale, they dry-docked their ships and set up an entrenched camp. The camp is forced; the ships are burnt. Samos, Chios and Lesbos were liberated and joined 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 from the Barbarians in the hinterland. Sparta wanted to solve the problem in the way that would happen 2,400 years later: by transplanting the Asian Greeks to Greece. To make room for them, all they had to do was dispossess those Greeks who had not joined the fight against the Persians. This brutal operation, which would initially lead to atrocious conflicts, was certain to change the destiny of Greece. Athens was opposed to it and, if Herodotus is to be believed, had already declared itself to be the metropolis of Ionia and declared that the Peloponnesians had no business deciding the fate of its colonists. It seems to have won without much difficulty, but the Spartans were not long in leaving it the burdens and benefits of their decision.

The entire combined fleet sailed towards the Hellespont, but as the storm had already destroyed the bridges that had allowed Xerxes' army to pass, it dispersed. Leotychidas brought the Peloponnesians back to Greece; the Athenians prolonged their stay to lay siege to Sestos, then returned home in their turn. Again in 478, there was a joint effort: Pausanias, the victor of Plataea, seized Byzantium. His arrogant conduct made him odious to the allies, who turned to Athens. The Spartans recalled Pausanias and sent a navarch, Dorkis, at the beginning of 477. The allies declined his authority; he withdrew without any protest from Sparta.

In a few brief, luminous sentences, Thucydides reveals the state of mind of the Lacedaemonians: "They feared that, following the example of Pausanias, the leaders sent abroad would pervert themselves; they wanted to be rid of the war against the Medes; the Athenians seemed to them capable of waging it and, for the time being, there was cordial understanding with them".

Pausanias is a rather enigmatic character. Above all, we can see his immense pride, which had been swollen by the victory at Plataea. He claimed all the glory for himself and wanted to engrave his name alone on the commemorative tripod dedicated to Delphi. It is certain that the Spartan ephors challenged him, and
It is likely that he wanted his own policy. Did he recognise that the hegemony of Sparta was compromised by the excessive caution of the Spartan government and did he draw up a programme of action, opposed to the narrow views of the ephorate and the Ancients? His confused - and perhaps exaggerated - negotiations with the king of Persia, then the relations attributed to him with Themistocles, the dubious
with the hilots gives a rather incoherent impression. We should at least note that in
Despite the oriental costume he wore on occasion, what was in him of Spartan stiffness made him completely unsuited to establishing a lasting authority in Ionia.

Maritime warfare was repugnant to Sparta, which had only an insignificant fleet. Among its Peloponnesian allies,
Corinth, whose navy still rivalled that of Athens, turned instead to the regions
Greece, towards Magna Graecia and Sicily than towards the ports of Ionia. It did not put pressure on Sparta to thwart the actions of Athens, whose danger it did not recognise for a long time. From then on, left to make its own decisions, Sparta would be all the less tempted to expose itself to distant risks as it could always fear immediate perils in the Peloponnese itself.

The agreement with Athens was, in fact, somewhat distrustful. When Athens set about rebuilding its walls, the Peloponnesians were upset. At their instigation, Sparta revealed an ingenuous Machiavellianism: outside the Peloponnese, no city should be fortified, because if the Barbarians returned, the strongholds could provide them with bases of operations. This naive trick is thwarted by Themistocles' cunning, and the walls go up while negotiations, deliberately slowed down, continue. Then the Athenian lifts the mask: the fortified city is in a position to protect its inhabitants. The Lacedemonians must deal with it on an equal footing and not claim to dictate its conduct. It can judge its own interests and those of Greece, just as they can.
Sparta did not rise to the challenge and seemed to recognise that, while it was allowed to give the Athenians advice suggested by the general interest, it had no right to give them orders.

Natural moderation or short-sightedness and indecision? Any policy of recollection can be seen in this dual light. Later, it will be said that Sparta's long-suffering allowed Athens to grow dangerously. But the Athenian empire was still in limbo. All Sparta's attention was focused on itself and the Peloponnese.

The kings slipped into disrepute. Leotychidas the Eurypontid, on an expedition to Thessaly, failed, was accused of corruption and had to go into exile in Tegea. During the minority of Leonidas' son, the house of Agiades was still represented by Pausanias: he was a suspect whom the ephors kept an eye on. On his own initiative, he returned to Asia Minor, but the Athenians chased him out of Byzantium. He lived in Colones on the Troad, became more suspicious than ever of Medism, was called back to Sparta where he was imprisoned, then released due to suspicious indulgences. New intrigues, aimed at changing the established order, were skilfully exploited by the ephors. Pausanias took refuge in the sanctuary of Athena Chalkioikos; the entrance was sealed off, and the former generalissimo of the Greek army
starved to death, a victim as much of his own misguided ambition as of police suspicions.

The death of Pausanias put an end to an internal crisis that was undermining Sparta's constitution. But the Lacedaemonian state was still in turmoil. Between 478 and 464, he only restored his authority through two victories, that of Tegea over the Tegeates and the Argians combined, and that of Dipaia over all the Arcadians, with the exception of Mantinea. Independence movements mingled with democratic reforms. The Eleans themselves were affected; hitherto dispersed in villages, they founded their capital Elis and adopted a constitution which at least limited the powers of the king.
the oligarchy. But their interests remained linked to those of the Lacedemonians. In Argos, on the other hand, the hostility
The age-old rivalry between Sparta and the city was to become even stronger as a result of the constitutional changes and the policy of unification that Sparta pursued in the Argolid. But there was no agreement between the Peloponnesian states. The Argians did not help the Arcadians at Dipaia, where the Lacedemonian hoplites once again demonstrated their superiority.

The Panhellenic League, created at the time of the Persian invasion, was not broken up. Athens initially stuck to
to organise, on the fringes of this league, the association of the cities which wanted to continue the fight against the Persians and to fix the contributions in ships or money which they had to provide. The spontaneous adhesion of the allies invested it with command; Sparta tacitly acquiesced. Both sides were watching each other closely, but it was not yet time for conflict. In Athens, one party was determined to maintain the entente at all costs: that of Cimon, son of Miltiades, the conservative party. He had Themistocles banished; then, in agreement
With Sparta accusing the former Athenian strategist of collusion with Pausanias and treason, he hunted him down throughout Greece and forced him to take refuge in the States of the Great King.

But on one crucial point, Cimon was unable to respond to Sparta's secret desires: he had neither the strength nor even the desire to limit the expansion of Athens' power in the Aegean. For Athenian imperialism was not the work of the Athenian democracy itself, which had 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 from then on they had to recognise a suzerainty imposed, if necessary, by force. The League of Delos had expanded and taken on an authoritarian form in which

the right of secession was no longer recognised.

From then on, Sparta prepared to intervene in the name of freedom. In 465, Thasos withdrew from the league; Athens immediately sent a fleet to punish this defection. The Thasians asked Sparta not to plead in their favour, but to use its weapons to create a diversion in Attica. The reason is noble and an excellent opportunity. Perhaps the Lacedemonians would have yielded to this appeal, even at the risk of provoking general hostilities; at least, Athens was convinced of this: but a catastrophe stopped them.

The earthquake of 464 seems to have been a disaster whose immediate or distant consequences were singularly serious. In Sparta, only five houses were spared; there were 20,000 victims, including all the ephebes exercising in a gymnasium. As usual, the figures may have been exaggerated, but there is no doubt that the Spartans, whose numbers had already begun to dwindle, were severely tested by this unexpected blow.

Their discipline saved them from total loss. As the survivors explored the rubble of their homes and drew up the grim balance sheet, trumpet calls rang out, as if the enemy were at the city gates. It was indeed an enemy that was threatening them with the implacable slyness of those who have long been enslaved. The hilots wanted to take advantage of the panic to get rid of their masters; in bands, they rushed in from the fields. But King Archidamos, full of composure, had sounded the call to arms and the men lined up around him. The roughnecks, with their makeshift weapons, were powerless against the battle-hardened phalanx and withdrew. A striking picture of the domination that hung over Laconia.

But it wasn't all over yet. The Hilots tried to stir up the Periec cities. Most of Messinia seems to have taken part in the revolt. On the plain of Stenyclaros, the Spartan Aeimnastos, who had killed Mardonios at Plataea, fell with three hundred men. However, the insurgents were defeated in open country and retreated to Ithoma, their traditional refuge since the wars of the eighth century.

The Lacedemonians had to call on their allies: the Mantineans, the Plataeans, the Aeginetes, and others. had already come to their aid. Finally, unable to break through the natural defences of Ithoma, they appealed to the Athenians. Despite the fierce opposition of the democratic party, Cimon decided to send a corps of troops. If Sparta disappeared," he said, "the team of Greece would lose one of its two steeds.

Despite this reinforcement, the siege dragged on. The Lacedemonians suspected that the Athenians were being somewhat lax, and they soon went so far as to suspect that there was some sort of intelligence between them and the besieged. Their misfortunes had further increased their natural mistrust and racial prejudices: these non-Dorians were for them the representatives of the revolution. They dismissed them, alone among the allies.

This affront was the final blow to the Panhellenic League and to the entente sought by Cimon. After 462, the conflict between Greece's two great cities occupied the whole of the latter part of the century. When precarious truces suspended the armed struggle, each, exalting its own ideals, thought only of definitively destroying the fortunes of the other. Divided Greece sided with one side or the other, and the barbarian world was no stranger to the quarrel.

Unresolved conflicts

Sparta was not ready to face the consequences of the affront it had inflicted on Athens. It was undoubtedly counting on its maritime allies: Corinth and Aegina, who could not remain indifferent to Athens' growing power. But Athens' diplomacy was active: it turned to Argos,
Sparta's eternal enemy, who took it upon herself to occupy the Peloponnese. It detached Megara from the Peloponnesian League. It installed the Messenians at Naupacte, on the Gulf of Corinth, when they finally had to abandon Ithoma following an honourable surrender. Corinth was sieged. Aegina was besieged.

Sparta was moved by this multiplied offensive, but her reactions were slow and embarrassed. In central Greece, it tried to pit Boeotia against the Athenians, forgiving them for the crime they had committed. of having made a pact with the Medes. A Peloponnesian army crossed into Phocis on the pretext of to protect the sanctuary of Delphi; it entered Boeotia, building up large contingents and maintaining intrigues with the Athenian oligarchs. The Athenian militia, supported by the Argives and the
The Thessalian cavalry met the Peloponnesians at Tanagra, but the Thessalians went over to the enemy and the Lacedemonian infantry was still irresistible. It only took advantage of its victory to return to the Peloponnese via the Megaraid. Two months later, the Athenians won in Boeotia. Then Aegina capitulated. Naval warfare ravaged the Peloponnesian coasts, and defections occurred in Achaia.

Athena 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 her. But the expedition ended in disaster. And already, Persian negotiators were appearing in the Peloponnese, ready to

pay the Greeks handsomely for thwarting Athens' audacity. Sparta had not yet decided to accept similar subsidies: it would take years of stubborn conflict, in which everything was subordinated to the crushing of the opponent, to remove her scruples.

At this time, both sides were still hesitating before making a decisive commitment. In Athens, Cimon, who had returned from exile, persuaded his fellow-citizens to abandon Argos and conclude a five-year truce with Sparta: he was thinking only of operations against Persia, which would soon, after his death, end in a compromise. Sparta's attitude is more difficult to determine. Her interests were not directly opposed to those of Athens; for her, it was mainly a question of prestige. Following a victory in which its military valour had been demonstrated, Sparta usually seemed ready to lay down its arms. It is possible that there is some chivalric conception of war here, a test of strength. But we must never Nor should we forget the internal difficulties, the ever-present threat of the hilots and the memory of the disaster of 464.

Sparta's interventions often took the form of "sacred wars". Any call from Delphi set it in motion, and the independence of the Pythian sanctuary was periodically threatened by its neighbours in Phocis. A crusade can conceal many selfish motives, and by placing itself at the service of Delphi, Sparta hoped to consecrate its hegemony. It was also aware that it was defending a traditional order established by divine will. This sentiment often served as a rule in a policy that was no longer driven by strong appetites.

There were also glimpses of deep-seated disagreements which did not manifest themselves, as in Athens, in party struggles, with oligarchs and laconisers against democrats hostile to Sparta, but, in this state where parties did not exist, in personal rivalries. After the five-year truce, the time seemed ripe for a settling of scores. Boeotia had risen up against the domination of Athens, overthrown the popular governments that were too docile to this domination, defeated the troops that had come to their aid at Coronea, and finally formed a confederation from which Plataea alone remained outside and which would work to the bitter end to defeat Athens. Megara slaughtered its garrison and the towns of Evia rose up in revolt. The king of Sparta, Pleistoanax, son of Pausanias, arrived in Eleusis with his army, as if to deal the final blow to the city, which was under threat from all sides. But Pleistoanax and his deputy, Cleandridas, agreed to negotiate and retreated. Athens was able to defend its Boeotian border and reconquer Evia.

In Sparta, the ephors and elders were indignant at the conduct of the king and his adviser, who were accused of venality. One of them was sentenced to a heavy fine and, unable to pay it, left the city; he lived in exile for nineteen years, taking refuge in Arcadia on Mount Lyceum, and was only recalled on the orders of an oracle.

Cleandridas was sentenced to death in absentia. The opposition between the kings and the ephors continued; but the ephors had not become advocates of all-out war with Athens, for, following these events, they received the enemy's plenipotentiaries with alacrity. Athens gave up Megara and abandoned what it held in the Peloponnese. Sparta sacrificed Aegina, while making it recognise an illusory autonomy. Each of the two cities could have its own allies and was forbidden either to poach the other's allies or to support them if they defected. This peace, which established or enshrined a dualist system in Greece, was concluded for thirty years (445). It was not even supposed to last fifteen.

