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THE WOMEN OF SPARTA[1]

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Introduction

Spartan studies often resemble piecing together a puzzle. The problem is that the pieces of that Spartan puzzle not only date from different periods, but also come in a variety of versions. Scholars take separate pieces from the box and attempt to put them together into an image of some topic that would be coherent and, in many cases, relevant to the entire history of Sparta. Pieces which do not fit get discarded or endowed with some meaning that makes them tolerably suitable within the puzzle. Fortunately, the fashion for seeing things in the categories of "the more bizarre it seems, the more Spartan it must have been" appears to have passed; so has the fashion for interpreting everything in terms of "obsolete relics". In effect, scholars presently prefer the puzzles dating from the era when Sparta was Sparta, and not, as they used to, ones dating from the later era, when the fabulous Sparta was already emerging.

Progress made in the course of the last three decades is immense, but the intellectual game entitled "Sparta" still has its shortcomings. From time to time one may get the impression that an interpretation of some image is of much better quality than the original image itself. On the one hand, the astounding subtlety and depth of analyses is often admirable; on the other hand, even the leading "Spartanologists", while with much refinement and sophistication pondering a topic, can suddenly, without any special debate or reflection, consider the most

[1] This essay was written as part of the realization of the National Science Centre (NCN) grant entitled "Spartan family in the Classical period" (NN 108 052038). I express my thanks for the insightful reviews by anonymous reviewers on an earlier version of the manuscript.

fantastic elements of the Spartan legend as historical. This results probably from the fundamental difficulty of embracing the entire picture; and it is not accidental that – in spite of the huge progress in the field of Spartan studies – practically no attempt has been made so far to present a new synthesis that would integrate the entirety of the newest findings.

This refers also to Spartan women, about whom it might seem everything that could have been written, has.[2] Yet even here, I think, there is much to be done. Even here the scholarly interpretations are often better than reality itself, and all the hazards and traps of Spartan studies are evident. This has once been aptly put by Alfred S. Bradford: "All those of us who study Sparta bring our own cultural and philosophical baggage with us and we will find in Sparta what we wish, but we should not force our own opinions on the witnesses".[3] Easier said than done, alas.

I do not think that the position of women was identical throughout the entire Classical period, not even the entire third century BC. There is no single Sparta, and I do not mean only the coexistence of the fabulous Sparta and the historical Sparta in the sources and in the European tradition, or that their images overlap in a manner that is awfully troublesome to a scholar. What I mean is: Sparta was changing. As James Redfield rightly wrote: "Ideally we should visit Sparta every fifty years from, say, 750 to 150 BC; on each visit we would listen to the Spartans describe themselves and compare this self-description with their behavior. We would find, I suspect, continual change on both levels. We would also, I think, be reminded again and again that the Greek reading of history is opposite to ours; at each visit we would find the Spartans describing their current condition as a decline from some original perfection, whereas we would see a continuing attempt to adapt political and social structures to a changing environment".[4] Sadly, paying a visit to ancient Sparta as Redfield advocates is impossible. But we may take a tour around the sources, stopping, where possible, at the images of Sparta from various eras.

A comparison of images

Even a cursory reading of those images (and the current reconnaissance is certainly cursory) reveals above all the more or less subtle, but always intelligi-

[2] On Spartan women, see among others Redfield 1977–1978, 146–161; Bradford 1986, 13–18; Kunstler, 1983; Cartledge 1981, 84–105 = Cartledge 2001, 106–126; Perentidis 1997, 7–31; Thommen 1999, 129–149; Hodkinson, 2004, 103–36; Perentidis 2006, 131–152; Figueira 2010, 265–296; Scott 2011, 413–424.

[3] Bradford 1986, 13.

[4] Redfield 1977/78, 147.

ble changes that occurred over time. Those changes may be observed not only in the sources. The paintings of Sparta or episodes from Spartan history created by various erudite artists have a very diverse appearance as well. The author's individual touch is sometimes evident; but more often it is the spirit of the times and a variety of tendencies or even fashions.

In the case of Spartan women, just as in the attempts to shed light on the situation of women in Greece in general, the imaged based on the available sources may be either negative or positive. Here, too, all (or almost all) has already been done. I shall limit my examples to a few selected ones, although the issue is certainly deserving of a deeper analysis, which I am sure it will receive, and in a context broader than just the matter of Spartan women.

G. E. M. de Ste Croix juxtaposes "the inferior position of women at Athens" with "the powerful position of women in the Spartan system of property ownership".[5] James Redfield considers Spartan women to be not only "counters but also actors in the transactions of marriage-exchange". According to Redfield, "They demanded of the men that they increase the status of the oikos", but also guaranteed "the competitive warriors a refuge from competition, a 'private nest'".[6] Barton L. Kunstler, in turn, emphasises that it was women who made the most important decision regarding the household.[7] According to Maria H. Dettenhofer, a woman in Sparta "im wesentlichen allein für den ökonomischen Bestand des Oikos zuständig war", and her role in the economy resulted in some political influence as well.[8] The finishing touch was provided earlier by Linda J. Piper: "The Spartan women were shrewd businesswomen who made money and kept it".[9] It is thus not at all surprising that Simone de Beauvoir, departing from an entirely different position, reached an even more impressive conclusion, announcing that Sparta "was the only Greek city in which woman was treated almost on equality with man".[10] The voices of the doubters are relatively infrequent, although by no means absent. For instance Lukas Thommen questions "der Mythos der freien und einflussreichen Stellung der spartanischen Frau".[11] Noteworthy is also Ellen Millender's level-headed scepticism regarding the stereotype of "the empowered Spartan woman".[12] At the same time, it is entirely clear that although motivations vary and the intellectual depth differs, with re-

[5] de Ste Croix 1970, 277.

[6] Redfield 1986, 160.

[7] Kunstler 1983, 427.

[8] Dettenfofer 1994, 14–40; Dettenhofer 1993, 61–75.

[9] Piper 1979, 8.

[10] Beauvoir 1952, 82.

[11] Thommen 1999, 146

[12] Millender 1999, 355 (see further on Millender's reasonable views regarding some deeply rooted stereotypes found in even the newest specialist literature, pp. 355–391).

spect to women rationalisation in economical terms has long predominated in Spartan studies. The crowning glory of this "economic approach" to the history of Sparta are the fundamental findings of Stephen Hodkinson, which revealed a hitherto hidden aspect of Sparta. In his *opus magnum* and in other texts, Hodkinson has demonstrated that "partible inheritance", "diverging devolution" and "universal female inheritance" did exist in Sparta.[13] Let it be noted, however, that Sparta was not an economic power and it is not to economy that it owes its place in history. This "economic approach" is a sign of our times, and it does permit to reinterpret some elements of history – mainly the "Decline", but not the "Birth" or "Growth", and I still think that with time, not all of the findings of the "economists" will be verified as correct; but the exceptionality of Sparta lies entirely in something else. So does the uniqueness of the Spartan men and women.

The sources tell of rich Spartan women who suffered, or were threatened with, the loss of their wealth; of egoistic Spartan women; of wicked, unnatural mothers, wives and daughters; of licentious women who wore shockingly short chitons or even ran around naked; of naked maidens wrestling with naked lads; of young women with firm thighs, breasts and buttocks; of false wives happy to possess two *oikoi* and two bed-fellows; of women influencing their husbands' decisions on important matters – Aristotle's *gynaikokratoumenoi*… Scholarly publications are filled with even more interesting constructs straight from the fabulous Sparta, which are nevertheless based on those sources: the races of naked maidens on the banks of the Eurotas; the practice of revealing the maidens' nakedness in front of foreigners; naked wrestling contests between girls and boys; little Spartans running around barefoot like hobbits, to fulfil the hobbit ideal of quickly climbing up the mountain and just as quickly climbing down; Spartan hoplites who in contrast to all other Greek recruits were supposed to walk long marches (carrying burdens heavier than the backpacks of today's marines) and fight… barefoot; a true challenge to hygiene: the solitary all-year-round himation of Spartan boys; degenerate mothers, wives and daughters who were happy to see their men die; mothers who repudiated or even killed their sons who returned from the wars alive; the little fox that fatally mauled a brave Spartan boy (a natural marvel to interest the National Geographic); marriages by abduction – even if we stipulated (who is to forbid us?) that only the first wife was abducted, how were the later marriages sealed, when the bride was older or the groom no longer a youth, or even a Xenophon's *geraios*? The list could go on and on. I think the Spartan women themselves would have had "viel Spass" reading this. So would the men.

Yet still there are scholars who find the way to incorporate this fabulous Sparta into the historical Sparta, quite in keeping with Page's eminently universal ob-

[13] Hodkinson 1986, 378–406. See also Hodkinson 2004, 103–136.

servation, made in relation to the "Homeric question", that "one can always find some trick to extricate oneself from the clutches of the common sense".

This common sense advocates a completely different assumption, if only as a working hypothesis: that in different periods the position and significance of (different) women may have been, quite simply, different. In connection with that, I would like to suggest making comparisons between various images of the Spartan woman instead of programmatically creating a single image. Thucydides's Sparta would have been immutable for four centuries, Cicero's – for seven.

