The Apophthegmata Lakonika and Greek Perceptions
Identifying Authentic Spartan Traits from the Spartan mirage

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Abstract

There exists within the corpus of extant Greek and Roman literature a work by Plutarch, the *Apophthegmata Lakonika* that has been looked upon dubiously by scholars. However, the scholarly neglect of the *Sayings of the Spartans* has created another unnecessary barrier to gaining a better understanding of the Spartans. Although heavily influenced by the Spartan mirage, the *Apophthegmata Lakonika* represents a valuable source of insight into the mindset and personality of the average Spartan. The intent of this study is to examine key selections of the *Sayings* and comparing them to historical events that either reflect, or contradict, the values expressed in the *Sayings*. This study will focus on five fundamental areas: patriotism, nerves, obedience, contempt for wealth, and the Spartan relationship with death. The intended approach is to examine several *Sayings* that discuss each value, and then compare that evidence with the historical record to confirm or deny their authenticity as Spartan traits. By dissecting the *Sayings* and examining them in this way, we can begin to dissect features of the Spartan mirage that have developed over the course of thousands of years of scholarship. We can begin to divide the fictitious and fallacious aspects of the Spartan mirage from authentic fact, and in doing so gain a new avenue with which to interact with Spartan culture. The implications of such a study are wide-reaching. By affirming the validity of the *Apophthegmata Lakonika* we can both open it to further examination as well as reinvigorate an otherwise neglected area of scholarly study. The name “Spartan” has always echoed with authority within the ancient tradition – and such an echo deserves its due within academic scholarship, rather than its status as near anathema for much of the latter half of the 20th century.
Acknowledgements

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Abbreviations and Conventions

Ancient authors and works are abbreviated according to those used in H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek English Lexicon*, Oxford 1968. For Greek names I have used spellings which follow the Greek as closely as possible, keeping the traditional forms for such names as Thucydides and Plutarch. All *Apophthegmata Lakonika* excerpts are my translations, but other translations are from their corresponding editions in my bibliography. Finally, the term “Spartan” is used to refer to an individual hailing from Sparta (much like a “German” is used to refer to a man or woman from Germany), while “Spartiate” is used specifically to refer to male citizens of Sparta.
Chapter One
The Timeless Ideal: Plutarch and the Spartan mirage

Plutarch and his Fortune

When one considers the vast history of Greece – from the Bronze Age into the Classical and Hellenistic periods – two names have always dominated academic scholarship: Athens and Sparta. However, Sparta, until recently, has been somewhat neglected by modern academic scholarship (i.e. Post-WWII). Although partly due to a lack of archaeological materials left behind by this famously austere society, the dearth of literature on Sparta has a much older cause. The seeming lack of scholarly interest is largely the result of a significant absence in our ancient sources concerning Sparta and her customs. This gap in the historical record is so complete, that it almost seems as if the Spartan state intended it that way. By restricting the movement of information, the Spartan state fostered speculation, and ultimately caused the emergence of a perceived reality, or rather, the Spartan mirage. Over time this mirage would come to be accepted as reality by their fellow Greeks. They created the spectre of an austere society defended by fanatically patriotic warriors famous for their ability to withstand physical hardship. With little effort, the Spartan state was able to set the groundwork for every victory they had against their Greek rivals before their armies ever met on the battlefield.

As a result of this mirage, and the restriction on outside access, we have few sources that shed light on an authentic Sparta. In order to gain better insight into this mirage, and what true Spartans may have been like, we need to consider the mirage more closely. As with all gossip and intrigue, it relies on a kernel of truth hidden deep within the exaggeration and invention. Our best authority on the mirage, albeit unintentionally, is Plutarch, whose writing stands out as a solid amalgam of this mirage. Plutarch himself grew up at a center of historical change. His birthplace, Chaironeia, was the site where Philip of
Macedon bent Greece to his will in 338 BCE, and where Sulla defeated Mithridates in 86 BCE. From his birth, ca. 40-50 CE, he was very much ‘steeped in history.’

Coming from a rich family, Plutarch was able to take part in the social and intellectual life of his city. He studied in Athens under the philosopher Ammonius, a well-known Platonist and veteran strategos. While studying he also gained Athenian citizen rights, but he was not content simply return to Chaironeia. Instead he travelled the known world, visiting such areas as Egypt and Rome in his journeys. While in Rome he lectured for eager audiences, and while in Egypt he visited Alexandria, sparking a lifelong interest in Egyptian culture, especially in Isis and Osiris. Returning to Greece, Plutarch also spent some time at Delphi, becoming a citizen there as well. While serving as a priest of Apollo at Delphi, and in a minor political role in Chaironeia, Plutarch died around 120 CE.

Beyond this life of travelling, religious office, and minor political affairs, Plutarch spent his life doing what he loved: writing. What Plutarch is most famous for are his Parallel Lives of famous Greeks and Romans. Of these twenty-three pairs of Lives, written between 96 CE and his death, all survive but one pair. The first pair of this series – pairing Epaminondas, the Theban freedom fighter, and a Scipio – was lost. Plutarch’s scholarship was founded on a profound interest in the character of famous individuals and what we could learn from them. He wrote these Lives so that these notable Greeks and Romans could show how they deserved their fame, and thus inspire emulation of those traits.

When Plutarch set to the task of writing, however, contemporary scholarship was a very different concept. Today we are spoiled by the vast availability of resources, with hundreds of texts accessible at

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1 Russell (2001), pg. 1, and also Duff (1999), pg. 1.
2 As evidenced by the fact that his family had horses – a very expensive pass-time. See Russell (1999), pg. 4.
3 The Strategos position was one of several annually elected positions in Greek city state structure. Typically they would be given control of military matters. They would be the commander-in-chief in times of war.
4 Russell (2001), pg. 4-5, and Clough (1864), pg. IX.
5 Russell (2001), pg. 7.
7 Duff (1999), pg. 2.
8 Talbert (2005), pg. XVII.
the click of a button. In fact, nowadays most of Plutarch’s works, including the *Lives*, can be found online. Although these are typically out-of-copyright editions of his text, they still provide access to the *Lives*, the *Synkriseis* (Comparisons), and many of his other works.\(^9\) This same process was much more trying for Plutarch, as he had to rely entirely on his memory. Although sources typically had to be repeated second or third-hand, due to the limited availability of texts for circulation, Plutarch had no shortage of sources for his studies. Plutarch always endeavoured to the best of his ability to ensure that his account had a strong and varied source basis. The scholarship of Plutarch’s time was filled with amateur scientists and polymaths who had some expertise is many different fields, but typically only very little. In many cases they were more scientific enthusiasts than educated and trained scholars. They were by no means experts in any of their fields, but happily discussed their interests. Plutarch is a clear example of this trend, and his writing shows a wide range of disciplines that he had a basic knowledge, rather than trained expertise. This was the kind of scholarly climate in which Plutarch was educated, and its touch can be seen in his work.\(^10\)

More specifically, certain authors within this climate had direct influences on Plutarch. Homer was a definite influence on Plutarch, as he was on all ancient authors.\(^11\) As a fundamental part of Greek education, Homer was a long-standing pillar of Mediterranean culture, and his influence can best be seen in Plutarch’s battle scenes.\(^12\) He also made wide use of Herodotos, employing a similar, yet slightly-varied approach to myth. While Herodotos was comfortable outlining, and then debunking, mythical stories, Plutarch tried to stay within the bonds of decency, giving these mythical stories ample explanation without critiquing them too severely.\(^13\) Aristophanes too was a big influence, and Plutarch was not afraid

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\(^9\) The *Synkriseis* were passages in the *Lives* where Plutarch compared the characters of his two paired subjects. See Humble (2010), pg. IX.

\(^10\) Russell (2001), pg. 42-43.