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The most fervent admirers of Athenian democracy are forced to admit that, by the way it reduced its allies to subjects, it allowed the Lacedemonians to pose as champions of violated rights and oppressed freedom. At the time of the Thasos revolt in 465, they had already sought to play this role. The situation only got worse thereafter, even if Pericles still put some form to it. The great statesman was under no illusions: he had established the principle that between the will to power that animated the entire Athenian state and the still great but inert force that
represents Lacedemona, a decisive conflict is inevitable. And so he completed the work he had begun before him; he brought the combined system of democracy and the rule of law to its highest level. imperialism: the tributary cities support the Athenian people. We were able to break down their defensive energy; but we must foresee that, sooner or later, all the latent resentment will manifest itself and seek support. So be it! 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 try to break up the ancient league of Delos, now subject to a tyrannical regime.

In fact, Sparta, which led this Confederation, was in no hurry to commit itself, and another state, Corinth, in 441, when Samos revolted against Athens and asked for help, still took the view that the disputes between the Athenians and their allies were none of its business. The Peloponnesians confined themselves to thwarting by a 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 all too apparent, since Athens was the seat of the Conference, to assert at least a moral hegemony, to which Sparta was not about to consent.

Furthermore, while tradition sheds light on the actions of Pericles and the policies of Athens, we are unable to follow Sparta's diplomacy in the years leading up to the great conflagration known as the Peloponnesian War. Did it even have diplomacy? She worried

With all her conscience, she condemned the ways of Athenian democracy; but she took little action until her own allies forced her hand.

This time, Corinth pushed for a rupture and Megara the second. Corinth had fresh grievances: Athens had formed an alliance against it with Corcyra, a Corinthian colony which had become a rival of the metropolis; it had sent ships to the Ionian Sea which prevented the Corinthian fleet from destroying that of Corcyra. Corinth's commercial monopoly in the West was threatened by its ventures. To the north of the Aegean Sea, in the Chalkidiki area, another Corinthian colony, Potidea, which had joined the League of Delos, was ordered to break off all relations with Corinth and, as it procrastinated, it was besieged by land and sea. Corinth's interests were damaged, but Megara's very existence was threatened. A decree closed the ports of the Athenian empire to Megara, and this economic blockade was to force it to accept Athens' wishes. It appeared to be a provocation, launched in cold blood by Pericles to test the strength of the Peloponnesian Confederation.

Thucydides has painted an admirable picture of the deliberations that took place in Sparta. The speeches he attributes to the Corinthians, to ambassadors from Athens who happened to be there, to the Spartan king 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 tribute to Sparta's loyalty in her international relations, but criticise her long-suffering, which gave her adversary time to double her forces before anyone thought of attacking her. The Spartans, they said, were living by outdated principles: they lacked any entrepreneurial spirit when faced with rivals who thought only of enterprise. The contrast between the Athenians and the Spartans is complete.
to the advantage of the Athenians, at least if we consider, not political morality, but the results achieved. Let the Spartans beware: their allies will break away from them if they leave them defenceless to enemies who will not disarm.

After the Athenian deputies had tried to justify the means of authority they had had to use against their allies, Archidamos gave a lengthy account of the difficulties of fighting Athens and warned his fellow citizens against any hope of a rapid outcome. Sthenelaidas' speech was as brutal as he could have wished: the Athenians were to blame for everything; they had harmed Sparta's allies. There was no point in deliberating when one was outraged: all one had to do was vote for war against perfidious aggressors. An imposing majority rallied to this opinion, and proclaimed the initial responsibility of the Athenians for the breach of the peace. Later,
the assembly of the Peloponnesian Confederation, where the Corinthians again vigorously exposed their demands and the encroachments of Athens, confirmed the decision to go to war.

But Thucydides, who was careful to emphasise the initiative of the Corinthians, also suggests that the Lacedemonians 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 subjugate the rest. This assessment does not seem to correspond to reality: Sparta's hesitation was obvious and would become even more apparent later on.

Without doubt, the negotiations which continued during the winter of 432-431 were no more than diplomatic feints, intended to shift all the blame onto the opposing side and win the opinion of neutrals. However, when military operations began in the spring of 431, the way in which they were conducted was perhaps not simply a reflection of King Archidamos' strategic mediocrity: Sparta had not yet come to terms with the idea of a war in which all its forces had to be committed.

Year after year, the army of the Confederation invaded Attica, ravaging the countryside, contemplating.., the united ramparts of Athens and Piraeus and withdrew. It was a solid and numerous army: the Spartans, now mixed with the Periecans, formed its core; the Confederates were under their command. Not only did the Peloponnese provide its levies, but the Boeotians, the Phocidians and part of the Locrians had also joined the league. Without calling on all the men who could be mobilised, 25,000 hoplites could be poured into Attica, before which the 13,000 hoplites of Athens, who were less well trained, could not hold out. But they refused to fight, and the Spartans were put to the sword.

Athens, however, master of the sea, ravaged the coasts of the Peloponnese. Admittedly, its tactics imposed harsh sacrifices and the plague, which decimated the population crammed into the city, dampened the spirits. But she did not give in, even after the death of Pericles. In a bold move, she stationed troops on the west coast of Messinia, at Pylos. The Lacedemonians tried to flush them out of this post, which could serve as a rallying point for the Messenian hilots. They imprudently landed 420 hoplites on the island of Sphacteria opposite Pylos. The island was blocked by Athenian ships; after a long resistance, 292 surviving Lacedemonians laid down their arms. Among them were 120 Spartans, and all Greece was astonished that they had preferred surrender to death.

Sparta was dismayed: in Attica, it had been unable to obtain a decision; and now,
Fearing for the lives of her captive soldiers, she no longer dared to enter. It was also threatened in its own domain. The Athenians installed Messenians from Naupacte in Pylos, who waged a war of banditry as far as Laconia. Sparta would have made peace on the spot, had she been able to obtain reasonable terms. But, while her opponents, intoxicated by their success, increased their demands, a Spartan, inaugurating new means of fighting, re-established the situation.

Until then, the military leaders of the Lacedaemonians had been inferior to their task and one might think that Spartan education formed courageous and disciplined soldiers, but destroyed any spirit of initiative. Brasidas escapes from routine. In the first part of the war, he proved his worth at Méthonè, which he defended against an Athenian attack, and at Pylos, where he was wounded. He was entrusted with a mission in Thrace, the results of which were not expected to be dazzling, but he had to respond to the appeal of the Macedonian king Perdiccas and the inhabitants of Chalkidiki in Thrace, who had revolted against Athens. It was also an opportunity to send the dreaded hilots out of the Peloponnese. Six hundred of them, armed as hoplites, left with Brasidas; he also recruited a thousand mercenaries in the Peloponnese. He was almost a gang leader, with only irregular troops at his disposal. Although he had a reputation for great energy, he did not seem to have much credibility with the Spartan government: his efforts were poorly supported, and justice was not done for him until after his death.

He has a breadth of vision and resources of intelligence which distinguish him not only in the of his fellow-citizens, but also between those who were directing Sparta's policy at that time. He was, however, a Spartan of good character. About to attack the Athenians at Amphipolis, he reminded his soldiers that, as Dorians, they were going to fight the Ionians whom they had so often defeated. He had nothing but contempt for states ruled by the multitude. His political ideal was that of Sparta: the government of a minority that owed its privileges only to its warrior virtue. But in his relations with the other Greeks, he was neither arrogant nor brutal. The Athenians liked to say that the Spartans' morals were incompatible with those of other cities and that, moreover, every Spartan, once outside his own country, no longer followed either the customs of his homeland or those of the rest of Greece. The example of Pausanias supported their claims, and later too many others would justify them. But Brasidas was not of this kind: his justice and moderation were admired everywhere. Before his departure from Sparta, he made a promise by
He swore an oath to the magistrates to leave independence to all the allies he could win over. He was himself faithful to this promise, knew how to put it into practice with skilful speeches, and, more than any other, succeeded in
instilled the opinion that the liberation of Greece was Sparta's sole aim. The Athenian Thucydides, who saw him in action in Thrace, bears him witness in a way that is not at all suspect, for it is, moreover, tinged with bitter irony: "He inspired everywhere a pronounced inclination in favour of the Lacedemonians... As he seemed in every way perfect, people had the firm hope that all the others were like him".

The king of Macedonia, the cunning and volatile Perdiccas, had only called in the Lacedemonians to serve his interests. Brasidas lent himself little to his designs, incurred his displeasure in cold blood, and, after a joint expedition against the Lyncestes in which the Macedonians abandoned him, fell out with Perdiccas.
entirely with him. The Chalkidiki region of Thrace was his main objective because Athens drew abundant resources from it, especially timber for building its ships. He kidnapped or forced the defection of the Greek cities in the region that 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 sourced their wheat from the Pont-Euxin region, famine hit them. if the straits were occupied by the enemy.

Brasidas had to shape this vast project: he set about building triremes on the Strymon. But Lacedemonia sent him no reinforcements: the conquests in the north were seen as little more than a bargaining chip to buy back Pylos and the prisoners of Sphacteria. An initial truce was concluded, but Brasidas scarcely took it into account and provoked new hostilities. He was killed in front of Amphipolis, at the same time as Cleon, the Athenian leader who was trying to retake the city. Cleon, a politician who had been called a demagogue and an incompetent general by Thucydides and the comic poet Aristophanes, had represented in Athens the party of war without mercy or respite. In Sparta, Brasidas had similar After his death, King Pleistoanax, who had been recalled from exile, easily brought about a peaceful solution. But the memory of Brasidas remained dear to the Amphipolitans, who buried him on the Agora and paid him the cult reserved for founding heroes. Sparta built a cenotaph for him.

However, she concluded a peace by which she repudiated all of Brasidas' actions: she abandoned the cities of Chalkidiki which, in his name, he had declared free. There was no longer any question of the beautiful
programme of autonomy, proclaimed before Greece at the start of hostilities. Athens and Sparta were to return their conquests to each other: it was the white peace, the restoration of the status quo with all the iniquities that had been sought to be eliminated. Old Archidamos had been wise: he had told his fellow citizens that they were embarking on a crusade for which they were ill-equipped. This inadequacy had been clearly demonstrated, and by the time Brasidas had shown them new ways, war-weariness had weighed too heavily on the Lacedemonians. In 421, after ten years of effort, they seemed to have given up all concern for their prestige.

Settling scores

Sparta made a treaty; but Corinth, Megara, Thebes and Elis refused to sign, and the Chalcidians prevent the return of Amphipolis. The Peloponnesian Confederation appeared to be on the verge of collapse.
dissolved and Argos prepared to take over from Sparta. At first, these difficulties seemed consolidate the agreement between the Lacedemonians and Athenians: misunderstandings and intrigues soon compromised it. From the end of 421, Sparta's politics were conducted by ephors hostile to the peace treaty. In Athens, Alcibiades engineered the alliance with Argos; Elis and Mantinea joined in.
It was the definitive union of the democracies against Sparta.

Here again, we are much better informed about the political debates that erupt in the United States. The war was not only the result of the war in Athens itself, but also of the bitter oppositions which, in narrow and closed circles, preceded Sparta's final decisions. One of the consequences of the war was to undermine social discipline. When the prisoners of Sphacteria were released by Athens, it was feared that they would
try to make a move. The hilots who had taken part in Brasidas' expedition were freed, but they were settled as far away as possible, on the borders of Laconia and Elis. Shortly before, during the war, two thousand of them had been freed for services rendered; then they had mysteriously disappeared. The old apprehensions did not cease: they could only nourish feelings of caution, a necessary pacifism.

But sparks do fly. It is less easy in Sparta than in a democracy to unleash irresistible movements of opinion and outbursts of fury. However, when King Agis, who was leading the elite of the Arcadians, Boeotians, Corinthians and Megarians against Argos, along with the mass of Lacedemonians, hesitated to give the signal for the attack and ended up dismissing his troops, his house was about to be razed to the ground. The Lacedemonians," says Thucydides, "obeyed, against their custom, the rules of their country.
first move". Argos is the hereditary enemy that dares to challenge the primacy of Sparta.
in the Peloponnese.

The battle of Mantinea, shortly afterwards, satisfied public opinion. It finally pitted the Argians and their allies from Athens and Mantinea against the Lacedemonians, flanked by the Arcadians. And it was a victory according to the rules: the Lacedemonians, under their king Agis, slowly advanced to the front of the city.
cadence of the flutes, broke the accelerated momentum of their opponents whose tactics had been superior to their own. Then, in keeping with their tradition, they refrained from pursuing the enemy by
They dismissed their allies and returned home to celebrate the Carneia. "By this fact alone
of arms, they redeemed the disaster of Sphacteria in the eyes of the Greeks and washed their hands of the blame.
of irresolution and slowness. It was recognised that fortune may have betrayed them, but that in their courage they were always the same.

An unshakeable force in the Peloponnese, a bronze rock: this is how Sparta still appears. Argos, plagued by civil strife, was reduced to impotence. But the blow that brought it down did not
Athens cannot be reached by the same weapons. The victory at Mantinea would even suggest that, while Sparta had lost none of her ancient virtues, she had learned nothing useful for the day when she would again attempt to bring Athens down.