Aristotle's Spartan women

Against the rule of chronological precedence, which is due to Xenophon, let us begin with Aristotle; by this, we shall give the floor to a scholar, not a side in the debate:

"Again, the licence in the matter of their women (*peri tas gynaikas anesis*) is detrimental both to the chosen aim of the constitution and to the happiness of the state. For just as man and wife are part of a household, so clearly we should regard a state also as divided into two roughly equal bodies of people, one of men, one of women. So, in all constitutions in which the position of women is unsatisfactory, one half of the state must be regarded as unregulated by law. And that is just what has happened there. For the lawgiver, wishing the whole state to be hardy, makes his wish evident as far as the men are concerned, but has been wholly negligent in the case of the women. For being under no constraint whatever they live unconstrainedly (*akolasia*), and in luxury (*trypheros*). An inevitable result under such a constitution is that esteem is given to wealth (*timasthai ton plouton*), particularly if they do in fact come to be female-dominated (*gynaikokratomoumeia*); and this is a common state of affairs in military and warlike races, though not among the Celts and any others who have openly accorded esteem to male homosexuality. Indeed, it seems that the first person to relate the myth did not lack some rational basis when he coupled Ares with Aphrodite; for all such people seem in thrall to sexual relations, either with males or with females. That is why this state of affairs prevailed among the Laconians, and in the days of their supremacy a great deal was managed by women (*polla diokeito hypo ton gynaikon*). And yet what difference is there between women ruling and rulers ruled by women? The result is the same. Over-boldness is not useful for any routine business, but only, if at all, for war. Yet even to those purposes the Laconians' women were very harmful. This they demonstrated at the time of the invasion by the Thebans: they were not at all useful, as in other states, but caused more confusion than the enemy. So it seems that from the earliest times licence in the matter of their women (*he ton gynaikon anesis*) occurred among the Laconians, reasonably enough. For there were long periods when the men were absent from their own land because of the campaigns, when they were fighting the war against the Argives, or again the one against the Arcadians and Messenians. When they gained their leisure, they put themselves into the hands of their legislator in a state of preparedness brought about by the military life, which embraces many parts of virtue. People say that Lycurgus endeavoured to bring the women under the control of his laws, but that when they resisted he backed off. These then are the causes of what took place, and clearly, therefore, of this mistake as well. But the subject of our inquiry is not whom we ought to excuse and whom not, but what is correct and what is not. The poorness of the arrangements concerning women seems, as was said

earlier, not only to create a sort of unseemliness in the constitution in itself on its own, but also to contribute something to the greed for money (*philochrematia*); for after the points just made one could assail practice in respect of the uneven levels of property. For some of them have come to possess far too much, others very little indeed; and that is precisely why the land has fallen into the hands of a small number. This matter has been badly arranged through the laws too. For while he made it (and rightly made it) ignoble to buy and sell land already possessed, he left it open to anyone, if they wished, to give it away or bequeath it—and yet the same result follows inevitably, both in this case and in the other. Moreover, something like two-fifths of all the land is possessed by women, both because of the many heiresses that appear, and because of the giving of large dowries. Now it would have been better if it had been arranged that there should be no dowry, or a small or even a moderate one. But as it is one may give an heiress in marriage to any person one wishes; and if a man dies intestate, the person he leaves as heir gives her to whom he likes. As a result, although the land was sufficient to support 1500 cavalry and 30 000 heavy infantry, their number was not even 1000. The sheer facts have shown that the provisions of this system served them badly; the state withstood not a single blow, but collapsed owing to the shortage of men (*oliganthropia*)" (Arist. *Pol*. 1269b12–1270a34, transl. T. J. Saunders).

What does Aristotle have to say on the topic of Spartan women then? Perfectly aware that the world consists of women as much as men, he reveals that they are not subordinate to the rules that govern the male world of the Spartans. Worse still, they are not subordinate to the rules that regulate the world of the Hellenes in general. It is not the Athenians that are the sole point of reference, perhaps against the expectations of the advocates of reasoning in the categories of "Athenocentric representations of the Spartan 'Other'".

Stephen Hodkinson rightly encourages treating the "images of the 'liberation' of Spartiate women with caution"[14]. Also, I do not think that the issues of inheritance provide answers to all the questions. This is a very narrow-minded approach, even if at some point it fortunately illuminates the scholarly minds.

Another issue is what exactly Aristotle meant by sexual licence (*anesis*): if this is something of which we are aware or not. In the first case, this would probably mean the unusual marital "strategies" of the Spartans (see further on). In the latter case – perhaps it is much more. In Plato's "Laws", right after the accusation of licentiousness (*anesis*) levelled at Spartan women, there comes the charge of drunkenness (*Nomoi* 637 C).

This prompts an additional question as to which women Aristotle may have had in mind speaking of their indiscipline (*anesis*) or intemperance (*akolasia*) as the opposite of *sophrosyne*,[15] their love of luxury (*tryphe*) or finally avarice (*philochrematia*);[16] whether he meant all women or only the female members of the elite, older women or also the younger ones. The practicality of some charges

[14] Hodkinson 2004, 103.

[15] Generally on *sophrosyne* in Sparta, Humble 2002, 85–109.

[16] On Aristotle's approach to Sparta, with a critical discussion of the earlier views on the subject, see Eckart Schütrumpf 1994, 324–341. See also Hermann-Otto 1998, 18–40 and the earlier reflections of Tigerstedt 1974, 280–304.

ought to be re-examined depending on at least the age of the women in question. In considering the so-called political influence, the issue of the "feminisation of old age" should be taken into account – a problem which was probably present in Sparta in general, and perhaps was especially evident in the fourth century.[17] But the important point is not only the fact that the proportion of women to men increases with age, and that from some point in time the number of landowning women was growing. What is also significant is that the mother of Demaratus, the wife of Leonidas, the grandmother and mother of Agis IV, the mother of Cleomenes III were all going strong when their male partners were no longer among the living. In the background there is the phenomenon – universal, but perhaps especially noticeable in the unique conditions of Sparta – of the age-related "masculinisation" of women (and the concurrent "feminisation", as some term it, or more traditionally – the infantilism of old men).

The opinions regarding the influence Spartan women are supposed to have had over their husbands cannot be verified, but it is more probable that this phenomenon referred to the female members of the elite. According to Bradford, "We – in the light of modern feminism – might not agree that Spartan women ruled Spartan men, but we must concede to Aristotle that some Spartan women did have real power in the Spartan state".[18] If the phenomenon was more universal, it did not leave any discernible traces in the source material. In any case, it is now impossible to link any important decisions made by the Spartans with the influence of their women. Hence, if Aristotle is not guilty of a serious exaggeration, it seems that Spartan women were so discreet in their behind-the-scene manipulations that in no concrete case was the cat let out of the bag; all that remains is suspicion.[19] In Sparta, just like everywhere else in Greece, it was the men who truly ruled and shaped the state policy.[20]

Xenophon's Spartan women

Aristotle and Xenophon write about different issues and focus on different points. This is not surprising, considering that Aristotle, thinking about Sparta's decline, was looking for the flaws in the system, while Xenophon, always sympathetic to Sparta, sought the system's advantages, summing up the decline he witnessed (unless someone else had summed it up thus for him) with the com-

[17] Cf. Brulé 2003, 139; David 1991, 60–63.

[18] Bradford 1986, 18.

[19] Incidentally, Ernst Baltrusch's observation that in creating his "Ecclesiazusae", Aristophanes may have been referring to the political role of women in Sparta, is noteworthy; see Baltrusch 1998, 86. Cf. Figueira 2010, 267.

[20] Kulesza 2003, 129–130.

ment that the Spartans had renounced the old values. In practice, Xenophon holds us hostage, for good or ill; all of us. He is the founding father of our historical Sparta in the same way as Plutarch is the originator of her fabulous counterpart. It must be recalled again and again that as an author, he was biased and "must be treated as a partisan source";[21] but it is with him that the origins of the main themes of the Spartan legend must be sought, other authors only developed those themes.

Xenophon was absolutely convinced that the Spartan *politeia* was extraordinary and that everything Spartan (and hence praiseworthy) was due to Lycurgus:

"And I was thinking that Sparta among cities of few citizens proved to be the most powerful and famous, and I wondered in what way this had come about. When, however, I thought about the Spartans' way of life, I no longer wondered. I admired Lycurgus, their lawgiver, whose laws they were fortunate in obeying, and I think him extremely wise. He did not imitate other cities, but thinking the opposite of most, he made his country outstandingly fortunate. Now, to begin at the beginning, I will discuss the breeding of children. In other states the girls who are destined to become mothers and are brought up in the approved manner live on the most modest amount of food, with the smallest possible allowance of delicacies. They are either totally deprived of wine, or drink it mixed with water. The rest of the Greeks think it right that their girls keep silent and work wool, like sedentary craftsmen. How, then, ought we expect that women brought up in such a way will bear a sturdy child? But Lycurgus thought that slave women were able to supply clothing, and he believed motherhood (*teknopoiia*) was most important for freeborn women. Therefore first he ordered the female sex to exercise no less than the male; moreover, he created competitions in racing and trials of strength for women as for men, believing that healthier children will be born if both parents are strong" (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 1.1–4; translated by Michael Lipka).