\(^12\) See for example Plu. *Art.* 8.1-14.1

\(^13\) Hdt. 1.1-1.7 – see for example Herodotos’ description of the Io, Europa, or Argonaut myths, compared to Plu. *Mor.* 351D-358E – on Isis and Osiris.
to draw on him for anecdotal evidence concerning Perikles and Nikias.\textsuperscript{14} He also admired Thucydides – although at times Thucydides lacked all of the necessary details desired by Plutarch, using him for his tales of Perikles, Nikias, and Alkibiades.\textsuperscript{15} Unlike his predecessors, however, Plutarch was unique in that he never had a chance to interact with his subjects.\textsuperscript{16}

This in itself is the main reason Plutarch was neglected by 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} century historians. The lack of contact between subject and biographer was not an ideal circumstance in their eyes, nor did Plutarch’s stance concerning historical events help. Plutarch was not interested in simply recording events as they happened, but rather his interest was in his subject’s character:

> For neither is it histories we are writing, but Lives, nor is there by any means display of merit or vice in the most outstanding actions, but often a trivial matter as well as a remark and some joke have offered a better illustration of character than clashes with countless casualties and the biggest battalions and sieges of cities.\textsuperscript{17}

This disregard for historical events has frustrated historians who have turned to Plutarch for details about the careers of his subjects. Plutarch was interested purely in details concerning character, rather than events, when he wrote. Thus, he used the historical narrative as an outline around which he could weave the anecdotes he found most telling for the exhibition of character.\textsuperscript{18} For him, the historical narrative was the vessel, and character the goal. Together, the lack of contact with his subjects and his interest in character instead of historic details rendered his work unappealing to most 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} century historians. They were more interested in finding the facts concerning events, rather than viewing Plutarch’s work as literature.\textsuperscript{19}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} Scardigli (1995), pg. 3-4.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Scardigli (1995), pg. 4.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Stadter (1992A), pg. 3.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Plu. Alex. 1.1 in Talbert (2005), pg. 135.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Scardigli (1995), pg. 25.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Stadter (1992A), pg. 2.
\end{itemize}
Xenophon and Plato also had a clear influence on Plutarch. Xenophon’s work on Agesilaos would have been especially significant for his life of the Spartan king.\textsuperscript{20} Plutarch also absorbed some of Xenophon’s admiration of the Spartans, unavoidable when Xenophon represented such a fruitful source of information.\textsuperscript{21} Plato, on the other hand, instilled in Plutarch his focus on personality that he himself exhibited when discussing Socrates. Plutarch was, after all, educated by the well-known Platonist Ammonius,\textsuperscript{22} and so the fact that he inherited this interest in personality is no big surprise.\textsuperscript{23}

This focus on the personality of his subjects stemmed from Plutarch’s desire to instruct and improve his audience. While he did not believe that one could escape his convictions, he believed that one could always improve oneself through education.\textsuperscript{24} This is why he wrote the Lives – to act as examples for others to follow and emulate.\textsuperscript{25} While discussing Perikles, Plutarch came to the realization that, while great works of art do not typically inspire emulation:

> Virtue, however, instantly produces by her actions a frame of mind in which the deed is admired and the doer rivalled at one and the same moment...Nobility exercises an active attraction and immediately creates active impulse, not merely forming the eyewitness’ personality by imitation but producing a settled moral choice from the simple historical knowledge of the action.\textsuperscript{26}

Elsewhere Plutarch reveals his motivations:

> I began writing biographies for others, but I have continued and grown attached to them for myself: the virtues of these great men serve me as a mirror in which I may see how to adjust and make more handsome my own life.\textsuperscript{27}

Plutarch believed that personal improvement could best be attained through the emulation of great men.

While historical scholarship has tended to shy away from similar hero worship in the past few decades,
Plutarch’s motivations can best be understood from this viewpoint. When reading Plutarch we need to remember, as Arthur Hugh Clough put it, that Plutarch “is a moralist rather than a historian.”28 His value does not lie only in his historical narrative, but in his examination of personal character, actions, and motivations. His mind was constantly preoccupied with Aristotelian ethics and high Platonic theories upon which “formed the religion of the educated population of his time.”29 This is something that modern scholars seem to routinely forget about Plutarch. After all, he was writing to educate and entertain, not to accurately record events. In both his Moralia and the Lives, Plutarch was creating a model for his audience to learn from and emulate.

Despite this focus on personality over historical fact, the Lives were very popular, and not just within academic circles. Throughout history they have inspired individuals, such as Niccolò Macchiavelli, Shakespeare, Ralph Waldo Emerson, or Friedrich Nietzsche, to name but a few who found inspiration in Plutarch’s work. Shakespeare used the Lives as a template upon which to build some of his most famous plays,30 while Macchiavelli and his ideas concerning leadership are clearly influenced by Plutarch.31

Plutarch at first enjoyed such popularity because he offered a view of the classical world not otherwise seen from a broad focus on events. His belief that history should teach the reader was shared by his audience, and they became students of the moral values he sought to instill. Alongside this shared view on history, Plutarch held other views that appealed to different audiences in different periods. For example, his emphasis on the virtues of humanity, calmness before adversity, and preference for enlightened monarchs made him a favourite in the Renaissance period. In the 18th and 19th centuries he was also a favourite of liberals and revolutionaries, because of his opposition to despotism. This was the

28 Clough (1864), pg. XVII.
29 Clough (1864), pg. XVII.
30 For example Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar, see Stadter (1992A), pg. 1.
31 For example, Machiavelli’s advocating of extreme measures to maintain control echoes Plutarch’s description, and the contemporary belief that morally reprehensible measures could be necessary to effect lasting change. See Stadter (1992A), pg. 1 and Rawson (1969), pg. 141, 144-145.
typical pattern for successive generations of his audience; each generation would find their own meaning and identify their own ideals within Plutarch.\footnote{Duff (1999), pg. 4.} Each idea originated from his focus on morals and personality, but altered slightly by their own pre-dispositions. Within his works they each found something to inspire them, developing their own ideas, but rarely were these the same between generations.

This wide literary appeal gave Plutarch considerable fame, and he came to represent a persistent influence on later writers. In the early Christian period, he was a source of inspiration for both pagans and Christians. Both groups saw in his works a shared morality; even early Christians, who had a strong disdain for all things pagan, could find in his morals a worthy example to follow.\footnote{Morris (2012), pg. 5.} One such author, John of Salisbury (c. 1120-1180), an influential author in the Medieval period, found such exemplary morality in Plutarch that he included them in his \textit{Policratus} (c. 1159). The \textit{Policratus} was a compilation of \textit{exempla}, exemplary individuals he judged worthy of emulation. One of these individuals, in fact, was Lykourgos, Sparta’s primary lawgiver. For Christians, Lykourgos was compatible with church thought: he rejected material wealth, and advocated stable government.\footnote{Morris (2012), pg. 5.}

From the time his writings were first circulating, they gained considerable long-term fame, continuing to be read and valued throughout the later imperial period. His work also featured prominently in education – Athenian schools quickly adopted his writings as their primary textbook.\footnote{Russell (2001), pg. 144.} In the Medieval Period, Christian writers searched through the writings of pagan authors like Plutarch, searching for Christian tenets in pre-Christian works. While they found evidence of a messianic prophecy in Virgil’s \textit{Fourth Eclogue} that they believed was linked to Christianity, in Plutarch they found the afore-mentioned shared morality.\footnote{Russell (2001), pg. 144-145.} This congruency meant that Plutarch would remain a standard reading in Christian...
education into the 6th, 7th, and even 9th centuries, his work compiled and reproduced in anthologies by his admirers.\(^{37}\)

To these admirers, such as the Byzantine monk Maximus Planudes (c. 1255-1305), Plutarch owes a great deal. It was largely due to this copying of his text in 1296 that the Plutarchian corpus was preserved for the future. Plutarch, along with many other ancient writings, had been lost in the West, but survived in the Byzantine Empire thanks to such efforts as these. Two generations afterward, in fact, translations began to appear in the West.\(^{38}\) This Western revival brought Plutarch into mainstream 14th century culture. As the 14th gave way to the 15th century, translations of Plutarch proliferated, although radically abridged and filled with errors. By 1470 the *Lives* had been translated into Latin, followed soon after by the *Moralia*.\(^{39}\)

From here the *Moralia* was soon translated into vernacular languages in the early 16th century, such as Italian, French, Spanish, German and English. In 1570 a French edition was translated by Jacques Amyot, working from a Greek text, and would become the standard by which others were measured. English translations would follow it based solely on Amyot’s edition, translating from the French into English (the standard practice at the time). Although Amyot was criticized for the freedoms he took with the text – adapting it for comprehension – his edition would long remain the standard.\(^{40}\)

After Amyot’s edition, two English translations, Philemon Holland’s (1552-1637), in 1603, and John Dryden’s (1631 – 1700), in 1683 would follow as consecutive standard editions. Holland’s edition was quickly replaced due to changes in the vernacular, while Dryden’s, however, would remain the standard edition into the 19th c., when it too required revision (a common enough problem, considering that the modern languages are forever in flux). This proliferation of translations was a clear sign that

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\(^{37}\) Such as in the anthologies of Stobaeus (c. 5th c) or Sopater of Apameia (c. 4th c). See Russell (2001), pg. 146-147.