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The disaster of the expedition to Sicily, where Athens ventured so recklessly in the summer of 415 when so many enemies were lying in wait for her in Greece itself, left a more than half-disarmed city in the hands of these enemies.
Sparta was slow to seize the opportunity. To the deputies from Syracuse and Corinth who urge her to send help to Sicily, the ephors were about to make a dilatory reply. A banished Athenian, Alcibiades, enraged at the party that had ruined his dreams of ambition, revealed to them the chimerical and perhaps deliberately exaggerated immensity of Athenian projects, opened their eyes to their own interests, and finally dictated a plan of operations: "Send men to Sicily who will do
first as rowers, then as hoplites. Even more useful: send a Spartan commander to discipline the militiamen present and force the recalcitrant into service... Take the war to Greece. Fortify Decelia in Attica and install 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, Decélie, whose fortifications could be seen from Athens itself, was occupied by troops who alternated between the two. The Attic countryside remained uncultivated; the dirt roads were cut off; the slaves deserted. A superstitious fear had long held the Spartans back from openly breaking the peace: they were convinced that, having taken the initiative in 431, misfortune and setbacks had befallen them.

Shortly afterwards, Alcibiades still had to overcome the hesitations of the Lacedemonians, who were still resistant to the idea of a sea war. From Decelia, King Agis established relations with Euboea, which was ready to revolt. In
Asia, Ionia is in turmoil; the satraps of the Great King, Tissapherne and Pharnabaze, are fighting for Sparta's alliance. Alcibiades indoctrinates the ephoros Endios, takes advantage of his rivalry with Agis, and tells him that he must
do his work of raising Ionia and forming an alliance with the Great King. It seems that the advice
The exile's diabolical actions unleashed hobbled forces, all of which were now working to bring down the Athenian empire.

Sparta first freed herself from her scruples: to wage war at sea, she needed subsidies from Persia. From now on, it would receive them shamelessly [on this subject, see David Astle, Sparte, les pélanors, la richesse et-les femmes, https://elementsdeducationraciale.wordpress.com/2015/10/18/sparte-les-pelanors-la-richesse-et-les-femmes/]. A formal treaty bound Sparta to its financial backer: the Greek cities of Asia would be freed from the yoke of Athens only to fall back under that of the Great King. This treaty was amended three times. The first draft was so vague that it could have justified the King's claims to countries in Greece that Xerxes had for a time possessed. A Lacedaemonian commissioner, Lichas, was indignant about this. Finally, the formula was arrived at which limited the domain of the King of Persia to Asia. Sparta was not interested in Asian Hellenism.

Individuals also seemed to act more independently and boldly. Maritime warfare was often waged by inexperienced and hesitant leaders. When Alcibiades had fallen out with the Lacedemonians, he achieved easy successes. But King Agis, in Decelia, had already managed to combine military operations and diplomatic negotiations with consummate skill. He had the most powerful
He had extensive powers, raised men and money at will, and won the obedience of the allies. This authority was not without its worries for Sparta, but it was necessary to adapt to the conditions of the new war.

With Lysander, a Spartan of a new type appeared, or at least a Spartan whose circumstances allowed him to display a powerful personality without constraint. His origins remain uncertain: perhaps he was the bastard son of a Heraclian family, but he received a Spartan education and enjoyed full political rights. A statue consecrated at Delphi depicts him with long hair and a long beard, in the ancient fashion. He was disinterested, but had prodigious ambition. This empire-builder, who established Sparta's domination of the Aegean Sea, worked above all for his own glory. To achieve his goals, he knew how to court the powerful effortlessly: from the young Cyrus, the youngest son of the Persian king Darius II and governor of almost all of Asia Minor, he thus obtained the most
large subsidies. He is brutal and cruel if it pleases him. Between truth and lies, he chooses according to the advantage he hopes to gain. 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 in. Sparta respected the gods: Lysander consecrated ex-voto offerings in their sanctuaries, but had little fear of offending them with perjury. He was not the first to use the oracles for political ends; but the intrigue he devised towards the end of his life to prepare himself for the throne is the masterpiece of a mind which, strengthened by a fundamental incredulity, hoped for everything from the credulity and superstition of others. Perhaps his unlimited pride encouraged him to take it easy with the gods. He was also the first Greek city to erect altars and offer sacrifices.

In 408, he was given command of the Peloponnesian fleet in Ionia: his immediate mastery of the fleet is all the more surprising given that his background escapes us. A close relationship developed between him and Cyrus: the influx of Persian gold allowed the pay of the rowers to be increased to one drachma, and desertion spread throughout the Athenian fleet. Alcibiades was defeated and, as a result, his unstable popularity collapsed in Athens: the only leader who might perhaps have been able to stand up to Lysander disappeared.
However, Lysander, who had settled in Ephesus, laid the foundations for the policy he would apply in the future: in all the Greek cities of Ionia, he encouraged the formation of small groupings.
oligarchs who will take over the government. The men he supports in their struggle
against democracy and whom he never disowns despite their crimes, will be totally devoted to him.
He used them to force Sparta to extend its powers.

But the law required him to resign after a year: thanks to Lysander, who was less devoted to his country than to himself, his successor Callicratidas encountered a host of difficulties both in the Greek cities and at Cyrus' court. He was a perfect contrast to Lysander: he did not know how to solicit, he hated the barbarians and he refused to work for the benefit of the oligarchs. Plutarch has great admiration for this character, whose noble sentiments made him worthy of Sparta, but fortune was against him. At the battle of Arginuses, he was defeated and killed. The discouraged Peloponnesians thought of making peace, but Athens still refused to accept proposals that would save her while taking away her empire. Cyrus and the allies demanded Lysander's return.

The decisive game was played on the Hellespont: for Athens, it was the wheat route that had to be defended at all costs.
against Lysander's fleet. But his imprudent generals were deceived by the Peloponnesian's stratagems. In the straits, near the little river of Aigos Potamos, the Athenian ships, stripped of their crews, were taken almost without a fight; sailors and soldiers were captured on land. And the implacable Lysander had three thousand Athenian prisoners slaughtered in retaliation for the cruel measures taken by the beleaguered city. The die had been cast: the empire of Sparta was to succeed that of Athens.

The Spartan empire and the problem of depopulation

After the battle of Aigos Potamos, the capitulation of Athens in April 404 was nothing more than a dramatic event.
episode. Sparta, under the impetus of Lysander, had already developed its new policy: throughout the Aegean Sea, the Athenians were driven out and the democratic governments destroyed. The establishment of the regime of the Thirty in a dismantled Athens reduced to the possession of twelve ships was the crowning achievement of the work begun four years earlier by Lysander in Asia.

It may have been a personal project, but Sparta was responsible for it. It had entered the war with a programme of liberation. Lysander introduced a system of decarchies in the liberated cities: ten trusted men, recruited from the oligarchic coteries, acted as masters. They were often supported by Lacedemonian garrisons; a Lacedemonian governor or harmoste was even installed in certain cities to keep watch over them. And Sparta demanded payment of this tribute, which, more than any other measure, had aroused hatred against Athens.

First and foremost, Lysander is all-powerful. Didn't he know how to end a battle by crushing his adversary, a battle that, even in the last few years, people had wanted to end with a compromise? He was able to erect a proud monument at Delphi in which he was represented among a group of divinities while the

other chiefs of the Peloponnesian fleet respectfully surrounded him. Poseidon crowned the navarch whose "swift ships had destroyed the power of the Cecropids". But the Spartan government was soon moved by an attitude reminiscent of that of Pausanias in the aftermath of
Platées. 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 was recalled from Asia; he was not put on trial, but he found an excuse to leave.

If he fell into a state of semi-disgrace, Sparta was bound to give up the system of domination he had created. Even in the Peloponnese, Sparta made its strength felt: invaded and pillaged Elidia had to abandon its southern cantons. Outside the city, the kings and ephors sought to react less against Lysander's methods than against his personal influence: the decarchies disappeared, but the harmosts remained. Athens was at least able to take advantage of King Pausanias' enmity with Lysander to shake off the yoke of the Thirty. On this occasion, the king put on a noble show: he negotiated and imposed an agreement between oligarchs and democrats, withdrew the Lacedemonian garrison from Athens and, despite Lysander, authorised the restoration of the old constitution while giving guarantees to the representatives of the fallen regime. This cautious policy, which took into account both the traditions and the interests of Sparta, was supported by three ephors. But there were such disagreements in Sparta that, shortly afterwards, King Agis, a friend of Lysander, accused Pausanias of "having taken away from the Athenian people the restraint of
the oligarchy". Pausanias barely escaped condemnation.

The needs of the time would have demanded unanimity of views in the Spartan government. No doubt personal hostilities do not necessarily mean radical opposition: the Spartans seem to have been unanimous on the primacy due to their homeland, and even on the use of force to maintain it. Their uncertainties stem rather from the inner uneasiness that
It was the inability to choose between the mistakes of the past and the innovations needed to enable Sparta to found and maintain an empire.

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In antiquity, the triumph of Lysander was often seen as the beginning of Sparta's decline. Lycurgus' constitution was no longer respected: the gods, who had sanctioned the wisdom of his laws, punished his fellow citizens for disregarding them.

In fact, there had long been gaps in this constitution; what was maintained with
This stubbornness only served particular interests. From the body of the State hung the debris

of archaic, rusty armour that impeded their movements. We had already seen this during the Peloponnesian War; when it came to maintaining an authoritarian peace, i.e. organising a Hegemony, no longer hegemony of prestige, but, as Athens had conceived it, hegemony of force and profit, Sparta, incapable of reforming itself, could only remedy its shortcomings through brutality and hypocrisy.

Moralists like Plutarch and, before him, Xenophon, see above all that, after Sparta's victory, precious metals flooded into a state which had hitherto confined its internal transactions to the use of iron money. This was both an economic and a moral crisis, and the Spartan authorities were particularly dismayed. The seriousness of the situation became apparent when Gylippos, the man who had saved Syracuse, embezzled some of the money that Lysander had asked him to bring back to Sparta. There was some discussion, with one ephorus proposing that no gold or silver coins should be allowed into the city. In the end, it was decided to punish by death any private individual who held gold or silver coins. valuable species. The effectiveness of the measure appears to have been mediocre. Do we know, moreover, whether Lycurgus' law had already been scrupulously respected? Accusations of venality were made early on against the kings and magistrates of Sparta. The city
In the fourth century, the city was clearly enriched: kings and even private individuals were reputed to possess prodigious wealth. Thereafter, moral corruption could be practised with less dissimulation.

Frequent contact with the foreign world is often fatal to the Spartan. It is like a man who has been protected from all the harmful germs by an excessively skilful prophylaxis: when he is exposed to them, his body is incapable of reacting. In the past, Spartans had been forbidden to live outside Sparta: now the city's leaders eagerly seek the privilege of being governors in cities that are more or less subject to them. This gives them ample opportunity to develop their bitter greed and insatiable appetite for all the pleasures that are forbidden, at least in public, in their homeland.

Perhaps it would nevertheless have been possible to adapt between the old customs and the new mores, almost imposed by the conditions of the time, if Sparta, through her own fault, had not restricted too much the circle of men to whom she entrusted her fate.

Sparta, a military city whose only ideal was to train its citizens for war, saw the number of its warriors steadily decline. At the beginning of the fourth century, Xenophon contrasted the small number of Spartans with Sparta's power. At the end of the same century, Aristotle attributed the city's sudden collapse to a lack of men. The fact is well documented, but it is important to see when this depopulation began and what the causes were.

At the time of the Median Wars, Sparta was still at the height of its power: 5,000 of its hoplites were engaged at Plataea and it does not seem that the whole of its forces were on the battlefield. Laconia and Messinia had to be guarded against external and internal enemies: a few mobilisable classes, no doubt the oldest, remained in the Peloponnese. There are no precise statistics: the figure of 9,000 cleroi, each of whom had to support a soldier, has been disputed. However, it is not wrong to estimate Sparta's strength at 7 or 8,000 men.

Now, during the Peloponnesian War, Sparta was only able to field 3,000 or 4,000 men at most. It was ready to make peace because 120 Spartans had fallen to the Athenians. The harsh measures taken against the soldiers who surrendered were becoming less severe. All the evidence shows that the civic forces are being sparingly used because they are being exhausted with frightening rapidity.

In the fourth century, the fall was vertical: in a region that could support 1,500 horsemen and 30,000 hoplites, says Aristotle, there were barely 1,000 soldiers. And the low point had not yet been reached: in the middle of the third century, there were still fewer than 300 men.

It is not difficult to identify the many and varied reasons for this decline in the number of Spartan citizens, focusing on one or the other in particular. Great importance has sometimes been attached to the earthquake in 464, which claimed countless victims among the population, or to the losses suffered in the war, which were poorly compensated for by an insufficient birth rate. The illustrious Fustel de Coulange thought that a very large number of citizens had been thoughtlessly deprived of the right of citizenship. Spartan discipline, which was too harsh and almost inhumane, would even have led to a search for a civic degradation that would have made it possible to avoid it. Usually, a connection is established between the fact, pointed out by Aristotle, that the land had passed into a small number of hands, and the reduction in the number of citizens: since it was necessary to own a cleros and contribute to the communal 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: didn't the legislation, at least until the beginning of the fourth century, ensure that a cléros always supported a soldier?

We have already touched on this problem in connection with the transmission of the keyros: the time has come to tackle it again.
to be dealt with in more detail, since it is the very problem of Sparta's decline.

Even if we consider Lycurgus' allotment of the citizens' land and the strict equality of shares to be legendary, and if we think that at all times there were rich and poor citizens in Sparta, we must admit that the State did not limit itself to imposing equal rights for all.

In fact, he seems to have been concerned with ensuring that a certain number of men, who were destined to work in the trades, would be able to work together. In fact, he seems to have been concerned with ensuring that a certain number of men, destined to work in the trade of
In other words, they could devote themselves exclusively to their trade. The cléros, which provided a fixed income, fulfilled this intention.