To Lycurgus (read: Xenophon), the most important issue was *teknopoiia*.[22] From Xenophon, who programmatically underlined everything that attested to the superiority of Sparta over the rest of the (Greek) world, we learn that in Sparta, firstly, potential mothers were on special diet; secondly, that they drank wine (perhaps even undiluted with water), thirdly, they did not spin wool, fourthly, they took exercise and even participated in contests (most probably same-sex ones, because otherwise we would have certainly been told of that extraordinary innovation). That is all as to the *peri geneseos*.

Xenophon does not say how the marriage was contracted in Sparta. Since he emphasises that Spartans, in contrast to other Greeks, married *en akmais ton*

[21] Powell 1988, 224.

[22] Xenophon's reasoning has some similarity to the surviving passage of "Lakedaimonion Politeia" by Critias. This work began with the statement: "I start, as you see, from a man's birth. How might he become physically best and strongest? [He could,] if the man who plants his seed would exercise and eat wholesome food and harden his body, and if the mother of the child-to-be would strengthen her body and exercise" (Diels-Kranz II (1969), 88, fr. 32). This similarity may suggest that Critias was Xenophon's source of inspiration or that this aspect of Sparta's home policy was the focus of special attention in the Laconophile milieu and/or in Spartan propaganda.

somaton, it may be suspected that had the *gamos* been different than elsewhere in the Greek world, he would not hesitate to inform us. Yet at that point there are still centuries to wait for Plutarch's fantasy tales. In the meantime, Xenophon shares some revelations as to what happens after the wedding:

"He [Lycurgus] saw, too, that during the time immediately following marriage, it was usual elsewhere for husbands to have unlimited intercourse with wives. He decreed the opposite of this: for he ruled that the husband should be embarrassed to be seen visiting his wife or leaving her. Thus the desire for intercourse was more fervent in both of them, and if there should be a child, it would be more sturdy than if they were satiated with one another. In addition to this, he took away from men the right to take a wife whenever they wanted to, and ordered that they marry in their prime, believing that this too was conducive to the production of fine children (*eugonia*). If, however, it happened that an old man (*geraios*) had a young wife (*nea*) – seeing that men of that age guard their wives – he thought the opposite. He required the elderly husband (*presbytes*) to bring in some man whose body and spirit (*soma kai psyche*) he admired, in order to beget children. On the other hand, in case a man did not want to have intercourse with his wife (*synoikein*) but wanted children of whom he could be proud (*teknon axiologon*), he made it legal for him to choose a woman who was the mother of a fine family and well born (*euteknon kai gennaian*), and if he persuaded her husband, he produced children with her. Many such arrangements developed. For the wives want to get possession of two *oikoi*, and the husbands want to get brothers for their sons who will share their lineage and power, but claim no part of the property. Thus in regard to the breeding of children he thought the opposite to those of other states. And anyone who wishes to may see whether it turned out that the men in Sparta are distinctive in their size and strength (*megethos kai ischys*)" (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 1.5–10; translated by Michael Lipka).

At this point we learn that any ostentation in relations with a newly married bride was frowned upon in Sparta. However, contrary to what Xenophon is attempting to impress upon his readers, this attitude was identical in Athens and probably everywhere else in all cultures and eras.

Further on, however, we learn of truly extraordinary solutions. An old man (*geraios, presbytes*) may have a young wife (*nea*) although, according to Xenophon's earlier observations, this was decidedly un-Spartan. Additionally, the man could be too old to still beget children; also, a (non-old) man could not desire to *synoikein* with his wife or could be unable to have offspring with her. Undoubtedly the solutions applied in Spartan *eugonia* seemed strange to other Greeks, and not only to them. Yet the effects were apparently obvious (even if the sense was not): they were evident in the strength (*ischys*) and size (*megethos*) of the Spartiates.

Spartan women in action (sixth – fifth century BC)

The sources' male perspective does not change, but the Spartan women's activity discernible in those sources in the fourth and third century is different from that in the sixth and fifth century. Even so, the roll of Spartan women, mainly the

"first ladies", is not very long. One of them is the first wife of Anaxandridas II, name unknown, whom he did not want to divorce despite her barrenness (Hdt. 5. 39–41).[23] Neither is his second wife, mother of Cleomenes I, known by name. There are reports of the ephors' justified suspicions upon learning that Anaxandridas's barren first wife turned out to be pregnant (Hdt. 5.41).[24]

None of the three consecutive wives of Ariston is known by name – not even the last one, although Herodotus describes in relatively much detail how, thanks to Helene of Therapne, she turned from an ugly duckling into the loveliest woman in Lacedaemon (Hdt. 6.61, cf. Paus. 3.7.7) and relates the probably once notorious story of her second "marriage". First she was the wife of Agetus, Ariston's friend. Ariston, who was burning with desire towards his friend's wife, arranged with him under oath that each would choose some valuable object from the other one's possessions. After Agetus had selected something, the wily Ariston asked for his wife; Agetus was forced, albeit reluctantly, to surrender her (Hdt. 6.62). Soon a problem appeared, however. Seven months later the woman bore a son and Ariston's paternity was questioned – not least by Ariston himself. Later, the rumour died down, to reawaken several decades later, when Demaratus had been king for at least 25 years, and become an important bargaining card in the hands of Cleomenes (Hdt. 6.65–69). Witnesses of the long-ago events were found. Demaratus tried to find the truth about his paternity from his mother (Hdt. 6.68.2–3). Her answer was evasive: she conceived her son either with Ariston or with the hero Astrobacus. In any case, as the result of intrigues based on his alleged illegitimacy Demaratus was deposed, left Sparta and finally ended up in Persia. Of the later fortunes of his mother nothing is known.

This tale is connected with another, this time referring to the fate of Demaratus's wife. Her name, for a change, is known: she was called Perkalos and was the daughter of Chilo. She was betrothed to Leotychidas (II), but Demaratus abducted her and so she became his wife. This is, incidentally, the only known abduction in Sparta to have resulted in a marriage. This event quite expectedly opens the history of Leotychidas's life-long hate of Demaratus; this was apparently the reason why, in the end, the former supported Cleomenes in his attempt to "dethrone" Demaratus (Hdt. 6.65.2).

Gorgo, the daughter of Cleomenes I, wife of Leonidas and mother of Pleistarchus, was described by Sarah Pomeroy as an "assertive woman". Pomeroy's evidence for this is as follows: "As a little girl of eight or nine, Gorgo was present when an ambassador from the Greek cities in Ionia came to persuade

[23] See the "economic approach" of Hodkinson (1986, 401), who writes that "Herodotus indicates that Anaxandridas was devoted to his niece", but emphasises, probably correctly, the king's mercantile motivation.

[24] See the observations of Ellen Millender 2002, 14–15.

Cleomenes to support their rebellion against Persia. When he offered Cleomenes a huge bribe, Gorgo advised her father not to stray from the path of virtue (Herod. 5.51). He followed her advice".[25] Pomeroy is probably correct in emphasising the "close relationship" between Gorgo and her father; it would be difficult, however, to consider the following generalisation, made on the basis of an episode from Gorgo's childhood, as fully justified: "Some of the royal women at Sparta did, however, wield a great deal of authority because of their influence on the kings. There was a long tradition of the involvement of women in politics, beginning with the child Gorgo, who advised her father the king about how he should treat a foreign ambassador (Herod. 5.51, 7.239). Her advice shows that she understood well the Spartan policy of avoidance of strangers (*xenelasia*)".[26] Not much more is known of the later actions of Leonidas's niece-by-marriage and concurrently wife (Hdt. 7.205.1). Herodotus notes only her input into the reading of Demaratus's "coded" message (Hdt. 7.239). This may, of course, confirm Gorgo's authority as much as her intelligence, but on the other hand it is easy to read whatever we wish into this anecdote, especially in connection with Gorgo's declarations in the *Sayings of Spartan Women*.

Another woman identified by name was Lampito, daughter of Leotychidas II from his second marriage to Eurydame, the daughter of Diactoridas (Hdt. 6.71 cf. Plut. *Ages*. 1; Plato, *Alcib.* I 204b). Leotychidas married Lampito to Archidamus (II), his own son from his first marriage. Hodkinson's analysis reveals that Leotychidas's matrimonial machinations were prompted by his economic strategy[27].

The roll closes with the ill-famed Timaia, wife of Agis II, accused of a liaison with Alcibiades, with whom she was to conceive Leotychidas – who, in turn, for this very reason lost to Agesilaos II the contest for the inheritance after his father (Xen. *Ages*. 4.5; Plut. *Alkib*. 23.7–9; *Ages*. 3; *Mor*. 467 f; Athen. 13. 574 c-d).