\(^{38}\) Russell (2001), pg. 147.

\(^{39}\) Russell (2001), pg. 147.

\(^{40}\) Russell (2001), pg. 149, 151-152.
Plutarch’s fortunes in Western academia were still high. However, it was in the 19th century that Plutarch’s fortunes, as I mentioned briefly above, took a turn for the worst. Although Plutarch had enjoyed a long-lived popularity in the West, the 19th century saw significant changes in his normal audience. Social values, which had previously reinforced Plutarch’s moralism, shifted. The mores of the Victorian age no longer coincided with Plutarch’s; he had thrived in a society more or less controlled by an aristocratic elite. Without a landed nobility to rely on, and no ruling class to educate, interest in Plutarch waned.

Plutarch continued at this low ebb for much of the 20th century. It did not help that changes in historical scholarship had injured Plutarch’s credibility as a source, as scholars of that time valued facts over anecdotes. Plutarch was more focused on teaching moral values than on recording historical events, and anecdotes were his preferred narrative feature over detailed historical accounts. As modern scholars were engaged in a careful survey of their sources for historical fact, Plutarch held no interest for them.

It has only been in the last half-century that Plutarch’s fortunes have changed. The current generation of scholars has come to see the Plutarch’s value as a creative artist – treating his work as not only history, but also as a work of literature.

The Plutarchian corpus, therefore, has seen its ups and downs over the centuries. One of his works in particular that deserves scholarly focus is his *Moralia*. This refers to a body of more than 70 individual works that are typically referred to together as the *Moralia*. This collection is largely the result of Byzantine efforts to preserve his works. While some of these works are of questionable origin, and others spurious, some of them hold great value. One of these valuable texts is the *Apophthegmata Lakonika – the Sayings of the Spartans* – though we cannot be entirely certain of its origin. It remains a matter of debate.

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41 Russell (2001), pg. 159-160.
43 Duff (1999), pg. 6.
44 Stadter (1992A), pg. 2.
45 Duff (1999), pg. 8.
46 Duff (1999), pg. 1.
47 Russell (2001), pg. 20.
whether the *Sayings* represent materials collected by Plutarch himself or another scholar. Francois Ollier, who will be discussed in greater detail below, believed the *Sayings* were Plutarch’s creation, while others believed them to be spurious.\(^\text{48}\) There can be no denying, however, that many of these *Sayings* also appear in Plutarch’s *Lives*.\(^\text{49}\) This means that it can be reasonably assumed that they represent either his own research material, or another’s work that incorporated his own, but they are definitely contemporary to him.

We can assume this based on some simple deductive work based on the scholarly practices of the time. The first theory concerning the authenticity of the *Sayings* is that they were compiled after Plutarch wrote the *Lives*. This would explain why some of the *Sayings* do not appear in the *Lives* and others are nearly identical to excerpts from the *Lives*. Thus Plutarch, or someone from the same period as Plutarch, compiled the *Sayings*. The second theory is that they represent Plutarch’s own research compiled before he wrote the *Lives*. However, the common feature between these two theories is that the *Sayings* are contemporary to Plutarch’s time. The fact that they were attributed to him gives significant credence to this idea. Even if the work was not his, it was attributed to him, which was not uncommon in antiquity. It happened fairly often that someone’s entire collection of books would be attributed to them upon their death, or one of their students might attribute their work to them, most notably with Galen or the Hippocratic corpus.\(^\text{50}\) Whatever the case may be, it is clear enough from the textual transmission that there was not a long enough period between Plutarch’s death and this attribution for it to have emerged long after. As a result, they represent an authentic view of the growing Spartan mirage during Plutarch’s time. This provides us with a snapshot of the Spartan mirage to examine, encapsulated as it is in the *Apophthegmata Lakonika*.

\(^{48}\) Hammond (1979), pg. 99.

\(^{49}\) Geiger (1995), pg. 175.

\(^{50}\) Talbert (2005), pg. 137.
The *Apophthegmata Lakonika* consists of some 400 sayings by 68 named Spartans and 72 anonymous ones. These *Sayings* consist of anecdotes, or quotations, of varying length that contain perceptions of how Spartans were believed to act and think. Many of them are attributed to famous Spartans, or royals, who were well known in the Greek world. Of this corpus of sayings, the most frequent speaker is Agesilaos, with 80 sayings attributed to him alone. Lykourgos follows with 30 sayings and Agis (son of Archidamos) with 18. It is also noticeable that only 4 Spartan women are named, although there are 30 sayings attributed to un-named Spartan women.51 These sayings, many of which are witty ripostes by clever Spartans, are intended to reflect the excellent features of the Spartan character – its true value lying in the fact that it offers us an idea of how Sparta’s admirers saw her citizens.

As this work was contemporary with Plutarch, these *Sayings* also coincided with a Spartan cultural revival.52 As a result, these *Sayings* also reflect a great deal of Spartan ideas about their own idealized past. In this sense, the Spartans contemporary with the *Sayings* are outsiders themselves, looking back on their city’s past. In this vein, the *Sayings* were composed to reflect that idealized image of Spartan character, traits, and abilities.53 They demonstrate what the ideal Spartan was, both in the minds of contemporary Spartans and other Greeks – embodying the very idea of the Spartan mirage. This mirage, the collection of traits and abilities considered to be part of a typical Spartan, is the purpose of this dissertation to discuss.

**Sparta and the growth of the Spartan mirage**

Using Plutarch’s *Sayings of the Spartans* it is my intent to isolate some of the main character traits and morals that were encapsulated in the Spartan mirage. The traits I intend to focus on become self-evident from a thorough reading of the text: patriotism, nerve, obedience, contempt for wealth, and

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52 With Roman control of Greece, Sparta became something of a tourist attraction. Spartans began to look to their past to try and remember what had made them great - they were trying to re-discover the culture and society they had lost. See Talbert (2005), pg. XVIII.
53 Talbert (2005), pg. 137.
contempt for death. By better understanding what image the Spartan state did its best to foster, as well as their intention in doing so, we can better recognize where the dividing line exists between the mirage and authentic Spartan values. Also, by comparing these traits from the *Apophthegmata Lakonika* to historical events we can also better judge their historical authenticity.\(^{54}\)

What we do know of Sparta casts a very incomplete picture upon which this mirage is based. Sparta began as a collection of four villages in the narrow valley formed by the Eurotas river. Sheltered by the Parnon and Taygetus mountain ranges, this valley was first settled by Dorian Greeks around the 10\(^{th}\) Century. The conquest of Messenia followed in the 7\(^{th}\) Century, making Sparta one of the strongest Greek states. This occurred at a time when other city states, such as Athens, were sending out colonies to deal with their over-population.\(^{55}\) It would also gain the young Lacedaemonian state the long-standing enmity of its neighbors, especially Argos, leading to upheaval and a major Helot revolt in the 7\(^{th}\) century.

It is at this time that, out of a desire for security, Spartan culture took on an austere, militaristic character. Their society changed from one with a lively artistic culture to one focused on the preservation of the state by martial means. This new social system, typically attributed wholesale to the lawgiver Lykourgos, created the Laconian state that we think of when discussing the Spartans.\(^{56}\) Some key aspects of the Spartan system, however, such as the dual kingship and the ephorate, either originated from the pre-Lykourgan system or came from reforms later on.

The Spartan government was composed of 2 kings – each allegedly representing a line of direct descent from the *Herakleidai*.\(^{57}\) In peace-time society, however, these kings had significant religious obligations and participated as members of the Spartan *Gerousia*, but lacked the same extra-legal powers

\(^{54}\) For future reference – Lakonia and Lakedaemon are inter-changeable names for the region Sparta occupied, much like Athens and Attica. Thus a Lakedaemonian, Lakonian, and Spartan are terms for inhabitants of the region. Heraklid, however refers specifically to the descendants of Herakles.