The cléros is declared inalienable: the aim of this measure is not to ensure that a family has
In fact, as we have seen, the cléros was passed down from father to son without any right of primogeniture. In fact, as we have seen, the cléros was passed down from father to son without there being any right of primogeniture; but is it conceivable that it could have been subdivided ad infinitum between all the living sons or that all the sons, remaining in joint ownership, could have lived off a cléros from the moment when the fixed fee, shared between them, no longer enabled each to pay his share of the communal meals? You were only a full citizen if you paid your share. The State's interest in keeping at least the same number of citizens seems obvious. Therefore, will it not intervene by means of some kind of regulation to ensure that the cleros fulfils its true function, which is strangely altered if none of the joint owners or usufructuaries has civic capacity?

No less than excessive fragmentation of the cléros, the State must prevent the concentration of several cléros on the same head. If a Spartan has no male heir, the heiress daughter, or rather, according to the According to Greek law, Epiclera should marry some Spartan not yet provided for. If there are no descendants, the State should make the allotment. However, as a result of a fall in the birth rate, the number of cleroi may exceed the number of Spartans; in this case, a broad policy of admitting new elements to the rank of citizens is required.

The constant intervention of the State in the devolution of an asset such as the cléros, of which the State seems always to have had eminent ownership in principle, is entirely normal. It is hardly surprising, particularly in Sparta, where the very existence of the individual is regulated by the community. And yet, it is doubtful that it occurred with sufficient firmness to act effectively.
The indivisibility, at least relative, of the cléros is not attested anywhere. Until the fourth century, the daughter of a spice maker was allocated according to certain rules that we do not know, but which do not seem to have been followed.
have differed from those of other Greek states, where the next of kin, or an adopted son chosen from among the parents, took possession of both the daughter and the inheritance. The authorities, in this case the kings, only intervened if the father had not disposed of his daughter. There was no guarantee that two or more cleroi would never have the same owner.

When a cleros fell into disrepute or was taken from a Spartan who had been dishonoured, the State had to provide it with a holder. We know that the exercise of civic rights was linked to a double condition: education from childhood by passing through the various age classes, and participation in public meals. Birth out of wedlock was not a case of exclusion. However, it
In Sparta there was a class, which seems to have been fairly large, of bastards, born of a Spartan father and a Hilot, who received the same education as legitimate children. They were called mothaces; to become full citizens, all they needed was the cleros. It was therefore like a
a reservoir of strength from which to draw. On the other hand, at the end of the fifth century and the beginning of the fourth, we learn of the existence of another class, serving in the Lacedaemonian army: these were the "new citizens" (neodamodes), perhaps freed hilots, if not themselves capable of becoming full Spartans, since they had not received the necessary education, then at least likely to be the offspring of citizens who would be indistinguishable from the others. Then there were all those who were called "citizens of lesser right" (hypomeiones) and whose inability to contribute to the common meals relegated them to inferiority. The Spartan state had no problem finding qualified candidates to own a cleros; without resorting to naturalisation of foreigners, which it avoided doing, it could recruit from its own ranks the men who, in the spirit of the old legislation, will have the duty and privilege of defending it to the exclusion of all other tasks.

Yet the class of citizens was emptying out. And then, at the beginning of the fourth century, a law was passed that precipitated the catastrophe: "An influential but stubborn and rude man became an epitore: his name was Epitadeus. He had had a quarrel with his son, so he had a law passed allowing any citizen to dispose of his house and his keyros as he wished, either by inter vivos gift 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 away the best constitution". Let's leave the anecdote aside: the futility of the motive that prompted Epitadeus to act can be challenged. Rather, Epitadeus is the spokesman for all those who are hindered by the restrictions still in place on land traffic. Perhaps they had already won many concessions and state control over the cleroi had become almost illusory. In the previous century, we suspected that it was powerless to curb a family policy that was diverting the institution of the cléroi from its true purpose: from now on, this policy would serve the interests of an ever smaller number of families.

It is not surprising that, around the same time, a conspiracy was formed to shake off the yoke of a blind oligarchy that did not hesitate to shake the foundations of the State in order to satisfy interests that its very triumph endangered. It is possible that the holders of the cleroi had previously pledged the revenues from the estates they were able to alienate. The law of Epitadeus put the seal on the spoliation. Above all, it deprived all the inferiors - mothaces, neodamoi, hypomeiones - of the hope of ever acquiring land. One of them, young Cinadon, wanted to group together the malcontents: propaganda was easy. A conspirator who denounced the conspiracy shows us Cinadon at work: "He led me to the far end of the public square. Count the Spartans in the square," he said. I

I counted: the king, the ephors, the elders and about forty others; that's all I found. These are the enemies," he told me; "all the others will be our allies: there are more than four thousand of them in this square. But the police of the oligarchy were well organised: Cinadon was tortured.

Cinadon's words are evocative: they show us that in Sparta itself there is a considerable mass of inferiors in which the Spartans are drowned. How do these people live? Did the poverty to which they were reduced result in a lower birth rate? Unanswered questions. The same is true of the periecles and hilots. But the shortage of men was most noticeable among the restricted class of Spartans, who, having become an aristocracy, were automatically exhausted, like all aristocracies, and refused to fill their gaps, more to increase their property and privileges than out of pride in their race. Around the time of the second Messinian war, the Spartan aristocracy, whether willingly or not, had expanded to the point where the name itself no longer suited it. The entire city saw itself as a city of equals, even if the privileges common to all were not shared equally by all. Family egoism has corrupted institutions that had nothing in common with family organisation, and has recreated an aristocracy based on wealth. The phenomenon can be interpreted in various ways: as the inadequacy of the precautions taken and, to use Aristotle's words, as an error on the part of the legislator; or as the irresistible force of certain feelings against which the wisest legislator can do nothing?

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Thus, at the very moment when Sparta was acquiring an empire, she did not agree to correct the defects of a regime which had had its greatness, but which was even less suited than Athenian democracy to a policy of imperialism. During the war, a few leaders had, after many setbacks, shown her the way and ensured her success against an adversary whose tactics baffled her. Subsequently, it was less Sparta, the city of fine laws, that attracted attention, despite the idealisation with which the philosophers began to envelop it, than a few men who emerged from its impoverished elite. The virtues of traditional education are to be found in them to varying degrees; but, sometimes in agreement with the Spartan government, sometimes against it, they endeavour to make their personal views prevail and to direct the future of Sparta according to their own conceptions.

The weight of Sparta's authority

Although the Greeks were anxious for autonomy, they soon realised that instead of the generous wine of freedom, Sparta was pouring them "Lacedemonian piquette", and it took some time for the discontent to coalesce and be translated into action. However, Sparta came into conflict with the Great King.

the war, it had sacrificed the cities of Asia-Minor; now it had the opportunity to adopt a more ambitious policy.
generous.

Lysander's friend Cyrus, who had revolted against his brother and ruler Artaxerxes II, died on the battlefield of Counaxa, and his Greek mercenaries had to make the painful retreat described in Xenophon's Anabasis. In Asia Minor, the satrap Tissapherne demands the submission of the Greek cities They turned to Sparta, the eminent protector of all Greece. Two successive expeditions, from 399-397, achieved only mediocre results. The Persians seemed to be preparing an attack on Greece. With Agesilaus, operations tended to take the form of a pre-emptive crusade for the benefit of Hellenism: the king wanted to leave Aulis after a sacrifice, like Agamemnon of old.

Agesilaus had succeeded his brother Agesis, at the expense of his nephew, through a special arrangement favoured by Lysander. Although he was short and lame, he had received Spartan military training. He prided himself on strict obedience to the laws of his country and to the magistrates who represented them, ephors and elders. He remained attached to traditional frugality and simplicity. To read his panegyrists, one would think that he wanted to realise in himself the ideal type of Spartan at a time when this ideal had already undergone more than one alteration. It seems that he had personal qualities that made him sympathetic, and his friend Xenophon made him a hero, energetic and tireless, patient, respectful and magnanimous.
many virtuous or wise apophthegms. Without disputing the amiable appeal attributed to his physiognomy, there were some rougher features. Agesilaus was very concerned about his authority: at the start of the Asian campaign, he endeavoured to belittle his imperious friend Lysander, whose credit was causing him embarrassment. In the name of statecraft, he legitimised reprehensible acts that were damaging to Sparta. He may even have inspired an entire oppressive policy that he no doubt considered indispensable, but which ended in disaster.

The Asian campaign showed him to be a skilful and cunning leader, methodically ravaging the territories of Lydia and Phrygia. He had only a relatively small army, 8,000 men from the Peloponnese, including 2,000 hilots who had recently been freed; the Spartans, who numbered thirty, formed only the general staff. The pillage
was his essential weapon: no stronghold was taken; no pitched battle was fought. Did Agesilaus use this tactic to weary the satraps of the King of Persia and win the freedom of the Greek cities?
Perhaps, but serious events forced him to abandon the game.

The eastern venture could only have succeeded if the whole of Greece, without collaborating, had at least given Sparta a free hand. But throughout the Balkan peninsula, the resentments resulting from the war combined with the discontent caused by the peace. Athens was thinking of revenge. The ancient
allies, Thebes and Corinth, regret having worked for the supremacy of Sparta. Persian diplomacy has a

a wide field of intrigues. It was a lamentable situation that would make the King of Persia the arbiter of Greece.
All the Hellenic states had a part to play in this. Sparta had won the war with Persian gold; she cannot be surprised that it is now flowing into the coffers of the enemy she has been unable to annihilate or appease, and the friends she has alienated.

Apart from Agesilaus, Sparta had two leaders who could act in Greece: Lysander and King Pausanias. But they hated each other. Pausanias thwarted Lysander's policies in Athens. Lysander, who also had a falling out with Agesilaus, harboured secret ambitions: he dreamt of depriving the two ruling families of their exclusive right to the crown. Bribed oracles and invented prophecies were to recommend the Lacedemonians to award the kingship to the most worthy, regardless of birth. The plot, devised over a long period of time, came to nothing. It was not revealed, it is said, until after Lysander's death, but his revolutionary plan was sufficiently well known to arouse many suspicions.

However, as soon as unrest broke out in mainland Greece, he was entrusted with an army that was to operate in Locris and Boeotia; Pausanias, for his part, was to attack from the south and join Lysander. He lingered, perhaps deliberately. In front of the Boeotian town of Haliarte, Lysander was killed. Pausanias concluded an armistice with the Boeotians, which was considered dishonourable. He went into exile in Tegea and this Spartan king did not disdain to write pamphlets in which he perhaps advocated a renunciation of Lysander's policies and a return to the constitution of Lycurgus, restored to its original purity.

All that remained was for Agesilaus to be recalled: the threatening attitude of Greece forced the liquidation of
the oriental adventure which places the Great King among the enemies of Sparta. Athens, Thebes, Corinth,
Argos formed a quadruple alliance; other central and northern Greek states joined in.
join forces. The allies, urged on by the Corinthians, planned to attack Laconia to "destroy the wasps before they leave the nest". But at Nemea, the Lacedemonians once again proved their military superiority (394). The immediate danger had passed. Agesilaus, arriving from Asia, received orders from the ephors to move without delay to Boeotia: he too was victorious at Coronnée, but the Theban infantry had shown singular tenacity. Agesilaus, wounded, consecrated the tithe of his Asiatic booty at Delphi and returned to the Peloponnese. The coalition of Sparta's enemies was not broken.

The naval victory at Cnidus, won on the same date by the Athenian leader Conon at the head of the Persian fleet, destroyed Sparta's authority in Asia and the Aegean. Athens could now rebuild its walls and prepare for a new maritime league. In the Peloponnese, Sparta was blocked by the close union of Argos and Corinth; it was exhausted in futile operations around Corinth. A military reform to which the name of the Athenian Iphicrates is attached threatens the supremacy of Sparta.
hoplites trained by Sparta; troops of light infantry, the peltasts, armed with a small shield

spear and sword, in rapid manoeuvres, harassed the phalanx. In 391, they annihilated a corps of six hundred Lacedemonians.

As the struggle dragged on, the rivalry between Sparta and Athens came to the fore. Sparta offered some concessions, but opposed any restoration of an Athenian empire, even a limited one. One of the Athenian negotiators, Andocides, whose speech has been preserved, was full of praise for Sparta. the assembly of the people this moderation of the Peloponnesian city. He came up against the hostility of all those who had been ruined by the collapse of the empire. From then on, a rapprochement, which had already been attempted, was to take place between Sparta and Persia, which was reluctant to support Athens for long, as its policy could only lead to intervention in Asia. This was achieved by the navarch Antalcidas and shortly afterwards (spring 386), the military situation enabled the Great King to dictate the terms of a general peace that the Greeks had to accept. By abandoning the Greek cities of Asia once again to Persian domination, Sparta gained a free hand in Greece, where the recognition of the autonomy of the cities only meant that they were all left, isolated, to the insolence of Sparta's ventures. Such was the King's Peace.

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On the pretext of applying its clauses, Sparta deliberately violated its principle. If it ordered the Thebans to recognise the independence of the Boeotian cities, if it broke the close union concluded between Corinth and Argos, it arrogated to itself the right to punish those of its allies whose loyalty seemed suspect. The Mantineans had to abandon their city and live in four unfortified towns where Lacedemonian recruiting officers ruled. Phlionte was accused of banishing those of its citizens who had Lacedemonian sympathies. The Ephors judged that the situation "deserved correction"; they demanded that the banished citizens be reinstated, then took advantage of the inextricable disputes that ensued to carry out a military execution, with Agesilaus in charge. After twenty months of siege, the city capitulated; Sparta's enemies were eliminated, the constitution was amended and the acropolis was occupied by a garrison.

Sparta's police force extended beyond the Peloponnese to the borders of Thrace. The Greek cities, always hostile to each other, provide her with pretexts. Acanthus and Apollonia complain Olynth, who wanted to incorporate them into the Chalcidian League: they were happy to magnify the dangers presented by this league, its strength, its resources; they invoked the sacred right to autonomy. Sparta summoned its allies, had them vote according to its own wishes and sent an expedition. The war dragged on for three years: against the Greek city, Sparta allied itself with the King of Macedonia. At last, it succeeded in dissolving the Chalcidian League.