Other women to add to the list are Theano, mother of Pausanias, who had a hand in his tragic death; she is known from the later sources (Polyainos 8. 51; Diod. 11. 45. 6; Nepos, *Paus.* 5. 3. see Poralla 1985, No 55 s.v. Alkathoa); the wife of Agis, who having returned from war, preferred to eat supper with her rather than his friends (Plut. *Lyk*. 12. 3) (by the way, because of her short stature, Agis was allegedly punished by the ephors for marrying her; Plut. *Ages*. 2 Athen. 13.566a-b; Theophrastus in Plut. *Ages.* 2.3, *De educ. puer.* 1 d)) and Argileonis, the wife of Tellis and mother of Brasidas (Plut. *Lyk*. 25; *Mor*. 219d4, 240c1), whom Plutarch set in the role of a Spartan female politico, uttering declarations which, although appallingly banal, in his opinion were worthy of a Spartan woman (Plut. *Lyk.* 25.5).

[25] Pomeroy 2002, 57.
[26] Pomeroy 2002, 76.
[27] Hodkinson 1986, 401.

The roll of Spartan women of the fifth century does not reveal anything unexpected. Their presence in the period sources is negligible. Often unnamed, they appear as wives, mothers or daughters of outstanding males. Their fecundity is at the centre of attention, their wealth, although in the background, most likely not without meaning. No women are governing their men. It is rather the latter that rule over the fates of women.

Interestingly, the early-fifth century example of the mother of Demaratus and the late-fifth century example of Timaia the wife of Agis II demonstrate that the Spartans seemed unaware that there was no marital infidelity in Sparta. What is more, in a futile attempt to make his mother tell the truth about his biological paternity, Demaratus pleaded with her to disclose whether she conceived him with her first husband or with Ariston – or perhaps the truth lay with those who said that "you consorted with one of the household (*oiketes*) that was the ass-keeper (*onophorbos*), and that it is his son that I am. Therefore I entreat you by the gods to tell me the truth; for if you have done aught such as they say of you, not you only but many other women have done the like" (Hdt. 6. 68).[28] There are also examples, if not of affection, than at least of marital attachment, for instance the attitude of Anaxandridas II towards his first wife or the behaviour of Archidamus II,[29] and even of passion, *vide* Ariston. There is nothing, however, with the possible exception of the attitude of Pausanias's mother, that would confirm any extraordinary features of Spartan women.

Spartan women of the imaginary world

Most of us, reading what Euripides or Aristophanes wrote about Spartan women, will imagine those women as the girls immortalised in the Laconian bronzes. This gives us a bias, making us inadvertently accept the stereotypical image of a Spartan woman, sealed by Plutarch and reinforced by the later authors, including those of the modern era.

The significance of fundamental elements in the literary image of a Spartan woman until the end of the fifth century is all the greater since with time those elements were increasingly strongly influencing the presentation of Spartan women in texts which ambitiously attempted to describe or refer to historical reality.

A Spartan woman of the comedy was quite a harridan. The one named Lampito from Aristophanes's *Lysistrata*, first staged in 411, is a large lady; she "can throttle a bull and has superb breasts" (*Lys.* 80–84). She can also jump so that her

[28] On the deposition of Demaratus, see e.g. Luther 2004, 115–117.

[29] C.D. Hamilton suspects that since she was poor and ugly, he must have married her for love (1991, 13–14).

feet touch her buttocks; apparently this trick, known as *bibasis*, was one of the many Spartan *specialités de la maison*. According to Elisa Queenan, "This dance or exercise routine required a lot of dexterity and skill. It was used to demonstrate the balance, skill and extraordinary physical physique maintained by Spartan women".[30] In reality this jump is not as difficult as it may seem to armchair specialists, and additionally it cannot be ruled out that – in the play about the "sexual strike" – it is also, or perhaps mainly, an allusion to the Spartan women's erotic dexterity.

William Poole notes that with Euripides, it is not Spartan men, but Spartan women who surrender to "the temptations of extravagance and excess".[31] Referring to reader to Poole's study, I will not concentrate on the issues linked with determining Euripides's attitude towards Sparta by the interpretation of the mythological themes in his plays. Let us, however, focus on the words of Peleus in *Andromache*, which are crucial to the development of the stereotype of a Spartan woman:

"Not even if she wanted to could a Spartan woman be chaste (modest). They leave their houses in the company of young men, thighs showing bare through their revealing garments, and in a manner I cannot endure they share the same running-tracks and wrestling-places. After that should we be surprised if you do not train up women who are chaste"? (Andr. 595–601; translated by D. Kovacs).

A scantily dressed girl who does physical training with the boys cannot be *sophron*.[32] Nudity or semi-nudity is one of the leitmotivs of the tales about Spartan women.[33] Authors who could still have some knowledge of Spartan women's costume mentioned the *phainomerides*, "thigh-baring" women (Ibycus, fr. 339 *PMGF*; Eur. *Andr.* 595–601, cf. *Hec.* 932–936; Soph. fr. 872 Lloyd-Jones), not naked ones. The short dresses (*schistos chiton*, Pollux 5.77) of young Spartan women could be shocking enough to other Greeks.[34] The later authors unclothed the Spartan girls entirely, making them engage in sports naked. In this context, scholars such as Sarah Pomeroy usually refer to Xenophon and Plutarch (Xen. *Lak. Pol*. 1.4; Plut. *Lyk*. 14.4–15.1; Nic. Dam. *FGrH* 103 F 90). Pomeroy is even convinced that mature and old women, as well as pregnant ones, still exercised naked.[35]

[30] Queenan 2009,7. On *bibasis* (and generally the image of the Spartans in Aristophanes), see Harvey 1995, 35–58 (observation on *bibasis* p. 41).

[31] Poole 1994,19.

[32] On this issue, see Cartledge 2001, 14.

[33] See the interesting text by Ephraim David 2010, 137–163. Generally on nudity in ancient art, Koloski-Ostrow, Lyons, 2000.

[34] On the Spartan women's attire, see also the observations of Thommen 1999, 137–140, and Hodkinson 2000, 228–229.

[35] Pomeroy 2002, 25.

A long time ago I was surprised at the nakedness, or rather semi-nudity, of the Indians in the museums of natural history in America. One afternoon, in the open-air museum and the "Indian village" in Plymouth, I saw an Indian, wearing no more than a loincloth, blue and shivering in the frosty November air. I thought of the Germans of Tacitus. Going about naked or in scant clothing for the large part of the year would be a highly impractical idea, in North America as much as in Germania or in Sparta.

I would also be very cautious in referring the views of Plato, who in "his" state envisaged nude exercise for women, to the realities of Sparta (*Pol.* 457A)[36]. Plato was inspired by Sparta and used its name to his own ends, but the question of how much of Sparta there is in Plato, and how much of Plato in "Sparta", is very far from being answered (if such answer is at all possible).[37] A related question is how much of the Spartan women there was in the Amazons, and how much of the Amazons – in the Spartan women. But above all, just as the *gymnetes* of Argos did not till the land naked and the gymnetes did not fight in the altogether, neither did the Spartan women go about with nothing on. Even Euripides mentioned no more than "naked thighs and open dresses", and that – only in the context of girls who "race and wrestle with the boys". He never indicated that it was an all-day costume worn by all women regardless of their age.

In the eyes of the non-Spartan world, the short chiton may have appeared, due to its uniqueness, to be the Spartan "regional" or "national" costume; there are records of the Doric peplos, the *himatia* and *monochitones* (Plut. *Pyrrh*. 27.3). But old ladies did not wear mini-skirts even when they were highly fashionable: such garments were meant for the younger clientele. Also, the accusation that Spartan women loved luxury must have had external justification in their attire and jewellery (cf. Eur. *Andr.* 147–53). Recently Nicholas Sekunda has unearthed from the figurative Spartan coffer forgotten garments completing the Spartiate's attire: the *lakonikai* and *amyklaidai,* the typical Spartan shoes.[38] Interestingly, with a considerable contribution from Xenophon, not only were the Spartan shoes mislaid, but also, in the fabulous Sparta, the Spartans began to generally go barefoot.[39] The well-known figurine of the Spartiate of Hartford

[36] See Plato *Pol*. 452B; *Nomoi* 833C-D.

[37] On Sparta and Plato, see e.g. Powell, 1994*,* 273–321.

[38] Sekunda 2009, 253–259.

[39] This, of course, is a broader topic, pertaining to the "media" image of the warriors, heroically naked (or not), on the vases (but not in tomb imagery). Another point is the issue of barefoot hoplites in contemporary books; see the illustrations to N. Sekunda's book *The Spartan Army* (Osprey Publishing, Oxford 1998), pp. 33–44, where only on p. 42 do we find two men wearing shoes, and the rest is barefoot. Incidentally, Jacques-Louis David, who was ahead of the American directors in underlining the Spartans' sexiness, painted his Leonidas in the buff, with the exception of a headdress and… shoes (sandals, actually).

confirms the career of the "barefoot Spartan" myth: bare feet, such as any gods-fearing Spartan should have (one from the fabulous Sparta, that is) were added to it in the modern era. In reality, the Spartans, male and female alike, wore shoes.