\(^{55}\) Talbert (2005), pg. XIX.

\(^{56}\) Talbert (2005), pg. XX.

\(^{57}\) The descendants of Herakles, see Rawson (1969), pg. 2-3.
seen in other monarchies. While on the battlefield and on campaign, they came close to being absolute monarchs, but at home they were little more than hereditary generals. Another feature of the Spartan government was the aforementioned Gerousia, which was elected from Spartan elders over the age of 60, and represented the highest court of justice. It presided over all cases where the penalty was death, exile, or loss of citizen rights.58 A later addition to this system of Spartan government was the ephorate. This office of annually-elected magistrates was initially tasked with overseeing the kings. They had the power to have the kings tried, punished, fined, or even removed from power if they acted improperly or contrary to the law. But over time the powers of the ephorate expanded. By the 5th century they also presided over the assembly, raised the military levy, received foreign envoys, and controlled what matters would be brought before the Gerousia and the assembly.59

This assembly was made up of all adult male citizens who qualified for citizenship. To qualify for citizenship, Spartan males were required to maintain a monthly stipend to the common messes.60 These Homoioi, as they were called, were forbidden from working or pursuing any trades. Instead they were obligated to maintain themselves at full readiness to fight if called upon. This work fell to the Perioikoi and Helot classes. The Perioikoi were free, if lesser, citizens of Laconia and were expected to work and to fight if needed. They formed a kind of middle class, performing the duties that Spartans and Helots were barred from.61 The Helots, on the other hand, were state-owned slaves, allotted to the Homoioi to work their land. Acting almost as tenant farmers, Helots were obligated to provide a fixed proportion of their produce every month to their master. The Helots remained the property of the state and like any item

58 Rawson (1969), pg. 4.
59 Rawson (1969), pg. 3.
60 Spartans were obligated by law to eat in communal gatherings. This was likely intended to foster a feeling of community and to prevent division based on individual indulgence. If they were all forced to eat together they could not have sumptuous dinners prepared that would mark them out against their fellow citizens.
61 E.g. Ironworking, pottery, etc. Rawson (1969), pg. 4-5.
shared communally, they could neither be killed nor freed by individual Spartan citizens. Also, much like the *Perioikoi*, they were expected to fight if the need arose, which it often did.62

The life of a typical Spartan followed a fairly consistent pattern. At birth, each child was examined by the elders, and if it was found to be sickly or unfit to be raised, it was exposed to the elements and left to die. If the child was judged worthy to be raised, the child would remain with its family until the age of seven. At this point, male and female children would take separate paths. Female children would stay with their family to learn domestic duties, as well as undergo a modicum of physical training in order to prepare them for childbirth. Female Spartans, just like their male counterparts, were denied luxuries: Spartan women were forbidden to wear any physical ornamentation or dyed clothing.63 Spartan males, however, would enter the famously harsh state education system known as the *Agoge*. This education would last from age 7 until 18, during which they would learn the proper habits of soldier and citizen.64

This training was also dedicated to hardening them physically, inuring them against hardship. Toward this end they were given inadequate food, clothing, and shelter. They were then expected to supplement these inadequate supplies by theft, and would only be punished for failure (i.e. discovery).65 They graduated from this system at the age of 18, and then spent some time in the *Krypteia*, Sparta’s secret police. This organization’s role within Spartan society seems to have been to police the Helot population during peace time, removing potential troublemakers. They would also conduct terror campaigns to keep the Helots servile, and act as a special operations unit in times of war.66 This likely began as a manhood initiation rite before evolving into a much more complex system over time.

After this time with the *Krypteia*, these new Spartans enter one of the common messes. This period of their life, lasting until late adulthood, would be spent in the city barracks. Those that married

62 Rawson (1969), pg. 4-5.
63 Rawson (1969), pg. 8.
64 Rawson (1969), pg. 6.
65 For an example of the severity with which Spartan youths took this, see Plu. Mor. 234B.
66 Rawson (1969), pg. 6-7.
would not be allowed time to visit their wives, being obligated to visit them by stealth. Later on they would be allowed to join their wives and live together, but at this younger age this was necessary to maintain discipline. A fully-grown Spartan male would devote his time to hunting, drilling, and other citizen duties. All of these pastimes had the additional benefit of keeping them ready and conditioned for combat.⁶⁷

In short, this is what we know about Sparta, though some details of it remain either uncertain or contentious within academia. One such issue is the level of animosity that existed between Spartans and Helots: whether or not there was a constant tension between them or if they coexisted peacefully. While Thucydides assures us that “most matters for the Spartans with regard to the Helots were always for the most part established with a view to security,” there is little evidence to support that idea.⁶⁸ Xenophon, who experienced Sparta first-hand, did not see the Helots as a threat. Writing as an insider, Xenophon saw the Helots as just another communal item to be shared. As a result, when Xenophon talks about the Helots, there is no evidence of fear in the Spartan population’s attitude toward them.⁶⁹ Nor does Herodotos discuss the Helots in these terms.⁷⁰ In fact, the only evidence we have in favour of Thucydides’ view is the 465 BCE Spartan appeal for assistance in putting down the Helot revolt. Yet again, however, we have no evidence that this created a lasting fear of the Helots. If the Spartans living at this time held any special kind of fear of the Helots then their continued use of them as an auxiliary military force makes little sense.⁷¹ So whether there was significant animosity between these two segments of Sparta’s population is very hard to tell.

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⁶⁷ Rawson (1969), pg. 8.
⁶⁸ Th. 4.80 and Whitby (1994), pg. 97-98.
⁶⁹ X. Hell. 6.5.29 seems to be the only instance where Spartans showed fear toward the helots, but this was mostly due to their gathering in large numbers to volunteer for military service, which caused alarm. See Whitby (1994), pg. 91-92.
⁷⁰ There is no hint of menace when they are discussed in the text. In fact, they seem to have been regarded by Herodotos as little more than tools or draft animals. See for example Hdt. 6.58, 6.75, 6.80, 6.81, 7.229, 8.25, 9.10, 9.28, 9.80 and 9.85.
⁷¹ Whitby (1994), pg. 100.
A similarly difficult concept of Spartan society is its austerity and the motivation behind its adoption. One significant feature of Spartan austerity was its iron currency, about which Seltmann proposed that Sparta chose to use iron currency out of a lack of silver and an abundant supply of iron.\textsuperscript{72} Holladay refuted this view, pointing out that most Greek states were poor in silver, while the silver mines in Athens were an exception rather than the rule with Greek city states.\textsuperscript{73} Another explanation was that the Persian conquest of Lydia cut trade ties for the Spartans, killing off their trade. Austerity then was a reaction to economic destitution. However, pottery evidence shows that Sparta was in no way dependent on such trade, even showing that such trade tended to continue despite hostilities. After all, even without the pottery trade, Sparta had plenty of other commodities (i.e. iron, food, etc.) that it could trade.\textsuperscript{74} Holladay concludes that Spartan austerity had to have been enforced following the conquest of Messenia – there was simply no other way it could have been done without leaving a historical mark.\textsuperscript{75}

Undoubtedly more issues exist, but our main area of interest remains the Spartan mirage. The problem that exists with the mirage is that, although it was only coined as a term in 1933 by Francois Ollier, it has existed for nearly as long as Sparta itself has.\textsuperscript{76} The mirage has affected all of our sources and knowledge of Sparta in one way or another, all the way back as far as Herodotos, and is so complete and effective that it is hard to tell just what is and what is not authentically Spartan.\textsuperscript{77} Alongside the lack of physical evidence, the Spartan mirage makes the job of the classical scholar that much more difficult.\textsuperscript{78}

While Ollier coined the term to describe the distorted view that other Greeks had of a typical Spartan, and what traits they were believed to value, it has evolved far beyond that concept.\textsuperscript{79} It has

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{72} Seltmann (1955), pg. 33f.
\item \textsuperscript{73} Holladay (1977), pg. 112.
\item \textsuperscript{74} Holladay (1977), pg. 112-115.
\item \textsuperscript{75} Holladay (1977), pg. 124-126.
\item \textsuperscript{76} See Ollier (1933), pg. 217, Africa (1960), pg. 266, and Talbert (2005), pg. XXII.
\item \textsuperscript{77} Talbert (2005), pg. XXII.
\item \textsuperscript{78} Cartledge (2002), pg. 81.
\item \textsuperscript{79} Rawson (1969), pg. 12n.
\end{itemize}
expanded to encompass the views of Sparta held by its admirers has changed to suit their different needs and convictions for over two and a half millennia. 