On this occasion, we see both the obligations that Sparta imposed on its allies and the changes in the federal army. The decline in the number of citizens had already led to the increasing use of periectics, but this was only a stopgap measure. The use of mercenaries began during the Peloponnesian War and was to increase. Sparta agreed that its allies should replace their contingents with payments in money proportionate to the size of the contingents. This was the system used by Athens. Any city that did not obey a mobilisation order had to pay a fine of two drachmas per man per day.

All resistance seemed to give way to Sparta's hold. "Thebans and Boeotians are submissive to her. Corinthians show the utmost loyalty; Argos is humiliated; Athens tamed; the allies who had any hostile inclinations have been brought back to duty. Sparta's authority seems to have been established on a secure footing. This is the balance sheet that Xenophon complacently presents. Sparta was even beginning to organise these states, which seemed to be her dependencies and to form her empire: she divided them into ten military districts, from the Peloponnese to Chalkidiki. Here again, the inspiration of Athens is to be found.

The repeated intervention of Sparta in the affairs of the Hellenic cities has often been attributed to the actions of Agesilaus himself. And there is no doubt that he enjoyed a great deal of credit in his homeland and that in various cases he made his opinion clear and helped it to triumph. But he usually agreed with the ephors. Sparta's policy was not dictated by vital necessities: the city had no need to expand its territory. In order to maintain a prestige that was only weakly contested, it would hardly need to deploy its forces. The determination of a ruling class to cast the tight net of its domination over the whole of Greece is astonishing.

There is no doubt that it found ample profit in this; but it may also have believed, very often, that its interests were in line with the common interest. Its interventions are usually solicited; even when they appear to be flagrant breaches of the law of nations - and this was the case in Thebes, as we shall see - a party in the cities which are the victims has provoked them and is ready to justify them. It doesn't matter that this party is a minority: has Sparta ever endorsed majority rule? In the fight against In Athens, she relied on the "honest people" to overthrow the "demagogues" who favoured her enemy. No doubt she disowned Lysander, who had installed men everywhere ready to wage war against democracy with their knives. In Athens, Pausanias favoured a compromise between oligarchs and democrats. Nonetheless, all over Greece, the oligarchs were turning to Sparta, incessantly appealing to her, harbouring furious grudges and excelling at making conservative opinion feel sorry for the men of order who had been persecuted, banished and robbed by the revolutionary scum. It would have taken extraordinary composure and an impossible freedom from political passions to resist these impassioned appeals or to arbitrate the conflicts impartially.

In fact, even the Greek elite, hostile by nature to democracy or tired of its excesses, only wanted to see Sparta as the guardian of order and, in its interventions, only as a police force,
necessary and indeed demanded. Plato's ideal conception of Sparta has hardly been altered by contemporary events: it merely provides a starting point for speculation on the perfect state. Xenophon, who was more interested in facts, only timidly condemned Sparta's conduct in one particular case, when a catastrophe showed him that the gods had judged the city to be excessive and had wanted to punish it, without however, he believed, dispossessing it of its hegemony for ever.

The collapse of Lacedemonian domination: from Leuctres to Chaeronea

The occupation of Cadmea, the citadel of Thebes, was part of Sparta's policy of force.
detached as a symbol of iniquitous violence. A Spartan commander, Phoibidas, led a detachment into Thrace. He camped near Thebes, an allied city, but one that was indocile and divided. The leader of the party favourable to Sparta, Leontiadas, who was one of the two principal magistrates, made contact with him and told him that he would be able to help him.
opened the gates of Cadmea, which Phoibidas took possession of, without a fight, on a feast day. He had acted without orders; this was the only reason why he was accused in Sparta, and King Agesilaus quite rightly argued that if this initiative was considered useful to the state, he should be forgiven for having taken it on the basis of precedent. Leontiadas exonerated him by incriminating the actions of the opponents of Sparta led by his colleague Ismenias. Phoibidas was fined in principle, but Ismenias was sentenced to death and Cadmaeus remained occupied. Under the protection of the Spartan garrison, Leontiadas governed Thebes as dictator, but to the greatest advantage of the Lacedemonians.

The importance and ancient status of Thebes, and perhaps also the circumstances of the occupation, gave great resonance to this act, which naturally fits in with Sparta's arbitrary actions. But above all, the events that followed gave it a formidable significance.

More than three hundred Thebans had taken refuge in Athens, which refused to hand them over and protected them as best it could against the hired assassins of Leontiadas, operating in the heart of Athens. Three years after the capture of Cadmea, the banished men daringly liberated Thebes and forced the Lacedaemonian garrison to capitulate (379). Sparta wanted revenge, but a retaliatory expedition, unable to take the city by surprise or lay siege to it, turned back. However, Thebes, intimidated, agreed to compromise; Athens, which had unofficially helped it, also tried to avoid an outright conflict. A follower of Phoibidas, Sphodrias, the governor of Thespia, attempted a night march against Piraeus, but miscalculated the outcome.

He distanced himself and withdrew, ravaging the area around Eleusis. He was acquitted in Sparta, and Agesilaus himself was implicated in this scandalous acquittal.

Athens, pushed to the limit, formed a close alliance with Thebes. It endeavoured to reconstitute a maritime confederation while avoiding the mistakes made in the previous century, giving its allies guarantees of independence and also excluding the cities of Asia to spare the Great King. Sparta's motto during the Peloponnesian War became Athens' motto: the cities would unite so that "the Lacedemonians would leave the Greeks free and autonomous, possessing their territories in peace and security". The Athenian fleets, victorious in the Cyclades and the Ionian islands, regained control of both seas. Meanwhile, Thebes, which had repelled two attacks in 378 and 377
of Agesilaus, fortified the Citheron and, behind this barrier, restored the unity of Boeotia under his suzerainty.

By 374, Sparta seemed discouraged: it could not halt Thebes' progress; in northern Greece, a Thessalian tyrant, Jason of Phères, was building up a dangerous power; finally, its own allies were weary and complained about the conduct of operations; but the naval war, which they had wanted, had brought nothing but failure. A peace was concluded, in which the Great King collaborated. But the Spartans hoped to receive the support of Denys, tyrant of Syracuse, perhaps subsidies from Persia, and to regain the advantage at sea. They took advantage of a rather flimsy pretext to break the treaty. There were three more years of fruitless battles, in which Thebes was the only one to benefit, consolidating its position in Boeotia while Sparta and Athens fought it out. In 371, a congress was held in Sparta, at which were represented, along with most of the Greek states, the king of Persia, whose mediation had once again been requested, Denys of Syracuse, Jason of Phères and Amyntas, king of Macedonia. Wise words were spoken by the Athenian Callistratos: prolonged opposition between Sparta and Athens would lead to catastrophe. The two cities had to forge a lasting friendship by sharing hegemony, since the Spartans had the best army and the Athenians the best navy. Peace seemed to more or less enshrine
explicitly this principle which was not new. There was still talk of autonomy, and Sparta recalled the garrisons and governors it had placed in the cities. But it retained a kind of primacy over its allies, and the legitimacy of the Athenian confederation was in fact recognised, even if each of Athens' allies signed up to the peace on its own behalf.

Athens and Sparta agreed, but would Thebes also be satisfied with peace? Yes, if autonomy is also interpreted in such a way that Thebes remains master of Boeotia. The Thebans, through one of their deputies, Epaminondas, asked for express confirmation. King Agesilaus agreed.
Epaminondas stubbornly refused, and his irritated words made it clear that Thebes was just one of the Boeotian cities for him. And, as Epaminondas maintained his position and invoked the example of Laconia, entirely governed by Sparta, before all the mute delegates, Agesilaus erased the name of these arrogant Thebans from the peace treaty.

He had gambled away the fate of Sparta: Phoibidas' attack would be avenged a hundredfold.

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Thebes itself was worried by its audacity: it remained alone in the war and had to bear the full brunt of the Lacedaemonian arms. King Cleombrotus was in Phocis with an army of ten thousand infantry and one thousand cavalry: Sparta, taking the responsibility of forcing the execution of the treaty without prior consultation with the other signatories, ordered Cleombrotus to dissolve the Boeotian confederation by force. With a long march through the mountains, the king turned the Boeotian line of defence and penetrated as far as Leuctres, south-west of Thebes. The Boeotian army fell back to face the Peloponnesians. They numbered only seven thousand men: their cavalry was better than their enemies' and their infantry had already proved their worth. Epaminondas convinced the other leaders to
accept the fight. On the battlefield of Leuctres, the new tactics he adopted gave him the advantage. He ranged the elite of his men on the left wing fifty ranks deep and launched
this wing against the phalanx placed on the right of the line of battle and spread evenly over twelve ranks.

The Lacedemonians, after a heroic resistance, gave in under this formidable blow. Their losses were cruel: they lost a thousand men, more than a third of their strength. Four hundred of the seven hundred Spartans died. The king himself was reported dying. The allies, on the left wing, retreated to the camp (July 371).

There was then a tragic deliberation. Many of the Lacedemonians, trained by a long tradition
of military honour, were not resigned to defeat. They wanted to forcibly remove their dead from the plains and prevent the enemy from erecting a trophy. But the leaders responsible
realised the dangerous futility of this effort: the Lacedemonians had been tested too much; the allies were recalcitrant. The Theban victory was acknowledged when they called a truce to raise the dead.

The ephors received the news while the Gymnopedias were being celebrated. They did not interrupt the festivities and forbade the women to show their grief. And, according to ancient custom, the relatives of the dead at least feigned pride at their glorious end; those of the survivors showed humiliation.

Agesilaus was ill; his son Archidamos was asked to lead reinforcements to Boeotia. Mobilisation was easy: the cities of the Peloponnese were still obedient to Sparta's wishes. The Boeotians had not dared to attack the enemy camp. Jason of Phères, whom they asked for assistance, prevented them from forcing the defeated into a desperate struggle. The defeated army was able to retreat along the coast to Megaraide, where it joined up with Archidamos' army. Both retreated towards Corinth and the allies. were dismissed. Thebes had complete freedom of action.

In the Peloponnese, however, revolutionary movements broke out, which were accompanied by territorial claims. Elid reclaimed part of its southern districts. The Arcadians
Mantinea rebuilt its walls and became a city again; Tegea drew closer to Athens and even proposed the formation of an Arcadian league. Athens wanted to take advantage of this troubled situation to bring down both Thebes, which it now feared, and Sparta, which it continued to distrust. In place of the Dorian city, it would become, with the consent of the Great King, the guardian of autonomy. It was a programme too vast for its strengths: most of the Greek cities, having appetites to satisfy, were not prepared to sincerely sign a collective security pact. The newly-formed Arcadian League wanted to force Orchomena to join: Sparta saw this as a good opportunity to break up the league. The Arcadians first sought the support of Athens, which they found reluctant.
and procrastination, they turned to Thebes. It was now Sparta's territorial domain that was going to be be dismembered, a situation that has lasted for four centuries and is about to change.

Thebes responded without delay to the call of the Arcadians. At the end of 370, Epaminondas left for the Peloponnese. From Arcadia, already evacuated by the enemy, he launched his offensive. With the Argians, Eleans, Arcadians and his allies from Central Greece, he had fifty thousand men under his command; in the middle of winter, he poured them into the Eurotas valley through the various passes leading to Laconia.
Leaving Sparta on his right, he followed the river, crossing it near Amyclées. The plundering hordes of the Arcadians wreak havoc throughout the plain.

Sparta had no walls. Epaminondas perhaps hoped that internal unrest would hand the city over to him. In fact, King Agesilaus succeeded quite easily in quelling the conspiracies and subduing the malcontents who were agitating. Some of the periecles and hilots defected, but the mass did not budge. Defenders could even be recruited from among the loyal hilots, and the periectic cities sent contingents. Epaminondas barely sketched out an attack; he could not persuade Agesilaus to abandon the heights to fight a pitched battle. This necessary prudence greatly affected the king himself and the Lacedemonians, who were still attached to their ideals. But the women of Lacedemonia belied their reputation: at the sight of the flames devastating the countryside, they ran like mad through the quarters of the city. Despite all the uproar, the city was defended, but Laconia was sacked as far as Gytheion and Helos.

The allies of Sicyone, Corinth and Pellana hurriedly sent reinforcements. Even Athens was moved and decided to send troops under the command of Iphicrates. Epaminondas' army was melting away: all the plunderers were in a hurry to get back to their country and secure the booty they had soaked up. But before leaving the Peloponnese, Epaminondas was to leave the Spartans a memory of his passage, more lasting than the ruins that can be raised and the ravages of the fields and orchards where the mutilated trees are turning green again. He freed Messinia, which had remained a servile land since the eighth century despite repeated revolts.

The descendants of the Messenians who had gone into exile were called back to their country; along with the hilots
freed, they regained possession of it. Epaminondas himself laid the foundations of the fortified city which was to serve as a centre of resistance. It was built on the slopes of the Ithôme, which already constituted a natural defence; but the most skilful methods of fortification were also applied: the remains of the well-built walls, the towers flanking them, the powerful gates, etc., were all used to defend the town.
that still arouse admiration. It was a place of refuge whose walls
had a perimeter of nine kilometres: the efforts of the Lacedemonians would break against this rampart.

Thus the rich plains of Messinia, from which the warrior class of Sparta derived a large part of its subsistence, were torn from it. Already reduced, it could have made up for this loss by better management of the land it still possessed, which many Greek states would have envied.
Aristotle, at the end of the 4th century, estimated that Laconia could have fed fifteen hundred
and thirty thousand hoplites? But for more than a century, Sparta did not even attempt to reform, and instead exhausted itself claiming its ancient conquest.