The beauty of Spartan women was famous (*Sparte kalligynaika* – Hom. *Od.* 13.412); after all, the loveliest of women, Helen, came from Sparta and was especially venerated there. Seeing Helen as the "prototype" Spartan woman, we may perhaps more usefully judge her psychological and intellectual qualities than her physical charms.

The Spartan ideal of female beauty is not known. Certainly it would be difficult to speak, as Thomas F. Scanlon does, of "the legendary Spartan female beauty, perhaps comparable in our day to that of 'California girls'".[40] What is known is that according to the Spartan standards (whatever they were), not all the Laconian women were beautiful; but then this is quite obvious. Expectedly, beautiful men and women were an object of admiration (Herakleides Lembus *ap* Athen. 13.566a); but what is meant is probably a special type of physical beauty. Euripides and Aristophanes speak, both directly and indirectly, of physical exercises ensuring appropriate physical prowess. Hence the most emblematic, or at least the most desirable model would probably be a tall, well-built and strong woman. In keeping with the intentions of Lycurgus (as described by Xenophon), she should be notable for her strength (*ischys*) and size (*megethos*), just like her male partner. Good diet was certainly conducive to this.[41] Whether everything in this description is specific to Sparta and at the same time fundamentally alien to other Greeks, is another issue

Herodotus cites an anecdote about a certain tall woman of Paeonia, with whose cooperation her two brothers, Pigres and Mantyes, staged a show for a single viewer in 511/510. The viewer who was to receive the message carried by the scene was the king of Persia, Darius. The brothers had been exiled from Paeonia and wished to convince the king to intervene on their behalf in their home state. To do so, they contrived for the king to see their sister leading a horse, spinning wool and carrying a pitcher upon her head. In keeping with their expectations, the king was enchanted with the spectacle and asked whether there were more women in Paeonia to have such extraordinary talents. Having been assured this was indeed so, he declined to intervene in Paeonia but, quite contrary to plans of the two Greeks, ordered all the Paeonians relocated to his kingdom (Hdt. 5.12–15.98).[42]

According to Eva Keuls, this episode shows everything that the Greeks expected from their women: sex and work.[43] Certainly, from Homer onward, the Greek ideal of a woman can be summed up in three words: beautiful, hardworking and obedient (and hence faithful). Spartan women did not have to do physical

[40] Scanlon 1988, 190.
[41] Cf. Hodkinson 2000, 228 (but the diet varied in relation to the economic status).
[42] Kulesza 1998, 136–7.
[43] Keuls 1985, 229.

work (which does not mean they were not doing any work at all). To believe Aristotle, they were not obedient either. The image found in the comedies and tragedies has little to do with their industriousness/laziness or obedience/disobedience. What is highlighted are the qualities and behaviour, as well as the special beauty, of Spartan women – or perhaps only of the heroines of the plays.

Spartan women in action (fourth – third century BC)

In the years 404–371 BC Sparta was rapidly changing. Thucydides could still claim that Sparta had successfully maintained its *politeia* for over four centuries (Thuc. 1.18.1); soon after this claim lost its validity. We may wonder whether the 404 BC was indeed the turning point in the history of Sparta, as much indicates it was; but in 371 Sparta "withstood not a single blow".

The ongoing changes find their reflection in the *Frauengeschichte*. From the beginning of the fourth century the presence of Spartan women in our sources is steadily growing; what is more, although they are still, if not exclusively, talked of as mothers, wives and daughters, they are always mentioned under their own name (although not always given bythe author from their own period. Both aspects are a reflection of the changes occurring in the world whose fortunes the authors were recording. In the context of Sparta, this is probably additionally linked with the special role played by the women of Agesilaus II, whose good name was assured forever by Xenophon, although perhaps contrary to the opinion of many of his contemporaries.

Among the women of Agesilaus, a special place is held by his sister Cynisca, who won the four-horse chariot race in the Olympic Games twice, possibly in the years 396 and 392, which fact she proudly announced to the city and the world by means of monuments and the famous inscription:[44]

> "My fathers and brothers are the Kings
> of Sparta. I, Kyniska, won in
> the chariot race with swift-footed horses.
> I erect this statue and I
> say that I am the only woman from all
> of Greece who has ever won
> this crown. Made by Apelleas,
> son of Kallikles" (*IG* V. 1.1564a).

[44] Testimonies regarding Cynisca: Xen. *Ages*. 9.6; Plut. *Ages*. 20; Paus. 3.8.1–2; 15.1; 5.12.5; 6.1.6. Hodkinson points to the probability that "her father, Diaktoridas, was the Olympic four-horse chariot victor of 456", and is of the opinion that Herodotus's remark about "Euridame's brother, Menios, perhaps suggests that he was a man of note" (Hodkinson 1986, 401–402; Hodkinson 2004, 111–112).

According to Xenophon, she was talked into entering her chariots into the races at Olympia by her brother, who by this wished to prove (to whom? and what for?) that this victory attests to wealth, not to manly virtue (Xen. *Ages.* 9.6.). Interestingly, scholars have tacitly accepted this odd reasoning[45] – odd, because it ignores the motive for her second attempt at Olympia (unless, let us note *cum grano salis,* that it was supposed to strengthen the effect) and also because of the fact that her victories did not discourage anyone. In the essence, Cynisca's victories open a new era, showing that it was precisely wealth that was the most important. I would expect that this overstepping of the boundaries of the until then male world caused a shock in Sparta and in the entire Greece. I think that in this case, not for the first time, Xenophon was responding to charges against Agesilaus, not having first indicated that such charges had actually been formulated. That he responds in a manner that should have surprised scholars is another issue.

Other women, also Spartan ones, followed in Cynisca's footsteps, notably Euryleonis, who won the two-horse chariot race at Olympia, probably in 368 (Paus. 3.8.1; 17.6).[46]

Nothing is known of the activities of either woman outside sport; similarly, little can be said of the deeds of other women surrounding Agesilaus, such as his mother Eupolia (Plut. *Ages*. 1; Paus. 3. 15.1.9; Xen. *Ages*. 9. 6), his wife Cleora (Plut. *Ages*. 19; Xen. *Hell*. 3.4, 29; 5.4.25; Paus. 3.9.6), his daughters Eupolia (Plut. *Ages*. 19; Xen. Hell. 7.4.23) and Prolyta (Plut. *Ages.* 19; Xen. *Hell.* 7.4.23). There are reasons to suppose he was particularly fond of his family. However, the fact that in order to please his wife, he appointed his brother-in-law, Peisander, the commander of the fleet (Xen. *Hell*. 3.4.29; Plut. *Ages*. 10.11) does not yet mean that it was she to persuade him to do so. It is, however, noteworthy that he was described by his relatives (*syngeneis*) as "devoted to his family" (*philokedemona*) (Xen. *Hell.* 11.13).[47]

Apart from that, we know of Xenopeitheia, the mother of Lysanoridas, and his aunt Chryse. They were both killed, while Lysanoridas, the Spartan commander in Thebes, was exiled from Sparta (Theopompus ap. Athen. 13.609b = *FGrHist* 115 F 240); regrettably, the reasons for their condemnation are unclear.[48]

An active political role was played by Deinicha,[49] the wife of Archidamus III, mother of Agis III, Eudamidas I and Agesilaus (Plut. *Agis* 3; Arr. *An.* 2.13.6). Ac-

[45] E.g. A. Powell, 1988, 228, although not Ellen Millender, who correctly indicates further meanings in it (2009, 23–26).

[46] Hodkinson 1986, 402. Hodkinson suggests that Euryleonis may have been descended from Euryleon, who accompanied Dorieus in the late sixth century (Hodkinson 2000, 414).

[47] See the comment of Cartledge 1987, 143.

[48] See the observations of Th. J. Figueira, 271–272.

[49] S. Hodkinson suggests that Deinicha may have been descended from Deinis, whose name appears on a sixth-century aryballos (2000, 414).

cording to Theopompus, during the Third Social War (356–346) she was bribed by the Phocians to persuade her husband to come to their aid (Paus. 3.10.3).

The list of fourth-century Spartan women is completed by Teleutia (Poralla No. 688), probably the mother of Antalcydas, and Alexippa, the wife of Iphicratidas and mother of Gylippus (*Anth. Pal*. 7.435).

As a collective, Spartan women appear on the scene of history twice. In 390, after the defeat at Lechaion, Spartan women were full of sadness, "except for those whose sons or fathers or brothers had died there. They went about radiant as if they had won a victory, rejoicing in what had happened to their families" (Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.10). The tidings of the defeat at Leuctra caused similar reactions. The ephors forbade women to weep, but "on the following day those who had lost relatives were to be seen going about in the open, radiant and well turned out, whereas few were in evidence of those whose relatives had been reported to have survived, and they went about humbled and gloomy" (Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.16, Plut. *Ages.* 29.4–7).[50] The reactions of Spartan women, if they were indeed such, may seem shocking. Would any of us like to have a wife, mother, sister or daughter who would grieve because we have returned from wars alive? Yet this reaction becomes far easier to understand in the face of collective responsibility awaiting the family members of the *tresantes*.[51] Incidentally, in this case it was thanks to Agesilaus (who, according to Xenophon, was the saviour sent by providence to deliver Sparta after the Leuctra disaster) that the penalties for men deemed cowards were overruled (Plut. *Ages*. 30.2–6; *Mor.* 191c; 215b; *Comp. Ages. et Pomp*. 2; Polyainos 2.1.13).