A great deal of that prestige has surrounded Sparta from the beginning, and that prestige was used by scholars and laconizers to recommend their own interpretations and agenda. Outside observers have always managed to find distinct ideas and ideals when studying Sparta, and the Spartan mirage is in no small part to blame.

As early as 550 BCE we can see the beginnings of the Spartan mirage, with Sparta being hailed as a tyrant-slayer, the result of their preference to partner themselves with legal governments. As tyrannies were, by definition, the result of an illegal seizure of power, Sparta was seen to have aligned with the law against it. This stance against tyranny and despotism reached its greatest expression in the Persian Wars, with Sparta leading a Greek coalition against Persia in 480 BCE. Already we can see outside observation has created an ideal of Sparta that does not entirely match up with Sparta’s actual nature. After the Persian Wars, Sparta was labelled as the quintessential Dorian city, which is significant, as the Dorians had never before been singled out culturally. After Persia’s defeat, Dorians came to have a stereotypical character: they were good soldiers and adverse to political extremes.

This view lasted for a long time, surviving into the era of Classical Sparta. Once Athens was defeated in the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides helped to present a much different view of Sparta. In his work he was highly critical of Sparta, contributing a key aspect to the mirage in doing so: Spartan fear of the Helots, which was discussed previously. Before Thucydides, we had never received any hint that this fear might exist. Afterwards, however, it became a solid part of how Sparta was seen by the outside world.

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80 Rawson (1969), pg. 1.
82 The Peisistratid episode is clear evidence that Sparta could act contrary to legality if the situation required it. Hdt. 5.63-76.
83 Rawson (1969), pg. 16.
84 Tigerstedt (1965), pg. 130.
Looking at this we can see the Spartan mirage changing as outside accounts, like Thucydides, shifted it based on their own biases and prejudices.

To Thucydides, Sparta would always be a paranoid and aggressive imperial power. It had spelt disaster for both his career and his city, and his account reflects that. Xenophon, yet another Athenian, gives us a very different view of Sparta. While in general he idealized Sparta, and Agesilaos in particular, Xenophon did his best to keep his account close to reality.\(^8^5\) He emphasized Lykourgos’ prudence and wisdom, representing the whole of Sparta as his deliberate creation.\(^8^6\) It is more than likely that Xenophon, an exiled Athenian in Sparta’s employ, is repeating to us the view that he received from Agesilaos and other Spartans – a kind of sanitized official history.\(^8^7\) Already, the Spartan mirage can be clearly seen to be actively impacting outside views. Whether or not Sparta consistently acted to create misinformation, or to carefully shape its image, is another question.\(^8^8\)

In a similar vein, Xenophon also consistently emphasized Sparta’s right to lead Greece. This was due to its stable government – its *Eunomia*. Having this *Eunomia* was, at that time, unique in the Greek world. Most Greek city states had suffered at least one tyranny in their history, but for Sparta to have managed to maintain good order, and a consistently legal government, was unique. For Xenophon, this was only possible because Sparta operated as an anti-thesis to Athens. Men were not able to spoil their children, defy the laws, or in any way undermine the state. Austerity countered greed, and their upbringing instilled in them a rigid obedience to the law. For correcting the core evils at the heart of most *stasis* in Greek society, Xenophon was willing to forgive Sparta for the *Agoge*’s harshness.\(^8^9\) While it may have been harsh and damaging for Spartan youth, Xenophon could not help but see its value.

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85 Tigerstedt (1965), pg. 159.
86 Tigerstedt (1965), pg. 162.
87 An account deliberately tailored to make Sparta look better in the eyes of its people.
88 Tigerstedt (1965), pg. 163.
89 Tigerstedt (1965), pg. 163-167.
While Xenophon was willing to forgive the Agoge its barbarity, he was also ready and willing, when necessary, to criticise Spartan policy. Even Xenophon’s hero, Agesilaos, was not safe from his criticism. Twice in his Hellenica, Xenophon criticises Agesilaos for acting contrary to the law. The first instance is Agesilaos’ forgiveness of Phoibidas for acting without state direction to seize the Theban Cadmeia. While custom dictated that Phoibidas be punished for his actions, acting as he did without state authorization, Agesilaos did something unexpected. Rather than advocate his punishment, Agesilaos argued that Phoibidas had acted in Sparta’s best interests. He had acted on his own initiative to better Sparta’s position, and, although he had acted illegally, should not face punishment for his actions. Xenophon criticises this decision, as it would cause nothing but problems for Sparta in the future.

Xenophon’s second criticism concerns another illegal action, this time committed by Kleonymos, son of Sphodrias, who was romantically involved with Archidamos, Agesilaos’ son. Kleonymos had tried and failed, to seize the Athenian Peiraieus, acting without orders, and at first Agesilaos was in favor of punishing him. Kleonymos had acted out of personal greed, rather than in Sparta’s interest, which was the redeeming feature of Phoibidas’ case. Agesilaos, however, was influenced by his son’s grief at the trial, and eventually he decided to pardon Kleonymos. Despite everything, Agesilaos found a way to save Kleonymos from execution, and so compromised his principles. Xenophon criticizes him for this, no doubt disappointed in a man he had known and respected his entire life. To put personal attachments above the law was shockingly unorthodox for a Spartiate.

Xenophon’s account of the 371 BCE peace congress is similarly filled with criticism of Sparta. This episode in the Hellenica is replete with disparaging remarks voiced by Greek diplomats unhappy with

90 The Cadmeia was the main citadel of Thebes. See X. Hell. 5.2.32.
91 The Peiraieus was the main harbour of Athens sited on the coast of Attica. See X. Hell. 5.4.25-33.
92 Tigerstedt (1965), pg. 172.
Spartan policy, criticizing Sparta’s oppressive control of other Greek cities.\textsuperscript{93} Xenophon himself was also willing to point out Sparta’s failings:

Many examples could be given both from Greek and foreign history to show that the Gods are not indifferent to irreligion or to evil doing. Here I shall mention only the case which occurs at this point in my narrative. The Spartans had sworn to leave the cities independent, and then they had seized the Acropolis of Thebes. Now they were punished by the action of those men, and those men alone, whom they had wronged, although before that time they had never been conquered by any nation on earth...\textsuperscript{94}

Although the \textit{Hellenica} ends before the disaster at Leuctra (ca. 371 BCE), Xenophon in some ways could see what was in store for Sparta. While he still felt Sparta worthy of his admiration, it was not flawless in his opinion. It had flaws like any other state, and he was more than willing to point them out.

Defeat at the battle of Leuctra shattered the myth of Spartan invincibility, leaving Spartan influence a shadow of what it had once been. Before Leuctra, Sparta had seemed to other Greeks like an invincible behemoth that they needed to placate. But now that was no longer the case. After Leuctra, Sparta began a slow decline until it was ultimately superseded by Macedon as the leader of Greece.\textsuperscript{95} Despite this, Laconism remained strong in areas with, or with perceived, connections to Sparta, such as with its colonies in Italy, North Africa or Sicily. These cities emphasized their Spartan roots in order to gain prestige in inter-city relations.

Much like Xenophon, Plato and Aristotle both wrote about Sparta. Plato focused on Sparta closely in his \textit{Laws}, detailing how Sparta came close to becoming his ideal city, but fell short. This was because Sparta forced its citizens towards virtue, instead of letting them pursue it based on their own initiative.\textsuperscript{96} Aristotle as well was critical of Sparta, but for its brutality rather than for its methods.\textsuperscript{97} However, with the rise of Alexander, this discussion of the merits of city state structure and politics would cease.