In fact, it was encouraged to do so by the foolish policies of those who might still have feared its ambitions. The intervention of Epaminondas did not establish a lasting order in the Peloponnese that would have been defended by the Arcadians, who were strongly united with the Messenians, Eleans and Argians.
In vain did the Arcadian Confederation give itself a new centre, the immense city of
Megalopolis, whose territory encompassed the whole of Southern Arcadia, including the cantons that had just been taken from Sparta. It was unable to maintain its own unity and thus encouraged all kinds of intrigue.

For a time, Thebes was in the driving seat; it systematically tried to weaken Sparta, taking away its allies, becoming in its place the champion of the king of Persia in Greece and receiving subsidies; Sparta was saddened to see its former ally recognise the independence of Messinia (367). It sought an agreement with Athens, which feared Thebes. However, Athens had no intention of supporting Sparta's claims.

still very recent memories of the city are the cause of incurable mistrust. At most, it would willingly play the advantageous role of arbitrator between the Peloponnesians. Sparta, helpless, now had the support of the tyrants of Sicily: they provided her with mercenaries who helped her to retake from the Arcadians, at least on her northern border, Sellasie, which guarded one of the entrances to Laconia. King Agesilaus entered the service of a satrap rebelling against the Great King: the military leader of the Spartan state acted as a condottiere to provide his homeland with money.

In the Peloponnese, the Eleans and Arcadians clashed and the Eleans, despite an alliance with Sparta, even lost the presidency of the Olympic Games. But the Arcadians were divided: North against South, Mantinea against Tegea and Megalopolis, the former with Sparta, the others with Thebes, Argos and Messene. Epaminondas reappeared in the Peloponnese: he tried to surprise Sparta, but failed.
In Mantinea, his tactics almost won him victory over the Lacedemonians, the Mantineans and the Athenians, but he was killed. The battle remained indecisive; the hegemony of Thebes succumbed with Epaminondas.

Sparta hardly benefited from this, and the years that followed were without glory. As it persisted in reclaiming Messinia, it excluded itself from the general peace concluded shortly after the battle of Mantinea (362). But it was powerless: the public treasury was empty. A system of taxes and loans annoyed the periecles and the Spartans themselves. King Agesilaus, at the age of eighty,
set sail for Egypt with thirty Spartans and mercenaries. He will defend against Persia
the independence of this country. A noble task, but Agesilaus, who supported both the Egyptian kings Tachos and Nectanebo, was less interested in glory than in money. Dismissed after consolidating Nectanebo's throne, he received two hundred and thirty talents for his homeland. The citizens of Sparta had not been sufficient for military operations for a long time; the periectics had become reluctant; the allies provided troops if they were paid; mercenary armies replaced the militias. But throughout the Greek world, the Spartans' military tactics were still renowned and their services as leaders and trainers were readily praised. Agesilaus, who died in Africa before returning to Sparta, was the first of a long series of captains who took up service abroad and, with varying degrees of success, sold their military skills for money.

In this troubled period, when the states which had led Greece in turn - Sparta, Athens and Thebes - were weakened but not yet ready to give up their power for good, and when Macedonia, in the hands of a king of genius, Philip II, was beginning to rise to the rank of a great power, Sparta, like the others, was clinging to certain traditions, but was also throwing overboard ancient attachments. Devotion to the Apollo of Delphi was no more than an embarrassing memory now that Thebans and Thessalians were running the amphitheatre. When the Phocidians seized the sanctuary of Delphi and its treasures, thus unleashing the war known as the "Sacred War", Sparta sided with the sacrilegious. It did little to help them, firstly because its aim was always to re-establish its position in the world.

Peloponnesus, but also by the superstitious fear of compromising too openly with the godless. Philip, who ensured the crushing of the Phocidians (346), was seen as the champion of religion. In the Peloponnese, he was to assume the guardianship of the peoples who, quite rightly, continued to fear Sparta: the Arcadians and Argians were his loyal friends.

At the same time, Sparta, whose plans he was thwarting and whom he was urging to respect Sparta's independence, was being threatened.
Messene, showed a certain hostility towards him; but this hostility was inert. In 343, the king Archidamos, son of Agesilaus, left for Magna Graecia, where Taranto, a Spartan colony, was threatened by the Italic peoples. His own taste led him to seek adventure; but one would have to be blind not to see that in Greece Philip's ambition could at any moment precipitate a conflict in which Sparta, as at the time of the Median wars, would have found profit and glory. Archidamos was killed in 338, the same day, it is said, that the fatal battle of Chaeronea was fought. Thebes and Athens, the two enemies, but Sparta, hampered by the absence of its king and insensitive to its own interests, did not join the coalition.

However, at Chaeronea, Sparta could be counted among the defeated cities. It refused to come to terms with Philip, who then completed Thebes' work: not content with ravaging the Eurotas valley, he reduced Sparta to possession of Laconia, between Taygetos and Parnon. All the territories she had so long disputed with her neighbours in Argolid, Arcadia and Messinia were taken from her. But she took pride in suffering defeat without acknowledging it. It refused to join the Confederation Panhellenic, concluded at Corinth on Philip's initiative. When Philip's son and successor, Alexander the Great, led his expedition against Persia and initially pretended to act as Greece's delegate, Sparta did not recognise this title. After his first victory in Asia, Alexander dedicated an ex-voto with this inscription: "Alexander, son of Philip, and the Hellenes, to
With the exception of the Lacedemonians.

The reforms of Agis and Cleomenes. The Sellasie disaster

From 338 onwards, Greece had decidedly lost control of its own destiny. But the cities who had known days of glory and pride of command sometimes fell under the yoke. History records the successive failures of their efforts: there is still some grandeur - and some lesson - to be learned from these stubborn, all too often incoherent, attempts.

As soon as Alexander left for Asia, Sparta thought of taking up arms to abolish the decisions that had mutilated its territory. There was no tie to this Macedonian; there was no crime in asking him to take the law into his own hands.

subsidies from this Persia which he claims to destroy. His initial successes could only hasten the movement that was being prepared. Sparta found some allies in the Peloponnese, but its king Agis III encountered the superior forces of the Macedonian governor Antipatros near Megalopolis. He remained on the battlefield with more than five thousand of his own men. The battle had been fierce; the wounded king, carried off by his companions, was joined by the enemy; he sent away those who had accompanied him and, alone, fought on his knees until he was overwhelmed. Sparta had to surrender fifty hostages, but the city was not occupied.

During the wars that followed Alexander's death, Sparta remained on the sidelines. But from the end of the fourth century, it surrounded itself with a fairly primitive rampart, abandoning one of the features that had made it so distinctive.
Greek cities. Demetrios the City Taker laid siege to the city in 294 and, it is said, would have taken it had he not been in a hurry to interrupt operations to secure the Macedonian throne. Against his son, Antigonus Gonatas, Sparta, under the impetus of an energetic king, Areus, made an attempt to restore the old Peloponnesian league. It is regrettable that so little is known about this period.
For the first time, Sparta minted coins. The coins issued featured the portrait of Areus, wearing the diadem like the Hellenic sovereigns. This man, who had reigned since 309, seems to have had far-reaching plans; he even thought of resuming the policy of deference and protection towards Delphi that had previously been practised 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: Areus was opposed by his uncle Cleonymos, who had been ousted from the Spartan throne.
of the throne. At the end of the fourth century, he had been called by Taranto, as Archidamos had been in the past: the usage
it was customary for princes from royal families to go to the West to test their luck. The brother of Cleonymos, Acrotatos, had himself left for Syracuse in 314. But the Spartan education still formed strong, rough characters; outside, these men became tyrants who were soon hated. Acrotatos had to leave Sicily after being relieved of his command; Cleonymos evacuated Corcyra where he had settled. When Cleonymos returned to Greece, he took on the King of Epirus, Pyrrhus, a hothead who was always ready to embark on warlike expeditions.

This affair, which brought Sparta to the brink of ruin, is recounted at length by Plutarch: the sudden and disloyal entry of Pyrrhus into Spartan territory, his arrival in front of the city, the relentless efforts of the inhabitants to strengthen the fortifications, the cooperation of the old men and women, and so on. women, the repeated assaults of the enemy, the sudden return of Areus, who was in Crete at the time, and the final defeat of Pyrrhus. The bravery of the men of Sparta is vividly portrayed, and even more so that of the women who, once the alarm had passed, realised that they no longer needed to take part in the battle and returned to their homes. In the absence of King Areus, his son Acrotatos had defended the most threatened points of the city walls.

But Cleonymos' disappointed ambition was compounded by the spite of an outraged husband. His wife Chilonis had fallen madly in love with the young Acrotatos. While Pyrrhus and Cleonymos were attacking Sparta, she, who had stayed behind, was holding a shoelace 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 Lacedemonian women became envious of Chilonis, who had such a valiant lover. And some of the old men followed the prince, shouting: "Go, kind Acrotatos, do good work for Chilonis; but make Sparta beautiful children. There is nothing implausible about this anecdote: we know that the bonds of marriage were rather loose in Sparta. There may be some truth in the general picture of this heroic and simple city, but we must remember, for the sake of caution, that women had shown more weakness a century or so earlier, when Epaminondas had invaded Laconia.

After Pyrrhus had withdrawn and been killed before Argos, King Areus once again allowed himself to be drawn into grand political plans. Egypt had the main hand in it; it wanted to use the Greek states to keep Macedonia at bay. Areus was the agent of its plans and won over the Greeks.
Athens. The alliance formed at that time is a moving reminder of the battles waged jointly by the Athenians and Lacedemonians to save the Greek cities from slavery. Now the time had come to join Ptolemy in attacking the destroyers of Hellenic freedom. But Antigonus Gonatas, who had been targeted, was quick to retaliate: in 264, Areus was killed trying to break through the lines at Corinth. The defeat of the coalition hit Athens harder than Sparta. Acrotatos, Areus' successor, was still able to try to take Megalopolis; his failure and death put an end for a time to his vast thoughts.

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In the second half of the third century, the reforming kings appeared: Agis from the house of Eurypontides, Cleomenes from that of Agiades. This is one of the most curious episodes in the history of Sparta.

Since the law of Epitadeus had authorised the free trade in land, the social and economic situation had rapidly worsened. The whole of Greece was suffering from the same evil: the concentration of land ownership in the hands of a small number of people. In Sparta, everything had favoured this concentration: the development of movable wealth from the end of the fifth century, the loss of Messinia in the middle of the fourth. In a country deprived of trade and industry, the only possible investment for capital was the acquisition of land. Small landowners sold their estates to pay off the debts they had incurred as a result of new needs. In this way, a few hundred families came to own the entire territory of Sparta; women, in particular, had

huge estates because, for a long time, they had acted as nominees for all the financial transactions that were forbidden to their husbands.

The owners themselves were not all prosperous. The simplicity of ancient customs had disappeared: public meals were deserted both by the rich, who no longer wanted to take part, and by the poor, who were unable to contribute. More frequent contact with foreigners had quickly given the Spartans a taste for easy living and luxury. Some of the kings, Areus
among others, had set an example of splendour borrowed from the Hellenistic courts. As a result, many of the estates belonging to this spoliating aristocracy were heavily mortgaged. Between the poor, deprived even of their civic rights, and the privileged, living in the uncertainty of tomorrow, coalitions could be formed that were at least temporary.

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 incurred immense debts. But Agis brought to it all the ardour of a generous youth. He shared the partly utopian conception that had gradually been formed of Lycurgus' constitution; the salvation of Sparta seemed to him to depend on a return to that constitution. In fact, he had a clearly revolutionary programme: equalisation of fortunes, elimination of debts: but he added to this the restoration of public morality, and in the very detail of his reform, he believed himself to be related to the great legislator of the past.

In fact, the essential article of the reform was the division of the land, in the valley of Eurotas, into four thousand five hundred lots, reserved for the citizens of Sparta; of the rest of the land, into fifteen thousand lots. In this way, alongside the periecles, the old body of Spartans was reconstituted by including those who had been deprived of their rights, a certain number of periecles and even foreigners. These diverse elements would be subject to traditional education and discipline, and attendance at public meals would once again be compulsory. The virtues of yesteryear would flourish again, for they were based not on race and origin, but on morals shaped by institutions [institutions are precisely a
emanation of the race]. The condition of the hilots remained unchanged: the Spartan state could not survive without them. Agis obviously dreamt of renewing Sparta's military strength by re-establishing a class devoted exclusively to war and nourished by slave labour.

This was merely an apparent anachronism. The regular army of the Lagids was not far from being based on the same principle in this Egypt where the indigenous peasant almost played the role of hilot. But on the banks of the Eurotas, expropriation was difficult. In vain, the grandmother and mother of Agis, who The opposition was led by the king's colleague, Leonidas. The opposition was led by the king's colleague, Leonidas, who had lived at the Syrian court for many years and had little idea of the role of the king.

to return to the customs of the ancestors. It was supported not only by the nobles whose property was threatened, but also by all those offended by the excessive increase in the number of citizens. The Council of Elders rejected the project. The ephors, in favour of Agis, succeeded in dethroning Leonidas. But in the following year (243), the new college protested and had to be deposed illegally. At Agesilaus' instigation, the mortgage deeds were solemnly burnt: the obese owners were relieved. But they managed to get the division of land postponed, supposedly for reasons of prudence. The people began to murmur.

Agis wanted to seek military glory abroad to consolidate his credit. At the time, Sparta was allied with the Achaean League, which had been formed at the beginning of the third century and comprised a number of cities in the northern Peloponnese.
A joint campaign against the Etolians, the eternal plunderers who had invaded the peninsula, led to the creation of the "Aetolians".
ended without a fight. In the absence of Agesilaus, the government of Agesilaus gave rise to general complaints. Agesilaus, having compromised with him, met with nothing but hostility. King Leonidas, who had taken refuge in Tegea, was recalled. Agis sought sanctuary in the revered 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 over his body. Never before had anyone laid hands on a king. The Spartan oligarchy, in its decline, did not shy away from the most atrocious executions to defend its authority.