The events that occurred soon after, when the Thebans and their allies invaded Laconia in 369, are actually far more surprising, also in view of the above. Spartan women "could not stand even the sight of the smoke [raised as the Thebans ravaged the area] because they had never before seen enemies." (Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.27–28; Plut. *Ages.* 31.4–5).[52] This must have made an impression in all Greece, just as the Battle of Sphacteria once had. The Spartan women's physical prowess turned out entirely useless. Plato wrote about this (*Laws* 805e–806b), and Aristotle stated outright that "they were not at all useful, as in other states, but caused more confusion than the enemy" (Arist. *Pol.* 1269b37–39).[53] But the myth of the brave Spartan woman was not damaged by the events of 369. It was the element of fabulous Sparta that withstood the trial of time; in the later tradition there was more need for those than for historical truth.

[50] See the comment of D.R. Shipley 1997, 326–328.

[51] See Kulesza 2008, 24–25, and above all Ducat 2006, 1–55.

[52] See Shipley1997, 339–341.

[53] On the interpretation of Aristotle's text and the attitude of Spartan women, Powell 2004, 137–150. See also Figueira 2010, 269.

This was in some measure facilitated by the later events that erased the memory of the un-Spartan Spartan women of the 360's. The first Spartan heroines appear in the third century, although the motive for their heroic sacrifice was not always the love of homeland. Archidamia, the grandmother of the future reformer King Agis IV, saved the mortally threatened Sparta during the invasion of Pyrrhus in 272: "When night had come, the Lacedaemonians at first took counsel to send their women off to Crete, but the women were opposed to this; and Archidamia came with a sword in her hand to the senators and upbraided them in behalf of the women for thinking it meet that they should live after Sparta had perished". In Plutarch's picturesque tale, the women seem to obliterate the disgrace of their compatriots, the women of 369. When the men decided to dig trenches to hold back Pyrrhus's elephants, the same women came to their aid, "some of them in their robes, with tunics girt close, and others in their tunics only, to help the elderly men in the work. The men who were going to do the fighting the women ordered to keep quiet, and assuming their share of the task they completed with their own hands a third of the trench. (…). When day came and the enemy were putting themselves in motion, these women handed the young men their armour, put the trench in their charge, and told them to guard and defend it, assured that it was sweet to conquer before the eyes of their fatherland, and glorious to die in the arms of their mothers and wives, after a fall that was worthy of Sparta. As for Chilonis, she withdrew". Chilonis, the wife of Cleonymus, wore a rope round her neck in order to take her own life in case of defeat (Plut. *Pyrrh.* 27.2–5, transl. Bernadotte Perrin). Yet Chilonis had a personal reason not to risk falling into the enemy hands alive: with Pyrrhus's army came her husband, old Cleonymus, whom she had betrayed with Acrotatus, son of Areus I (Plut. *Pyrrh*. 26.15–29, 12).

Archidamia was to play a crucial role in Spartan history once again,[54] this time with Agesistrate, the mother of Agis IV. The two women were the largest landowners in contemporary Sparta (Plut. *Agis* 4.1). They were not enthusiastic about the revolutionary policy of their royal son and grandson or enchanted with his vision of the revival of Sparta's power. But as a loving mother and grandmother, they finally came to support the young man's projects; they won supporters for him and persuaded other women to his cause – the latter without much success, "For the women were opposed to it [Agis's reform – R.K.], not only because they would be stripped of the luxury (*tryphe*) which, in general lack of higher culture, made their lives happy, but also because they saw that the honour (*time*) and influence (*dynamis*) which they enjoyed in consequence of their wealth (*ploutos*) would be cut off" (Plut. *Agis* 7.4). Both ladies paid for their love with their lives. It must also be noted that women played only an indirect political role here. As Lukas Thommen

[54] Powell 1999, 393–419.

rightly noted, "Ihre politische Rolle war letztlich jedenfalls nur untergeordneter Natur. Die politischen Programme zur Rettung des spartanischen Bürger – und Heeresverbandes stammten von Männern".[55]

The sacrifice of Chilonis, the daughter of King Leonidas, was also of personal nature. When her father, who opposed the reforms of Agis IV, was deposed, and his son-in-law, her husband Cleombrotus, became king, the devoted daughter Chilonis accompanied her father when he sought refuge at the temple of Athena Chalkioikos (Plut. *Agis* 11.3–5). Yet when Leonidas returned to power, she begged him successfully for mercy upon her husband, with whom she left Sparta (Plut. *Agis* 17–18.2).

A special place among the Spartan women of that era is held by Agiatis, the wife of Agis IV. Having murdered her husband, Leonidas forced her to marry his own young son, Cleomenes III (Plut. *Cleom.* 1.1–2). In Plutarch's version of events, she was a loving wife in both her marriages. She even managed to instil the reformatory ambitions of her first husband in her second (Plut. *Cleom*. 1.2). The mother of Cleomenes III, Cratesicleia, aided him with her influence and her wealth (Plut. *Cleom.* 6.1). To win additional means and support for her son's campaign, despite her age she decided to marry again, with Megistonous as the groom (Plut. *Cleom*. 6.1). Here, too, it is hard to find any other motivation than maternal love.

Plutarch's Spartan women

Plutarch knows everything that was written by his predecessors of whom we are aware; and in every case he knows more. He completes and expands the accounts of earlier authors on his own or with the help of other accounts; to some, certainly significant extent he uses whatever he had seen and especially heard in the "Sparta Plantation" of his own time. He adds subsequent elements to legends, often modifying Xenophon's general comments or transforming them into concrete facts. For instance, when Xenophon speaks of the appointment to the gerousia as happening *epi tou termati tou biou*, Plutarch replaces this with the age criterion of sixty years (Plut. *Lyk.* 25.1). Plutarch also speaks of the equal division of land (Plut. *Lyk.* 8.2), the inspection of newborns, until then never mentioned by any source (Plut. *Lyk.* 16.1–2), and many other elements of the increasingly fabulous Sparta. It is from Plutarch that we learn the Lycurgus knew democracy – in the period when it had not yet been invented (Plut. *Lyk*. 19.3), and also that he forbade the use of coins – before they even appeared (Plut. *Lyk.* 9.1–2). There was no prostitution in Sparta, men lived in the barracks until thirty and sent their kinsmen and lovers to settle all the maters in the agora for them.

[55] Thommen 1999, 146.

Being ultimately woven from a variety of historical and fabulous threads (in part as a collective achievement), Plutarch's image of Sparta is inevitably self-contradictory. It would be difficult not to agree with Antony Powell that "Although Plutarch cannot be ignored we should try to reconstruct our history mainly from writers of the fifth and fourth centuries, to reduce the risk of distortion".[56]

Plutarch questions Aristotle's statement that the Spartan system (presented as the achievement of Lycurgus) was characterised by the *anesis* and the *kratia* of women:

"In the matter of education, which he [sc. Lycurgus] regarded as the greatest and noblest task of the lawgiver, he began at the very source, by carefully regulating marriages and births. For it is not true that, as Aristotle says, he tried to bring the women under proper restraint, but desisted, because he could not overcome the great licence and power (*dia tas polles aneseos kai gynaikokratias*) which the women enjoyed on account of the many expeditions in which their husbands were engaged. During these the men were indeed obliged to leave their wives in sole control at home, and for this reason paid them greater deference than was their due, and gave them the title of Mistress (*Despoina*). But even to the women Lycurgus paid all possible attention" (Plut. *Lyk.* 14.1; translated by B. Perrin).

The great Spartan lawgiver took care of women or, as the following account demonstrates, of virgins, the future mothers of healthy offspring:

"He made the maidens (*parthenon*) exercise their bodies in running (*dromois*), wrestling (*palais*), casting the discus (*bolais diskon*), and hurling the javelin (*akontion*), in order that the fruit of their wombs might have vigorous root in vigorous bodies and come to better maturity, and that they themselves might come with vigour to the fullness of their times, and struggle successfully and easily with the pangs of child-birth. He freed them from softness (*thrypsin*) and delicacy (*skatraphian*) and all effeminacy by accustoming the maidens no less than the youths to wear tunics (*gymnas pompeuein*) only in processions, and at certain festivals to dance and sing when the young men were present as spectators" (Plut. *Lyk.* 14.2; translated by B. Perrin).