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\textsuperscript{93} X. Hell. 6.3.7-12.  \\
\textsuperscript{94} X. Hell. 5.4.1.  \\
\textsuperscript{95} Tigerstedt (1965), pg. 172.  \\
\textsuperscript{96} Rawson (1969), pg. 66-69.  \\
\textsuperscript{97} Rawson (1969), pg. 79-80. 
\end{flushright}
While such discussion came to an end with the rise of Alexander, with his death, Greek philosophical schools spread to Rome, taking Laconism outside of Greece.\textsuperscript{98} The Cynics, whose goal was to live life virtuously according to nature, found value in Sparta’s teaching of practical virtue. As such, they were able to extend Laconism beyond the limited circles it had otherwise occupied to this point. Stoicism, much like Cynicism, also helped Laconism extend its influence. Popular in Italy, Stoicism held particular admiration for Sparta’s mixed government. Serving as political advisers, Stoics were able to spread Laconic values and admiration to some of the most influential Romans.\textsuperscript{99}

It was in the Hellenistic period as well that Agis IV and Kleomenes reigned – the Spartan reformer kings. At separate times, but working along similar lines and with similar doctrines, these two kings worked to resurrect the Lykourgan system. They were aided by the fact that, at the same time they were working in Sparta, there was upheaval in the Peloponnese.\textsuperscript{100} Their reforms and propaganda appealed to many, both to the wealthy and to the poor. However, they lost momentum when it became obvious that they never intended to extend their reforms beyond Sparta herself. The reform movement ultimately failed with Kleomenes’ death, stopping short of his proposed re-distribution of land.

Despite this failure, Laconism continued an upward trend. With Alexander’s death there was renewed appeal in having Spartan connections, especially Lykourgan ones.\textsuperscript{101} In the Roman period, several prominent authors discussed Sparta, while prominent Romans politicians, such as Brutus, were laconizers.\textsuperscript{102} Polybios, for example, wrote about Sparta, emphasizing Spartan temperance and \textit{Eunomia}, while criticizing her limited foreign policy.\textsuperscript{103} Cicero, on the other hand, compared Sparta to Rome. He even went so far as to suggest that Romulus borrowed features, such as the \textit{Gerousia}, from Sparta when

\textsuperscript{98} Rawson (1969), pg. 87, 90.
\textsuperscript{99} Rawson (1969), pg. 87, 90.
\textsuperscript{100} Rawson (1969), pg. 91, 93.
\textsuperscript{101} Rawson (1969), pg. 94-95.
\textsuperscript{102} Brutus named a river on his property the Euvrotis, and a portico the Persian Stoa, see Rawson (1969), pg. 100.
\textsuperscript{103} Plb. 5.43, and Rawson (1969), pg. 102.
founding Rome. Such speculation would become a common feature of the literature around Sparta, the author seeing parallels within his own city’s systems and claiming their Spartan origin.\(^ {104}\) Under Roman control, post 146 BCE, the *agoge* was also re-instated – partly to educate its young male population in the duties of a citizen, and partly for the entertainment of Roman tourists.\(^ {105}\) Finally, in Dionysios of Halikarnassos’ history of Rome, he claimed that the Romans had copied Sparta’s constitution, going so far as to claim that Brutus modelled the dual consulship after Sparta’s dual kingship.\(^ {106}\)

Over the course of the last few authors, from Xenophon to Dionysios, the Spartan mirage shifted significantly, taking on a few new traits, such as a greater emphasis on mixed government and virtuous living. Throughout each of the periods to follow there would be great discussion of Sparta both morally and politically. Certain authors, however, mark definitive changes in the mirage. Every new thinker changed the mirage in a subtle way, moulding it as they added their own perception of Sparta in relation to their own government. Each period would interact with the Spartan ideal in a different way, emphasizing certain features over others. The Roman Imperial Period would focus on Plutarch and the Spartan cultural revival. Plutarch’s focus, for example, was picturing Sparta at the head of a willing Greece.\(^ {107}\) In this way Plutarch effected what the mainstream thought on Sparta was focused on during his life.

**The Fortune of Sparta from the Middle Ages to Modern Times**

Likewise the Medieval period would also see a very different Sparta. Although most classical learning was lost in the West during this period, in places some of it did survive. In writings by Plutarch, scholars of this period found Sparta in the form of ‘admirable pagans,’ such as Lykourgos and Leonidas. They saw in these two pagans character traits that they felt were worthy enough to emulate, one a wise

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\(^ {104}\) Rawson (1969), pg. 102, 104.

\(^ {105}\) Talbert (2005), pg. XVIII.

\(^ {106}\) Rawson (1969), pg. 105.

\(^ {107}\) Rawson (1969), pg. 108, 111.
lawgiver and the other a model of chivalric kingship.\textsuperscript{108} This was the work of the afore-mentioned John of Salisbury and his \textit{Policratus}. What is most important is that in the Medieval period, the key addition to the Spartan mirage was an emphasis on the equal distribution of land. This was largely the result of the reformer kings and the cultural revival in Plutarch’s time, and this emphasis on land distribution would come to play a key role in contemporary discussions of Sparta.\textsuperscript{109} Also significant was the emphasis by the Medieval church fathers on the idea of a mixed constitution. This discussion had begun earlier, in the Roman period, but it is interesting to note that Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), in his \textit{Summa Theologica}, actually discussed the Spartan constitution along these lines.\textsuperscript{110}

Similarly the Renaissance period saw further discussion of the Spartan constitution – this time focusing on the ephors as a magisterial limit on royal power. For Renaissance thinkers, the king’s power was derived from the community, and they saw the ephors as a safeguard against the king’s usurpation of supra-legal powers.\textsuperscript{111} These thinkers, nourished by Plutarch, Plato and Xenophon, admired Sparta. To them it proved the benefit of education and simple living, as well as the validity of some of their own values, such as respect for elders.\textsuperscript{112} What is noticeably absent from the Renaissance period was any mention of Sparta as an enemy of learning, which would feature more prominently in subsequent periods.\textsuperscript{113}

The following period, c. 1500-1650, saw the resurgence of republicanism among European political theorists, and along with it, a renewed interest in the Greek republics. At first the emphasis was on Athens, as it was a full democracy, but that did not stop others from discussing Sparta. Scholars, such as Machiavelli, admired Sparta’s mixed constitution. This admiration, in some cases, led to direct

\textsuperscript{108} Morris (2012), pg. 2.
\textsuperscript{109} Morris (2012), pg. 5.
\textsuperscript{110} Rawson (1969), pg. 127.
\textsuperscript{111} Rawson (1969), pg. 129.
\textsuperscript{112} Rawson (1969), pg. 130-133.
\textsuperscript{113} Rawson (1969), pg. 133.
emulation, with some Italian city states, such as Venice, mirroring Sparta’s mixed government, consisting of an assembly, a magistrate, and a council.\textsuperscript{114} Unique to the period was a belief that real change could only be brought about through singular vision. Only a great man with full control of the state could bring about change, forming, or re-forming, a republic. Thinkers based this idea on Spartans like Lykourgos or Kleomenes, accepting that morally dubious methods were sometimes necessary to effect real and lasting change. Giannotti was also a fan of Sparta, and used it as a model for Florence’s mixed government.\textsuperscript{115} Notice here the emphasis placed on Sparta as a republic – despite the fact it was a monarchy.\textsuperscript{116}

The mid-16\textsuperscript{th} century marked the end, for a time, of the Republican spirit, with only Genoa and Venice of the Italian states remaining independent.\textsuperscript{117} In this new period, c. 1450-1750, which featured a preference, in government, for absolute monarchies, Sparta became a source of ideas for countering absolutist rule. Scholarly debate focused largely around the ephorate, representing as it did a system where a monarch’s powers were limited by an elected magistracy. This presented a challenge to the idea of the divine right of kings, and helped to inspire the idea that a king could be deposed for acting inappropriately.\textsuperscript{118} This view was especially influential in France during the Huguenot period (c. 16\textsuperscript{th} century). However, even when a Huguenot stood to take the throne, they could still appeal to the Spartan model: this time to support hereditary kingship.\textsuperscript{119}