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The other reformer, Cleomenes, was the very son of Leonidas, who had thwarted Agis' plans. His father had given him Agis' widow in marriage, the beautiful Agiatis, who was one of the richest heiresses in Sparta. It is said that she used all the influence that a very strong passion gave her over her second husband to persuade him to resume the plans of the first. But Cleomenes was a prince of a other stature than Agis. Circumstances undoubtedly made him the architect of the ultimate disaster, but he was on the verge of restoring Sparta's preponderance at the same time as he corrected some of the too obvious flaws in her constitution.

By the time he came to the throne (235), the Achaean League had reached its peak. Sparta's hereditary enemies Megalopolis and Argos had joined it. Sparta could have, and perhaps should have, entered into an alliance with this league, which was leading the fight against Macedonia. But the traditions of hegemony were still alive. It is also doubtful that the leaders of the league made much effort to spare the sensitivities of the ancient state.

Cleomenes sought to rally Elid and the Arcadian cities hostile to Megalopolis around Sparta, Mantinea, Tegea, Orchomena. Worse still, he drew closer to the Aetolians, sworn enemies of the Achaeans. Conflict became inevitable. Cleomenes was not averse to it: a successful war could give him unchallenged authority in Sparta.

The ephors saw through him and tried to suspend or at least limit hostilities. Without entering into direct opposition with them, Cleomenes succeeded in forcing their hand. He won a great success near Megalopolis; no longer fearing the Achaean army, he left his distrustful Lacedaemonian troops in Arcadia and left for Sparta with his mercenaries.

The coup succeeded: four of the ephors were killed, along with ten of their supporters, and eighty citizens,
exiles. The ephorate is abolished and, in a symbolic gesture, Cleomenes overturns the seats where these exiles were sitting.
magistrates sat down, except for one, which he took possession of. In front of the people, he justified his conduct, blamed the ephors for the violent measures he had had to take, and showed that this was not the case.
magistrature was born of usurpation; then he set out his social programme: a new distribution of land, the abolition of debts, an increase in the number of citizens through a reasoned system of naturalisation. On all these points, he was at one with Agis: both had been inspired by the doctrines professed in Sparta at the time.

The name of one of the theoreticians of the reform is given to us: Sphairos of Borysthenes, a Stoic, long established in Sparta, teacher of Cleomenes. He had meditated on the institutions of Lacedemonia, which he dealt with in several works. He contributed to Cleomenes' reforms, not all of which remained on paper. The number of citizens was increased to four thousand by the admission of the periecles; each of them had his own plot of land, but had to perform military service. The system of regular training and public meals, the focal points of military fraternity, reappeared. Cleomenes tried not to appear a tyrant: he shared the kingship with his brother Eucleidas. The rivalry between the Agiades and the Eurypontides thus came to an end (227).

Sparta was reformed: the Peloponnesian confederation still had to be recreated. The Achaeans could not stand up to Cleomenes' army; they were close to recognising Sparta's hegemony. But the league was led by Aratos, a mediocre general and a shrewd diplomat. Cleomenes' illness allowed him to conduct delicate negotiations at his leisure. Until then, his entire policy had been directed against Macedonia, the eternal enemy of Hellenic independence. He prepared the turnaround, showed the
The dangerous ambition of Cleomenes is reminiscent of the ancient tyranny of Sparta. Even Sparta once offered support to conservative governments. Now a king has given the signal for revolution: he has divided the land and abolished debts. In all the cities of the league, the advanced parties are going

to conceive a new daring. A choice had to be made: the Achaeans, left to their own devices, could do nothing against the King of Sparta. If they did not want to submit to his will, they would have to turn to their old enemy, the King of Macedonia, Antigonus Doson. Cleomenes' new successes backed up his words: almost the whole of Arcadia was subdued; Argos was occupied. Democratic movements broke out everywhere: the lower city of Corinth was surrendered to Cleomenes. The federal assembly of the Achaeans, under the impetus of Aratos, made a deal with Antigonus: it gave him the citadel of Corinth, the key to the Peloponnese, as a pledge.

From then on, Cleomenes' empire rapidly collapsed. In the cities, the oligarchic party, encouraged by Macedonian help, prepared to defect. The hopes that the popular masses had placed in Cleomenes had not been fulfilled: the king had not dared to proclaim the abolition of debts. Argos was the first to abandon him. He soon had to withdraw to Laconia and defend its passes, but not without making bold incursions into neighbouring regions. He had paid for the freedom of two thousand hilots and armed them in the Macedonian style. But he was short of money; the king of Egypt, Ptolemy III, who had supported him against Antigonus, seemed to have lost interest in the battle.

The decisive battle took place fourteen kilometres north of Sparta, at Sellasie. Cleomenes had entrenched himself on two hills with twenty thousand men. Antigonus had thirty thousand Macedonians or allies under his command: his skilful manoeuvres and the compact strength of the Macedonian phalanx decided the day. Cleomenes, flushed out of his strong position, had to engage in hand-to-hand combat in which the Lacedaemonians succumbed (222).

In the midst of the general rout, Cleomenes, with a few cavalrymen, left the battlefield where, among the corpses and broken weapons, lay the last hopes of Sparta. He did not linger in the city, which he could no longer defend, and himself advised the Macedonians to submit.
Plutarch has painted an unforgettable picture of the defeated king's return: "The women ran to meet his fellow fugitives, took their weapons and brought them drinks. He himself returned to his house: since the death of his wife, he had been keeping a young captive, of free birth, whom he had taken from Megalopolis. She approached him to give him the care she had been accustomed to giving him on his return from battle; but he would not quench his thirst, nor sit down, even though he was exhausted. Fully armed, with one hand resting on a column and his face resting on the crook of his elbow, he remained motionless for some time: in his mind, he was considering the various courses of action he could take. Then, with his staff, he set off at full speed on the road to Gytheion, and all the men of the army were on their way.
embarked on ships that had been kept ready and which immediately weighed anchor.

This departure has often been accused of desertion: a Spartan king should not have survived his defeat. But Cleomenes, who could no longer do anything for Sparta in the present, hoped for the future. He left for Egypt, where he believed he would find support in recovering his throne and boosting the fortunes of his homeland. There was nothing cowardly or absurd about this calculation; a few years later, it could have come true. But Cleomenes had already perished, betrayed by Egyptian diplomacy, which refused him any assistance, kept him in
captivity and finally forced him to make a mad attempt to escape from his prison by calling on the Alexandrians to
a freedom whose name they did not even know (219).

With Cleomenes disappeared the last champion of Sparta's greatness. In the work he had attempted, memories of the past had become strangely intertwined with the necessities of the hour, which he had not yet faced.
ignored. He had not relied solely on the forces of the city whose military power he had worked to rebuild; he had hoped that the already traditional policy of the Lagids, opposed to any expansion of Macedonia, would help him to get his hands on the Peloponnese. But, with insufficient support from Egypt, he had to face up to the alliance between the Achaeans and the Macedonians, which had been concluded at the will of Aratos. This was the real cause of his failure. Let's not be too hasty in accusing the Achaean leader. In a Greece torn apart by centuries of mistrust, it was difficult to decide on a policy that was both wise and generous. Memories of Lysander's Sparta offered little guarantee that Cleomenes' 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 met with no resistance. Antigonus Doson abolished Cleomenes' reforms, abolished the kingship and forced Sparta to join the Panhellenic Confederation, which he had just reconstituted.
Neither Alexander the Great nor his father Philip had been able to impose their will.

No doubt it was not long before the city freed itself from external constraint, not so much through its own strength as through the disorder unleashed by Antigone's death. Dual kingship reappeared, but Sparta, troubled by civil strife, was to experience a tyrannical regime under which the last vestiges of the ancient constitution were to disappear.

The most famous of Sparta's tyrants was Nabis, who also held the royal title and was a distant descendant of King Demaratus, who had gone into exile in Persia before the Median Wars. He was a curious and disturbing figure, known to us only through the testimony of his deadliest enemies. He brought about a social revolution, drawing on the constitution of Lycurgus and the example of Cleomenes, but by

he did, without any concern for principles or theories. He put to death or banished a large number of wealthy Spartans in order to confiscate their property; he freed the hilots in order to swell his army; he brought his mercenaries into the body of citizens without worrying about their origin or their past.

The duel between Sparta, represented by this Nabis, who was made a leader of brigands, and the Achaean league, now governed by the brave and upright Philopoemen, resumed with renewed fervour. But
Roman intervention was now blurring all the traditional lines of Hellenic conflict. In 197, the Republic and Philip V of Macedonia were at war. Nabis first approached Philip: Argos was abandoned to him; he dispossessed the rich, divided the land, abolished debts and imposed military service. Then he turned to the Romans and supplied them with mercenaries.

He wrongly expected their gratitude. Once he had made peace with Philip, the Nabis king was no more than a pirate to them. Had he not armed ships, joined forces with the Cretans and waged a running war from Gytheion? Since he wanted to keep Argos, he was seen as a violator of Greek freedom, solemnly recognised by the Roman general Flamininus at the Isthmian Games in June 196. By common agreement, Greeks and Romans marched against him. Laconia was pillaged; the coastal towns, including Gytheion, were kidnapped. An assault on Sparta was repulsed with difficulty; parts of the city had to be burnt down to stop the attackers. Nabis capitulated: the coast of Laconia, detached from Lacedemonian territory, was placed under the mandate of the Achaean Confederation. This was a new and serious blow for Sparta.

Nabis had been spared by Flamininus: he remained master of Sparta and soon resumed his dangerous activities. But the Aetolians, with whom he had formed an alliance, distrusted him and had him assassinated (192).
Philopoemen rushed in, occupied Sparta and placed it in the Achaean Confederation. This truly marked the end of Sparta's independence; the city would only break away from the Confederation to become a feudal city of Rome.

The Achaean Confederation then embraced the whole of the Peloponnese; but Rome was pleased to see the development of its power, and Sparta endeavoured to take advantage of this mistrust to take advantage of it.
free. Its pride was not the only thing at stake; many of the new citizens feared the return of the banished and the recall of the measures taken by Nabis. As early as 189, the city entered into open revolt against the League and wanted to place itself directly under the suzerainty of Rome: by a sad privilege, it was the first Greek city to take this step. But Philopoemen, in his own right, carried out a military execution: not content with putting to death all those responsible for the secession and expelling or selling as slaves the new citizens made by Nabis, he wanted to destroy every last one of them.

the remains of Lycurgus' institutions, to "cut the city's nerves". Sparta became nothing more than an Achaean city; Spartan education had to disappear.

Nevertheless, with the consent of the Romans, the city was able to return to its ancient form of government, without, however, re-establishing kingship. What remained of Sparta's traditional pride served little purpose other than to precipitate the savage rush of the legions onto the Peloponnese. Can we even speak of pride in the last conflict which, after years of peace, broke out between the Lacedemonians and the Achaean Confederation and led to the intervention of Rome? The Spartan Menalkidas, who was accused of fomenting the secession, was a strategist for the Confederation and his name is linked to a case of corruption. His accusers don't seem to have any more integrity than he does. They are all involved in shady intrigues and personal battles. They made repeated representations to the Roman Senate, but they did not even wait for its decisions and stirred up the people's passions dangerously, ready to flare up either for the independence of Sparta or for the intangible rights of the Confederation. Finally, after many
After much prevarication, the Senate seemed determined to break up the Confederation, whose indecisiveness was giving it cause for concern. This
Then came the mad war against Rome, the swift crushing of the Achaeans and the destruction of Corinth. Sparta had no reason to boast or rejoice at a success bought in this way, to which her weapons had not even been able to respond.
did not collaborate (146).

This success also consummated his decline. The Achaean Confederation was dissolved, but the Lacedaemonian state had also disappeared, and all that remained was the city of Sparta, a free city, free of taxes apart from the services it provided, but still subject to Roman tutelage. The former Periec cities, in particular the coastal cities, detached from Sparta, formed a kind of union, the Union of the Lacedemonians, whose religious centre was the sanctuary of Poseidon at Cape Tenearus.

For the city thus reduced, there was no longer any question of political life. It still disputed a few cantons of Taygetos with its neighbours in Messinia, but the Senate, and later the emperors, were the appointed arbiters in this constantly recurring dispute; their decisions were changeable, but always obeyed. In the first century B.C., the civil unrest in Italy had its repercussions in Italy.
Greece. Sparta sided with Pompey, but Caesar seems to have disdained taking revenge. After the dictator's death, Sparta takes sides against his murderers. Cassius ravaged the coasts of Laconia; Brutus promised his soldiers the plunder of Sparta. Two thousand Lacedemonians fought at Philippi and, during the first battle, were caught in Octavian's camp and massacred. But Octavian triumphed; he becomes emperor. Roman peace extended to Greece.

We are witnessing a curious return to the past. In Sparta, the civic body had undergone the most profound changes over the last four centuries. First it was reduced to a few hundred privileged members,

Enlarged with various elements, mutilated again by massacres and banishments, reconstituted by who knows what means, it is attached to a tradition and wants to revive it, insofar as it is compatible with the new state of affairs created by the hold of Rome.

Many of the institutions that gave the ancient city its strength and originality have died forever. The periecles have become independent; the hilots no longer exist. The Spartans were landowners or farmers: they worked their estates or cultivated them themselves. They had slaves, but the system of serfdom, of assigned plots of land and of fixed royalties, which had been obsolete for a long time, no longer had any reason to exist now that Sparta no longer had to organise its economy.
defence. No one has thought of reinstating it. Nor were Spartans forbidden to trade, but Sparta had no direct access to the sea. Even though imperial favour gave Sparta back a number of coastal cities in Messinia and the island of Gaudos, the provincial city devoted itself to trade.
preference to agriculture.