The fact that Spartan women engaged in physical exercise (at least until marriage) is mentioned by all the earlier authors. It seems that in this case the main source of Plutarch's inspiration is Xenophon. Yet the general remark that Lycurgus "ordered the female sex to exercise no less than the male" and created "competitions in racing and trials of strength" gains here a very concrete form. We are told of races, wrestling, discus and javelin throwing. The military aspect of some of those sports might be pointed out, but Plutarch is clearly thinking of *teknopoiia*. What is more, the girls *gymnai pompeuein* just like the boys. The skimpiness of clothing, exposing the boys and girls' physical qualities typical to their young age, is not at all surprising. What is surprising are the problems which scholars seem to have with the "nudity" of Spartan women. The girls were dancing or singing in the presence of boys, and also they were instilling correct norms of behaviour in the youngsters by praising or condemning them. This

[56] Powell 1988, 223.

seems similar to the folk dancing songs of old; as long as not treated deadly seriously, it does not seem unthinkable:

"There they sometimes even mocked and railed good-naturedly at any youth who had misbehaved himself; and again they would sing the praises of those who had shown themselves worthy, and so inspire the young men with great ambition and ardour. For he who was thus extolled for his valour and held in honour among the maidens, went away exalted by their praises; while the sting of their playful raillery was no less sharp than that of serious admonitions, especially as the kings and senators, together with the rest of the citizens, were all present at the spectacle" (Plut. *Lyk.* 14.3; translated by B. Perrin).

Pomeroy, citing precisely the *Life of Lycurgus* by Plutarch, writes: "Spartan women were encouraged and trained to speak in public, praising the brave, reviling cowards and bachelors".[57] In her opinion, "That Spartan women were taught to speak and were encouraged to do so distinguishes them from Spartan men, who did not debate in law courts or in their General Assembly, and from Athenians and other Greek women, who were expected to remain silent and by no means to speak to men".[58] It seems to me that the source does not confirm the thesis. On the one hand, I am reminded of Charlie Chaplin's un-politically correct statement regarding women and the silent film, and on the other hand it is not a secret that women do speak, and speak a lot; there is not much to teach them there. And although perhaps it is not Xanthippe, the wife of Socrates, that was the ideal woman of the ancient world, the male-oriented ideal of the silent woman, as articulated by Aristotle (*Pol*. 1260a28–31) and Xenophon (*Oik*. 7.10), may belong to the sphere of male wishful thinking.

Quite contrary to what it might seem, young women' skimpy attire (not nudity) is conducive to modesty, habituates them to simplicity and – since their body is to be exposed to public view – makes them careful to retain its health and beauty:

"Nor was there anything disgraceful in this scant clothing of the maidens (*he de gymnosis ton parthenon*), for modesty attended them, and wantonness was banished; nay, rather, it produced in them habits of simplicity and an ardent desire for health and beauty of body. It gave also to woman-kind a taste of lofty sentiment, for they felt that they too had a place in the arena of bravery and ambition". (Plut. *Lyk.* 14.4; translated by B. Perrin).

And all this was dictated not, as we might infer from the reasoning so far, by the desire to create a female type worthy of a Spartan male, but, as demonstrated by the "example" that crowns Plutarch's narrative, in order for the women to give birth to brave males or, to use Pomeroy's interesting phrase, produce "healthy children for healthy mothers".[59]

[57] Pomeroy 2002, 9. Cf. 92, 137.
[58] Pomeroy 2002, 135.
[59] Pomeroy 2002, 136.

"Wherefore they were led to think and speak as Gorgo, the wife of Leonidas, is said to have done. When some foreign woman, as it would seem, said to her: "You Spartan women are the only ones who rule their men," she answered: "Yes, we are the only ones that give birth to men" (Plut. *Lyk*. 14.4; translated by B. Perrin).

Later Plutarch speaks of young men being encouraged with the sight of scantily dressed maidens; this, according to Powell, "we may take seriously", because of, in his opinion, "Sparta's attachment to the persuasive use of the visual image"[60]:

"Moreover, there were incentives to marriage in these things, I mean such things as the appearance of the maidens without much clothing in processions and athletic contests where young men were looking on, for these were drawn on by necessity, 'not geometrical, but the sort of necessity which lovers know,' as Plato says". (Plut. *Lyk*. 15.1; translated by B. Perrin).

Further on there is information regarding bachelors and finally – marriage:

"For their marriages the women were carried off by force, not when they were small and unfit for wedlock, but when they were in full bloom and wholly ripe. After the woman was thus carried off, the bride's-maid, so called, took her in charge, cut her hair off close to the head, put a man's cloak and sandals on her, and laid her down on a pallet, on the floor, alone, in the dark. Then the bridegroom, not flown with wine nor enfeebled by excesses, but composed and sober, after supping at his public messtable as usual, slipped stealthily into the room where the bride lay, loosed her virgin's zone, and bore her in his arms to the marriage-bed. Then, after spending a short time with his bride, he went away composedly to his usual quarters, there to sleep with the other young men. And so he continued to do from that time on, spending his days with his comrades, and sleeping with them at night, but visiting his bride by stealth and with every precaution, full of dread and fear lest any of her household should be aware of his visits, his bride also contriving and conspiring with him that they might have stolen interviews as occasion offered. And this they did not for a short time only, but long enough for some of them to become fathers before they had looked upon their own wives by daylight. Such interviews riot only brought into exercise self-restraint and moderation, but united husbands and wives when their bodies were full of creative energy and their affections new and fresh, not when they were sated and dulled by unrestricted intercourse; and there was always left behind in their hearts some residual spark of mutual longing and delight" (Plut. *Lyk*. 15.3–5; translated by B. Perrin).

The "Spartan wedding *à la* Plutarch" is a graceful object of scholarly fantasy. As shrewdly observed by Helena P. Schrader, "A classic example of the need for common sense in viewing the Spartan marriage is provided by Plutarch's 'Life of Lycurgus'".[61] This is indeed a true challenge to common sense, although a multitude of scholars tends to treat Plutarch's "ritual" with all seriousness. Considering the entire tale to be an exclusive product of the fabulous Sparta, I may only refer the reader to my article, where I demonstrate that marriages in Sparta were really not settled in this manner.[62]

[60] Powell 1988, 248.
[61] Schrader 2010.
[62] Kulesza 2008, 135–166.

In scholarly literature, the *harpage* is viewed as obviously the ordinary manner of marrying; yet no other author beside Plutarch, before or after him, ever mentioned it. Plutarch truly knows something others did not. Of course, he also knows the writings of his predecessors; but even here he somewhat modifies Xenophon's account:[63]

"After giving marriage such traits of reserve and decorum, he none the less freed men from the empty and womanish passion of jealous possession, by making it honourable for them, while keeping the marriage relation free from all wanton irregularities, to share with other worthy men in the begetting of children, laughing to scorn those who regard such common privileges as intolerable, and resort to murder and war rather than grant them. For example, an elderly man with a young wife, if he looked with favour and esteem on some fair and noble young man, might introduce him to her, and adopt her offspring by such a noble father as his own. And again, a worthy man who admired some woman for the fine children that she bore her husband and the modesty of her behaviour as a wife, might enjoy her favours, if her husband would consent, thus planting, as it were, in a soil of beautiful fruitage, and begetting for himself noble sons, who would have the blood of noble men in their veins" (Plut. *Lyk*. 15.6–7; translated by B. Perrin).

It is beyond doubt that the key aim of all those manoeuvres was the production of offspring. Spartan women, just like the Athenian ones, were to be "mothers of legitimate children". At this point Plutarch is not interested whether they fulfilled also the other condition mentioned by Pseudo-Demosthenes ([Dem.] 59.122), that is were "faithful housekeepers", but earlier he used the name *Despoina* to describe a Spartiate woman (Plut. *Lyk.* 14.1).

Whatever we may think of those practices, Plutarch immediately (perhaps to preclude any doubts) assures us that adultery did not happen in Sparta:

"For in the first place, Lycurgus did not regard sons as the peculiar property of their fathers, but rather as the common property of the state, and therefore would not have his citizens spring from random parentage, but from the best there was. In the second place, he saw much folly and vanity in what other peoples enacted for the regulation of these matters; in the breeding of dogs and horses they insist on having the best sires which money or favour can secure, but they keep their wives under lock and key, demanding that they have children by none but themselves, even though they be foolish, or infirm, or diseased; as though children of bad stock did not show their badness to those first who possessed and reared them, and children of good stock, contrariwise, their goodness. The freedom which thus prevailed at that time in marriage relations was aimed at physical and political wellbeing, and was far removed from the licentiousness which was afterwards attributed to their women, so much so that adultery was wholly unknown among them. And a saying is reported of one Geradas, a Spartan of very ancient type, who, on being asked by a stranger what the punishment for adulterers was among them, answered: "Stranger, there is no adulterer among us". "Suppose, then", replied the stranger, "there should be one". "A bull" said Geradas, "would be his forfeit, a bull so large that it could stretch over Mount Taygetus and drink from the river Eurotas". Then the stranger was astonished and said: "But how could there be a bull so large?" To which Geradas replied, with a smile: "But how could there be an adulterer in Sparta?" Such, then, are the accounts we find of their marriages" (Plut. *Lyk*. 15.8–10; translated by B. Perrin).

[63] On this topic, see Kulesza 2008, 147.