This period also saw the first challenges to the idea of private property. Once again, these thinkers found support in Sparta, this time in its supposed equal division of land.\textsuperscript{120} Other thinkers focused on Sparta’s political stability and what made that possible. Discussion went back and forth during the period,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[114] Much like Sparta’s assembly, ephorate, and \textit{Gerousia} in Rawson (1969), pg. 137, 140.
\item[115] Rawson (1969), pg. 141, 144-145.
\item[116] This was partly due to errors in translation that stated Sparta had a single king – or elected. Rawson (1969), pg. 128.
\item[117] Rawson (1969), pg. 147.
\item[118] The divine right of Kings was the idea that God bestowed on certain noble lines the ‘right to rule,’ and so only they and their offspring could rule with God’s approval. Otherwise the state was destined for turmoil and disaster. See Rawson (1969), pg. 160.
\item[119] Rawson (1969), pg. 162-163.
\item[120] Rawson (1969), pg. 171-172.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
with different authors emphasizing that Sparta’s stability was due to a preponderance of one of the three styles of government (democracy, monarchy, and oligarchy) in its structure. The only group that did not like Sparta as a model were royalists, as it encouraged placing a limit on the monarch’s power. As a result, royalists tried to push scholarship away from admiration of Greek republicanism. Sir Robert Filmer (c. 1588-1653), for example, abandoned mixed government, arguing that most ancient republics were, at heart, democracies. Citing Athenian democratic abuses, Filmer did his best to bury the republican spirit. However, when it came to Sparta, he could only try to suppress it, as Sparta lacked the typical problems that beset most democracies.

The era that followed saw political upheaval in many different areas of the world (c. 1660-1850). Revolutions took place in England, America, France and elsewhere. As a result, these new governments, and their educated populations, sought models to emulate. One such model was Sparta. During the English Revolution, there was a hope among English scholars that the government would emulate ancient models of mixed government. James Harrington (c. 1611-1677), for example, hoped that the revolution would allow them to reshape the political balance. He took Sparta as a model, ignoring the Helot aspect, but was soon disappointed. With the fall of the English Protectorate, and the return of the monarchy, different hopes emerged. Many hoped that James II (c. 1633-1701) would emulate Sparta’s ephorate, giving up some of his powers ultimately to give the monarchy greater longevity. They too were disappointed, along with most British laconizers.

Eighteenth Century France, however, was the site of true Laconomania. At the heart of this scholarship was John Jacques Rousseau (c. 1712-1778), possibly the greatest single laconophile of the

121 Rawson (1969), pg. 189.
122 In this instance, a republic differs from a democracy in that decisions are made by representatives of the people, and not by the people themselves.
123 Rawson (1969), pg. 189.
125 Rawson (1969), pg. 198.
period. Rousseau admired the Spartan education system, emphasizing how the Spartans neglected science and the arts. For him, vice came from these disciplines, creating a soft and weak society. Modern education, in Rousseau’s opinion, was inferior to the Spartan as it lacked that moral dimension. For his model government, he needed virtue and education to co-exist – and so he valued how the Spartans emphasized living virtuously in their upbringing.\textsuperscript{127} In Rousseau’s vision, French society needed to emulate Sparta by encouraging patriotism among its citizens.

At first, however, Rousseau’s views on Sparta did not take. It was argued that the Spartan model was not viable for a county like France. It was too big, too wealthy, and its population too artistically skilled to emulate the small, austere city state.\textsuperscript{128} Scholars more fond of luxury, such as Voltaire, argued against Sparta as a model, seeing it more as a republic, rather than as a monarchy, like Rousseau.\textsuperscript{129} As time wore on, however, French society was changed drastically by the French Revolution. At first, most politicians were optimistic about the future of France’s government. In 1779, most of the deputies in the Estates-General were still loyal to the king, wishing only for a stronger role in government.\textsuperscript{130} That faith in the king, however, would soon be shattered. The 1792 attempted flight by the King from France shattered the hope for an enlightened monarchy, as any faith in the king was lost.\textsuperscript{131} Instead, there was a call for a republic, and along with it, the means by which to preserve it. They found those means in the Spartan model, and once again there was discussion of Sparta’s education system. French thinkers were interested in fostering virtue among their citizen body, certain that it was the only way to preserve their new government. This discussion of education was the closest they came to emulating Spartan models.\textsuperscript{132} With the failure of the

\textsuperscript{127} Rawson (1969), pg. 232.
\textsuperscript{128} Rawson (1969), pg. 237, 245, 269.
\textsuperscript{129} Rawson (1969), pg. 256.
\textsuperscript{130} Rawson (1969), pg. 270.
\textsuperscript{131} Rawson (1969), pg. 270.
\textsuperscript{132} Rawson (1969), pg. 278-279.
revolution and eventual return to monarchy, there was a belief that admiration of ancient models had ultimately caused the Revolution and the Terror.\textsuperscript{133}

The period of time following the Terror until the present day, c. 1850-2016, however, took on a much different shape. In Germany, the scholar Friedrich Schlegel (c. 1772-1829), in 1794, described the Dorians as a powerful, older and more truly Hellenic branch. Schlegel of course meant this in poetic terms, dividing Greece along poetic lines rather than racial ones.\textsuperscript{134} Even so, this quickly became the earliest root of the eugenic theory of Sparta that grew in Germany over the course of the 18\textsuperscript{th}, 19\textsuperscript{th}, and 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries. Sparta’s stock in Germany was boosted by those who believed Germany and Greece were closely connected racially.\textsuperscript{135} For them, Sparta fit the Aryan theory – their constitution seemed to be the work of a military aristocracy, and their decline could be connected to the parallel decline in citizen numbers. For example H.F.K. Gunther (c. 1891-1968), in 1929, published his \textit{Rassengeschichte des Hellenischen und des Römischen Volkes}, that explained Sparta’s decline as a process of de-Nordification.\textsuperscript{136}

All of these eugenic and racial views stemmed from the German belief that the Spartans were Dorians, the leading Hellenic race. As a result, this worked its way into the racialized history of those who wished to propagate theories of the Nordic/Aryan nature of the Dorians.\textsuperscript{137} For this subset of German scholars, the eugenic nature of Spartan laws seemed to be aimed at the goal of racial purity. This is how they rationalized Spartan birth policies and when the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century came around, the Third Reich took this a step further.

Hitler called Sparta the ‘purest racial state in antiquity.’\textsuperscript{138} He saw Sparta as a model for Nazi Germany to be built upon, although it is likely that even if Sparta had lacked such seemingly eugenic

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{133} Rawson (1969), pg. 287.
\item \textsuperscript{134} Rawson (1969), pg. 320.
\item \textsuperscript{135} Rawson (1969), pg. 332.
\item \textsuperscript{136} De-Nordification was believed to be the progressive denigration of Nordic racial purity. See Rawson (1969), pg. 336.
\item \textsuperscript{137} Roche (2012), pg. 316.
\item \textsuperscript{138} Roche (2012), pg. 317.
\end{itemize}
policies, their history would have been re-written anyway to make them resemble what was desired. Hitler’s education system also used Spartan anecdotes and history to instill desirable traits in Nazi youth such as obedience and bravery.\textsuperscript{139} He even went so far as to explain the Dorian conquests, where the returning \textit{Herakleidai} founded the two Spartan ruling dynasties, as a \textit{Lebenskampf}. A \textit{Lebenskampf} refers to a grab for \textit{Lebensraum}, or living space as the history surrounding the Third Reich knows it. He used this mythical event as a justification for such actions. He was trying to instill in German youth the idea that it was acceptable to seize land in this way – provided you had the strength to do it – as it was the inalienable right of all Aryan master races.\textsuperscript{140} In this way, the Spartan mirage was shaped by each society that interacted with it, and, as a result, cast a long shadow on Spartan studies. It has only been in the past quarter-century that Spartan scholarship has been able to move out from under the long shadow of the Third Reich.