The ephorate, which had been abolished by Cleomenes, was re-established and continued throughout the imperial era. But the patronomes, instituted by the same Cleomenes, were also kept and it is the name of the oldest of these magistrates that appears at the head of official documents. The powers of the two colleges cannot be determined. There was also the Council of Elders, the assemblies of the people held in the Skias, and the division of citizens into tribes and obai. Under the first emperors, one family held extraordinary power in the city. One of its representatives, Euryclès, had fought at Actium; he took the name of Caius Julius Euryclès, and acted as a sort of governor; among his descendants was a Caius Julius Lacôn, who minted coins. However, the authority of these figures depended on the goodwill of the emperors: Augustus and Tiberius sometimes disgraced them.

While many sacrifices had to be made in the political organisation of the city, the conservative spirit was able to manifest itself with all its intransigence in the institution of children. Numerous inscriptions from the first centuries of our era list the age groups with their complex nomenclature and the competitions in which the different groups of children took part. Religious festivals were celebrated with archaic games and dances. The whole of Sparta's youth played a part, proving their discipline and endurance. Under the influence of Stoic doctrines, a way had been found to enhance even the harshness of ancient times. The flogging of the ephebes, near the altar of Artemis Orthia, only took its form until Roman times. It was a bloody spectacle to which the city was invited. In the third century AD, a theatre was built to accommodate the audience, encompassing the façade of the goddess's temple and its altar. The priestess always presided over the ceremony, but the meaning of the ceremony was not always clear.
religious was obliterated. Before the eyes of the crowd, the young men displayed fierce emulation
Some, it is said, perished under the blows. The most resistant received the title of "victor of the altar".
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The training of children and ephebes in the past trained them for the military discipline that the
As a Spartan, you had to comply for the rest of your life. But from then on, when they left the ephebia, citizens were no longer bound by the constraints of the old legislation. They worshipped Lycurgus, who sometimes held the title of patron saint, and interpreted the customs brought back to them. But public meals were attended by only a few officials. Sparta was no longer a camp. Pausanias' description of Sparta in the second century AD gives the impression that there were some notable buildings inside the city walls, which must have been quite recent. The theatre whose remains have been unearthed may not predate the end of the first century BC, but it was altered and embellished several times. Tragic and comic performances were staged here.
Some intellectual life was developing in Sparta.

But it was extremely careful to retain its distinctive features. The Spartans still considered themselves to be the purest representatives of the Dorian race. Notable families were linked to the gods, Heracles, the Dioscuri, Poseidon; they bore the names of the great heroes of past centuries.
Above all, Sparta endeavoured to revive its ancient dialect. At a time when, throughout the world
It sought to reproduce as faithfully as possible, with all its particularities of syntax and pronunciation, the language of its ancestors in which contemporaries had already noted, with curiosity or amusement, traits of a strange archaism.

In the classical era, the manifestation of the conservative spirit in the field of language had been tempered by the Spartans' indifference to everything to do with the expression of thought. On this point, they were resistant to innovation by nature rather than by system. But in the first centuries of our era, their attitude was quite different: there was a conscious and thoughtful effort to revive a tradition that was often floating: they wanted to speak and write in Laconian. The language thus recreated was in
In the Spartan countryside, the dialect had been used for centuries. To restore it to the status of a national language required a scholarly effort that sometimes resulted in questionable creations. However, it has been said that this language, far from being a
"It was the last expression of the stubborn particularism that has survived political abasement in Laconia. It was the last expression of the stubborn particularism that has survived political decline in Laconia.

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Having noted this partial revival of laconism, we can quickly move on to the latter stages of Sparta's history. The tradition that the city claimed to represent dictated certain attitudes: for example, it entered into a rivalry with Athens for the leadership of the Panhellenic festivities which

still commemorated the battle of Plataea. On the other hand, a real or apparent respect for this tradition inspired the attitude of Roman emperors or more or less autonomous states towards Sparta. Tiberius did not like Sparta; Nero did not visit it, out of hostility, it is said, to the spirit of Lycurgus' constitution, which created free men. Hadrian, on the other hand, was enamoured of the past and visited it twice, giving it a prominent place in the Delphic amphitheatre. A final echo of Sparta's military glory can be seen at the time of Lucius Verus and Caracalla, in the wars against the Parthians: a contingent that took part in these wars bore the name of the battalion of Laconia and Pitanè.

Former colonies of Sparta are proud to recall the ties of kinship which united them to their metropolis. The noble traditions surrounding the name of Sparta had spread far and wide. One of the most curious consequences of this diffusion was, perhaps as early as the third century BC, the establishment of a bond of friendship between the Lacedemonians and the Jews: this seems to have lasted until the ruin of the Jewish state [it cannot be said that the Spartans were able to benefit from this state of affairs, if true, a claim to fame]. Documents, not all of which are suspect, even allege a kind of kinship between the two peoples [which is a mystification]. The legislation of Lycurgus is compared with that of Moses [which is incongruous]. In the Mediterranean world, the prestige of the well-policed city still endures and, by the same token, maintains the cult of the past among the last descendants of the Spartans.

The second invasion of Alaric's Goths in 395 marked the ruin of ancient Sparta. The site was not finally abandoned until the 13th century, but the Byzantine settlement is no longer linked to the city of Lycurgus. Then the Frankish-Byzantine city of Mistra was populated at the expense of Lacedemonia, whose site was barely known for a long time. When Châteaubriand was touring the Peloponnese in August 1806, he could still claim that common opinion confused Sparta and Mistra, and thus give himself the undeserved honour of having, through careful observation of the area and reasoning, established that Mistra was the city of Sparta,
identified the unknown remains of "one of the most famous cities in the universe".

The idealisation of Sparta

We know that an idealised image of Sparta began to emerge in Greece itself as early as the fifth century BC. The first lines were drawn in the party struggles that tore the cities apart: those known as the oligarchs celebrated the regime of the Dorian city over and over again. But this partisan favour would not have survived the circumstances that created it if philosophers and political theorists had not given it a kind of permanence by freeing it, at least in appearance, from immediate quarrels and attempting to establish it on a rational basis. Plato wanted to build a perfect city, or, if he were to be less intransigent, the best city imaginable, taking into account all the different aspects of life.

human possibilities: it borrows heavily from the institutions of Sparta, as it conceives. Real features and partial retouching are inextricably intertwined.

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 might be called upon, accidentally, to advise kings; they no longer legislated for free cities. Their ideals changed. Some, seeing the conflicts between the different classes in the cities, sought a remedy for the inequalities.
Lycurgus brought them an ideal of equality. The others, more concerned with individual destinies than with the happiness of communities, sought to train wise men, insensitive to the threats of fortune and death. Sparta was also to provide them with support. At the time
As we have seen, the only thing it has retained from the past is what concerns the education of children. But Xenophon was already tending to give Spartan education a universal value, almost independent of the political form for which it had been designed. Subsequently, this concept was taken further. Sparta was no longer a city; it was a school of frugality, endurance, temperance, in a word, virtue.

Plutarch gathered together the disparate data from these various sources and produced a gallery of Spartan celebrities: he wrote a life of Lycurgus, a life of Lysander, a life of Agesilaus, a life of Aghis (the reformer) and a life of Cleomenes. He would have written a life of Leonidas, had he known anything other than the hero's death. His very conception contradicts the ideal of old Sparta, which is repugnant to the pre-eminence of an individual. As a result, he is often at a loss for words and fills the gaping holes in his documentation with legends and anecdotes. He also collects
notables of the Lacedemonians, a collection of apophthegms in which the virile and sententious soul of a people of sages should be expressed with the appropriate brevity.

A contemporary critic, reading the justly famous sixteenth-century translation of Plutarch's Lives by the Hellenist Amyot, summed up his impression of Sparta and its legislator as follows: "The laws of Lycurgus are dreadful, and this much-vaunted Sparta appears to be a colony of Quakers which should have horrified the Greeks, who are such friends of liberty". The Quakers, who go so far as to deny the right of self-defence, would have made strange Spartans; but the fact remains that the spirit of conformity that reigned in Sparta shines through in Plutarch. But the fact remains that the spirit of conformity that prevailed in Sparta is reflected in Plutarch.
that it was incompatible with liberty; but reading Plutarch has
served in particular to arouse posterity's enthusiasm for Sparta, Lycurgus and the Lacedemonians. Montaigne, among many others, can serve as a guarantor. Amyot's translation was a bedside book for him: he declared himself "imbued with the greatness of these men"; he admired "
Finally, he finds so many rare examples in Spartan history that he considers it "a miracle".

It would take a long time to list the testimonies. Many relate only to the simplicity of Spartan life and their disdain for the sciences that soften courage. But the philosophers who, in the eighteenth century, wanted to draw up a plan for a constitution, turned to both Rome and Sparta.
above all the fundamental principle of equality and liberty [which is completely false]. For Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Lycurgus was the radical reformer whom he contrasted with the mendicants, the man who began "by cleaning up the area and removing all the old materials... to then build a good edifice".
"It is a republic [which Sparta was not] of demi-gods rather than of men, so much so that 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 corrupt. Even hilotism was justified or at least excused by Rousseau: "There are certain unfortunate positions where one can only preserve one's freedom at the expense of that of others, and where the citizen cannot be perfectly free unless the slave is perfectly enslaved. Such was the position of Sparta". Voltaire was less indulgent.
had no love for Sparta, which, in his opinion, had done no good for Greece and had produced only "a few captains, and even fewer than the other cities". He knew little about the land tenure system in Sparta, but his clear mind could see the link between this system and hilotism, which he harshly condemned: "
Lacedemonia avoided luxury only by preserving the community or equality of goods ["More
Karl Marx, a contemporary of Fustel de Coulanges, used the Spartan model as an example of primitive communism. Marx's lessons demonstrated that private property did exist, as did inequality between Spartans. In this way, the myth of a primitive communist city is dispelled, with sources to back it up. Closer to home, some would put forward the austerity of the city or its education system as models to be followed, but it's up to the historian to qualify that. (Sylvain Bessone, "Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, Leçons sur Sparte", https://journals.openedition.org/lectures/11894)]; but it only retained one or the other by having the land cultivated by a slave population. This was the legislation of the convent of Saint-Claude, with the exception that the monks did not allow themselves to assassinate or stun their murderers.

Voltaire is an exception. At the time of the French Revolution, Sparta was at the pinnacle; Lycurgus was seen as the great legislator. But as he left no written laws and even prohibited any written code, he was invoked more than imitated. Only a few extremists dream of equality of wealth. They often confine themselves to very simple formulas in which the Spartan ideal remains rather vague: in its list of grievances for the Estates General of 1789, the Tiers-État of Bar-le-Duc called for the establishment of a national school which, as in Sparta, would train men and citizens.

A historian of Sparta, Claudio Janet, writing in 1873, was distressed by this naivety: "These false notions about ancient Societies have not been without influence on the development of our national character, which proves once again that no historical error is absolutely indifferent." The

Contemporary scholars believe that their criticism has led them to more accurate notions of Sparta's institutions and Lycurgus' alleged legislation. Does this mean that the history of the Dorian city can no longer feed an ideology inspired by contemporary realities?

To answer this question, I need only translate the advertisement on the inside cover of a book published in Leipzig in 1937: Sparta, by Professor Helmut Berve.

"The education of youth, esprit de corps, the military form of life, the rightful place assigned to each individual after a test culminating in heroism, the duties and values for which we are fighting today - all these seem to have found their realisation in ancient Sparta.
exceptional. Many of the features of the idealised image of Sparta that we carry within us may not stand up to confrontation with reality. Yet the actual struggle to preserve oneself in a differently organised world shows us a life of tragic grandeur. The feeling
The high standards with which a divine ideal was pursued in almost ascetic self-denial, no less than the mastery of open struggle, made Sparta for centuries, almost uncontested, the ruler of the common interests of Greece. The stubbornness with which the order willed by the divinity and expressed in the voice of the Apollo of Delphi was preserved, even in decadence, by a class of men who
The stubbornness with which an aristocracy full of its dignity closed itself off, for the sake of its high ideal, to a world given over to external, commercialised, democratised prestige, is deeply moving.
And we are to some extent reconciled with the will of the gods when we see that it was not these false values that brought down Sparta, but that she found her own way.
dominating in the kind of combat which, from the outset, was appropriate to its nature, that it succumbed
finally on a battlefield.

We won't comment on this announcement, which is in keeping with the spirit of the book. But we must conclude.

History has been able to criticise the sources from which our knowledge of Sparta derives and to show the uncertainties and sometimes romance. It has cast doubt on the unity of the legislation attributed to Lycurgus and the very existence of the legislator. It has been able to attack, with particular vigour, the alleged system of community and equality of property that Sparta was said to have known at the dawn of time and which would have made it the perfect model of a democracy. Based on archaeological discoveries, she has been able to reveal a Sparta in the 8th, 7th and 6th centuries BC that was very different from the warrior city known only to our forefathers. Using comparative ethnography, it has shown the primitive nature of certain institutions, and an American scholar has made a highly suggestive comparison between the military system of the Spartans and that developed among the Zulus in the first part of the 19th century by the kings Djaka and Djingaan [this comparison is ill-advised].

History cannot - and probably never will be able to - shed full light on the origin and progressive action of the forces that determined Sparta's highly original development. It has no opinion on the value of these forces. And Sparta, mysterious and secretive, after having nourished the thought of Plato and Rousseau, is giving birth to a new mysticism.

Pierre Roussel, Sparte, Éditions de Boccard, 1960.

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