One would feel like saying: *Bonus dormitat Plutarchus*. Nevertheless, this is a part of the stereotype of the fabulous Sparta.

According to Plutarch, Spartan women engage in physical exercise in their youth: they run, wrestle, throw the discus and javelin, and thanks to this they give birth easily and breed healthy offspring. They play sports attired in garments which reveal they physical advantages. Their sight and their words stimulate young men and encourage them to worthy actions (what actions may those be? wherefrom do young women get their knowledge of young men?). When abducted, a Spartan woman undergoes certain rituals, and then daringly cooperates with her partner, coupling with him during illicit trysts. This would be all, if not for the fact that further on Plutarch introduces the impotent oldster and the man who is perhaps functional, but for some reason unenthusiastic about his wife. "Lycurgus" envisages a "way out" for both. I am consciously exaggerating in this summary of Plutarch's thoughts, in order to underscore the absurdity of the entire report. Yet what follows goes, in my opinion, way beyond absurd.

A Spartan mother – the birth of a myth

"The Spartan women", Redfield writes, "indeed come before us as the fierce enforcers of the warrior code". Later on he notes that "while the women enforce the code on others, they seem to be subject to no code themselves".[64] The second observation pertains to the Spartan women known to us; the first – to the women from fabulous Sparta, especially the heroines of the *Sayings of Spartan Women*. The *Apophtegmata* are of varying quality.[65] Some may refer to facts; others reflect, in a concise but striking form, some important aspect of reality; but there are many which create a new, fabulous reality. A part of this reality is the image of the unnatural mother who kills her son or rejoices at his death. Dysfunctional parents must have existed in Sparta, for instance Theano, who had a hand in her son's death, the probably non-historical Epitadeus, whose hatred of his son destroyed the Spartan *kosmos*, and the similarly fictitious sister-in-law of Lycurgus; after his brother died, she offered to secretly abort her unborn child in return for the promise that Lycurgus would marry her (Plut. *Lyk.* 3.2).

The *Apophtegmata* are directly or indirectly present in many texts by Plutarch. The *Sayings of Spartan Women* offer the image of the fabulous Spartan woman which until then was never so comprehensive[66]. From the point of view

[64] J. Redfield 1977/1978, 149.

[65] See the observations of Tigerstedt 1974, 16–30. A brief discussion of issues linked with the *Sayings of Spartan Women* is found in Figueira 2010, 273–296, with further literature.

[66] On the earlier occurrences and origin of motives found in the *Sayings*, see Tigerstedt1974, 27.

of the future, it is a constituting image. At the same time, the *Apopthegmata* are a treasure-trove of diverse pieces of information which permit scholars to present their own visions of Sparta. Alfred Bradford correctly encouraged writers "not force our own opinions on the witnesses", but even he wrote that "Male Spartan attitudes can be summed up by the story of Leonidas and his wife Gorgo. As he was leaving for Thermopylae, she asked him what she was supposed to do. He replied, "Mary well and multiply" (Plut. *Mor.* [*ap* Lac. 240D (6)" (cf. *Mor.* 225a51. Leonidas 2).[67] The historical Gorgo did not heed the exhortation addressed to the fabulous Gorgo. This is an example of an anecdote constructed upon a legend and concurrently an illustration of the scholarly practice of piecing the puzzle according to subjective needs. Incidentally, a *univira* was probably not a Spartan ideal.

The messages conveyed by the female politicos of the *Sayings*, "fierce enforcers of the warrior code", are interesting. Let it once again be noted that in the *Sayings* there are no Spartan heroines devoted to the homeland and ready to give their lives for it. This is to some extent a reflection of the reality. Such Spartan women are practically not known at all.

The *Sayings* portray Spartan women ready to devote lives for the homeland, but their sons lives, not their own. Thus Spartan women appear in a new role: "Another, as she handed son his shield, exhorted him, saying, 'Either with this or upon this' (Plut. *Sayings of Spartan Women*, 241s16 cf. Stob. 3.7.30; Val. Max. 2.7 ext 2); "Another, as her son was going forth to war, said, as she gave the shield into his hands, 'This shield your father kept always safe for you; do you, therefore, keep it safe, or cease to live'" (241 17). By the by, nowhere else is it mentioned that shields were given to Spartans by their mothers (and, in addition, precisely on the point of departing to war).

Worse still, women from the fabulous Sparta can even kill a son who returned from the war alive: "Because Damatria heard that her son was a coward and not worthy of her, she killed him when he arrived. This is the epigram about her: *His mother killed Damatrius who broke the laws, / She a Spartan lady, he a Spartan youth*". (*Sayings of Spartan Women,* 240f2 cf. 241.1; 241b5; Tymnes AP 7.433).

The fact that the name of the deceased, as Plutarch himself writes (*Lyk.* 27.3), appeared only on the grave (or rather cenotaph) of a hero fallen in battle, seems of small importance in comparison to the fact that mothers could not only revile, but actually kill those not courageous enough: "Another, when her sons had run away from a battle and come to her, said: 'Wretched runaway slaves, where have you come to? Or do you plan to steal back in here whence you emerged?' And she pulled up her clothes and exposed herself to them" (*Sayings*

[67] Bradford 1986, 13–18. On the image of Gorgo in the *Sayings*, see Chapman 2011, 48–49.

of Spartan Women, 241b4). Regarding this, Pomeroy, who believes that Spartan women punished their sons with death, writes: "Spartan women were renowned for enthusiastically sacrificing their sons for the welfare of the state".[68]

Spartan mothers grieve only for heroes: "Another, hearing that her son had fallen at his post, said: "Let the cowards be mourned. I, however, bury you without a tear, my son and Sparta's"(*Sayings of Spartan Women*, 241.2). It turns out they even write letters to "boys at the front", not at all assuring them of their love; Pomeroy considers this "not unthinkable":[69] "Another, hearing that her son had been saved and had fled from the enemy, wrote to him: 'A bad rumor about you is circulating. Either absolve yourself at once, or cease to exist'" (*Sayings of Spartan Women*, 241a3; 241d10).

Sparta is the Spartan woman's only love. It is for her that they give birth to sons: "As a woman was burying her son, a shabby old woman came up to her and said, 'You poor woman, what a misfortune!' 'No, by the two goddesses, what a good fortune,' she replied, 'because I bore him so that he might die for Sparta, and that is what has happened for me'" (*Sayings of Spartan Women*, 241.8).

Could anything like this ever happen?[70] Perhaps. Let us recall Pavko Morozov, who, well trained by Stalin's propaganda, reported his own father as the enemy of communism; although it is not impossible that this tale was concocted by the totalitarian propaganda machine to set an example worthy of imitation. Contrary to appearances, "Lycurgus" had very little in common with Lenin or Comrade Stalin, or the Spartan *kosmos* with the Soviet system. But it was not only Plutarch to construct a tall structure of legendary elements. We hear of Spartan mothers who on the battlefield checked whether their sons received mortal wounds from the front or from behind (Aelian, *VH* 12.21), meaning that in the first case they died honourably, in the latter as cowards. Are we to imagine cartloads of Spartan mothers travelling round the entire Greece in order to see where exactly the fallen men were wounded? But the world of imagination knows no boundaries. The words of Tyrtaeus were amazingly freely reinterpreted here. In any case, in the legends Spartan women are doing what Spartan women from the fabulous Sparta ought to be doing, and what their historical precursors never did. It is an illusion that the *Sayings* reliably confirm the thesis that "The social code for Spartiate males involved monitoring by women", as Thomas J. Figueira seems to believe.[71] In reality, to employ the *Sayings* in the description of the historical Sparta means a step backwards; by this, we repeat the error of ear-

[68] Pomeroy 2002, 57.
[69] Pomeroy 2002, 8.
[70] Bella Zweig (1993, 45–46), for instance, seems to believe this.
[71] Figueira 2010, 283.

lier scholars, who in recreating the historical Sparta often gave precedence to the fabulous Sparta.

The *Sayings* provided the foundation for the myth of a Spartan mother, but the direction of this myth changed in the later eras. Unnatural mothers from the *Sayings* transmuted into fierce enforcers of the patriotic code, who not only demanded the greatest sacrifice from their sons, but brought up their offspring in the true spirit of patriotism and themselves were ready for self-sacrifice.

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Abstract

In the ancient sources, European tradition and modern-day research, the fabulous Sparta and the historical Sparta coexist, overlapping to the extent that they are often very difficult to tell apart. Spartan women are an important element of both. Scholarly analyses usually present a static image of Spartan women. Yet Sparta itself was changing, and the position, and the image, of its women was undergoing transformations with it. The gradual "mythologisation" of a Spartan woman finally led to her being presented as the epitome of Spartan ideals. The author of the article confronts the images of Spartan women provided by Aristotle, Xenophon and the tragedy and comedy writers with the current state of knowledge regarding the historical Spartan women of the 6th /5th and 4th/3rd century BC. This confrontation shows how the myth of the extraordinary Spartan woman was growing, to reach its ultimate variant in Plutarch, where it finally emerged as the previously unknown, famed image of the "Spartan mother".