Throughout each of these periods, different aspects of Spartan culture and history have, in turn, been studied and emphasized. Each time a different area of Sparta was focused on, it was the result of a unique need by the writer(s). They knew what they hoped to find while they searched, and, unsurprisingly, found it, twisting the facts wherever necessary to fit their doctrine. Each of these periods created their own idealised image of Sparta, morphing and influencing our perception of Sparta. From monarchists to communists, Sparta has been able to appeal in some way to everyone. Nor has this stopped, but instead it has continued to evolve.\textsuperscript{141} Much as Tigerstedt points out in his introduction, each time a new author discusses Sparta, it is never the same Sparta each time. Each time a new writer publishes, the idea of Sparta changes. That perception, that mirage, is forever in flux.\textsuperscript{142}

\textsuperscript{139} Roche (2012), pg. 321.
\textsuperscript{140} Roche (2012), pg. 326.
\textsuperscript{141} Rawson (1969), pg. 366, 367.
\textsuperscript{142} Tigerstedt (1965), pg. 17.
Sometimes these changes can be so different that the new Sparta is more of a reflection of the present onto the past.\textsuperscript{143} A good example of this is the neo-Spartan culture that has grown out of the theatrical success of the film 300. This is the newfound cult of the Spartan action hero. Just as when Rousseau or Xenophon set ink to paper, Frank Miller’s graphic novel is one more instance of Sparta as reflected through the Spartan mirage. Once again it is the construct of ideal features that Spartan admirers believe are a reality. But just what constituted this ideal Sparta for Plutarch’s era? With the help of the *Apophthegmata Lakonika* of Plutarch, that is what this paper will reveal.

\textsuperscript{143} Tigerstedt (1965), pg. 17.
Chapter Two: Sparta Before Themselves

Much as has been stated in the introduction, one of the key features of the Spartan system was the Agoge. This famously harsh education system was lauded by some, but was an object of great contempt from others. As Thucydides has Perikles mention in his funeral oration: “The Spartans, from their earliest boyhood, are submitted to the most laborious training in courage...”\textsuperscript{144} Perikles had his own agenda when he brought up the Spartan Agoge, mostly to denigrate and dismiss his opponents’ courage. He was trying to make the claim that Spartans were a lesser foe because of their training. It is that very training, however, that it is our intent to focus on here. Perikles inspired patriotism with his speeches, inflaming the Athenian people. The Spartans had a much more effective system.

The Agoge was dedicated to fostering the idea that Sparta was always to come before any individual’s personal well-being, comfort, and even existence. This exact feature is one of the main reasons for Rousseau’s admiration of the Spartan model.\textsuperscript{145} He admired the level of dedication within the citizen body towards the state and its preservation. In times of trouble the state could always rely on its citizens’ devotion to safeguard its interests. In the Apophthegmata Lakonika we can see that devotion first-hand: there are fifteen separate sayings that discuss Spartan devotion to the Laconian state, and the self-sacrificing nature of their courage. Through an examination of a sub-set of these Sayings we can see to what extent the Spartan mirage and reality measure up when it comes to Laconian patriotism. By examining these Sayings we can see whether or not Spartans were patriots – or if that was simply a false perception by their fellow Greeks.

As a feature of the Spartan mirage, patriotism was key to the Spartan ideal. No individual better embodied this idea than the Eurypontid King: Agesilaos II (c. 444 BCE – 360 BCE). Agesilaos is unique for a Spartan in the sheer volume of material that exists concerning his life and career. By far the most Sayings

\textsuperscript{144} Th. 2.39.1. \\
\textsuperscript{145} Rawson (1969), pg. 237.
can be attributed to him, and he was even one of Plutarch’s subjects. He also featured prominently in Xenophon’s *Hellenica* and, of course, his *Agesilaos.* More importantly, however, is the fact that, throughout his career, Agesilaos was a diehard-devotee to his country, obedient and faithful to every command he was given. He was also not afraid to put that devotion into words. Thus, it comes as no surprise that he is one of our examples of Spartan patriotism.

*Agesilaos* at first was not destined for the kingship. Instead, he came to it after the death of his brother, thanks to the oratory skills of Lysander (c. ??? – 395 BCE) - the wily Spartan navarch known for his deceptions.146 The two managed this feat by proving that Leotychidas, who had been Agis’ heir, was illegitimate. Even with this revelation, the decision was uncertain – there being a prophecy that a crippled king would spell disaster for Sparta. Ultimately Lysander was able to secure Agesilaos’ rule by arguing that the prophecy referred to a king without Heraklid blood rather than a physical deficiency.147 Thus Agesilaos, who had initially not been groomed for the position, became one of the illustrious kings of Sparta.

However, Agesilaos was unique among Spartan kings for two reasons. First, Agesilaos was lame from birth, exhibiting a persistent limp. Second, he was one of the only Spartan kings to experience the *Agoge.*148 As the second son in the Eurypontid line, Agesilaos would not have been expected to inherit the kingship. As a result, he had undergone the same gruelling training as every other Spartan male citizen. Royals were typically exempt from this treatment – a privilege, no doubt, of claiming descent from Herakles. Despite this, Agesilaos came away with a stronger devotion to Sparta than many of his predecessors, and we can see that loyalty expressed in his *Sayings:*

146 X. Hell. 3.3.1-3.
147 X. Hell. 3.3.3.
148 Pausanias as well may have been trained in the *agoge,* as he too was not in the direct line of succession, however, unlike with Agesilaos, there is no way to confirm this. See Plu. *Ages.* 1.2. Here Plutarch outlines the custom that the Spartan heir apparent would be exempt from the *Agoge.* See also Bradford (2011), pg. 153, and X. *Hell.* 3.3.1-3.
But a message was sent to him from the king of the Persians, peace having come to pass it was brought by the Persian with Kallias the Lacedaemonian, it bore things relating to hospitality and friendship. He did not take it, telling [them] to report to the king that he no longer needed to send letters to him concerning personal affairs, but if he was a friend to the Lacedaemonians and to the Greeks and he appeared well-disposed [to them], that he himself would be a friend to him completely: ‘If however he were caught plotting [against them], no matter how many letters I might receive, let him not think he shall have my friendship.’

The timing of this particular instance is not hard to establish, as it comes, no doubt, from the period of one of Agesilaos’ campaigns in Ionia. What is key here is the sheer enormity of the refusal. Despite the obvious potential benefit that exists in cultivating a personal relationship with the Persian king, Agesilaos is completely uninterested. As he makes expressly clear, while his friends are friends to his city, his enemies are his city’s enemies. For the Persian king to become his friend, he had to first prove himself to be a friend of Sparta. Any falsehood or deceit on the king’s part towards Sparta would make him Agesilaos’ enemy. In this situation you can see the impact that the Agoge has had on Agesilaos – there is absolutely no vacillation or hesitation. He’s not at all interested in personal gain, but rather in the advancement of Sparta’s interests.

This episode concerning Agesilaos bears significant resemblance to one concerning the Spartan King Kleomenes (c. 519 – 490 BCE). For those unfamiliar with the episode, it focuses on Aristagoras’ attempts to convince Kleomenes to commit Sparta to the Ionian Revolt. After several different tactics had failed to secure Sparta’s support, Aristagoras had finally resorted to outright bribery. As the two men talked, Kleomenes’ young daughter Gorgo was present. As she listened, Aristagoras’ promises got more and more extravagant. It was at this point in the narrative that Gorgo stepped in and warned her father that this foreigner, Aristagoras, was trying to corrupt him. Kleomenes promptly rose and left the room, and the frustrated Ionian returned home without securing Spartan aid.

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149 Plu. Mor. 213e. All Greek text is from the 1931 Babbitt edition.
150 Hdt., 5.48-51.
The reason this episode is important in relation to the aforementioned Saying by Agesilaos, is that it shows the contrast between two Spartan kings with different upbringings. Agesilaos had undergone the Agoge and all that entailed, while Kleomenes had not, making the effect of such training quite evident. It is possible that without his daughter’s presence, Kleomenes may very well have been convinced to commit Sparta to the Ionian cause. Although he had resisted bribery of such sort before, without the same training as Agesilaos Kleomenes was much more susceptible to outside bribery and influence.\(^\text{151}\) The Agoge made all the difference for Agesilaos, and this kind of devotion was undoubtedly one trait the state sought to instill in all of its citizens. Without that training, Spartan royals could be influenced by wealth and power. Pausanias (c. ??? – 470 BCE), for example, was just as susceptible as Kleomenes to Persian offers of wealth and power.\(^\text{152}\) Much like Agesilaos, Pausanias was tempted by offers from the Great King himself; the only difference was in how they reacted to it. While we can be certain that Agesilaus experienced the agoge, there is a parallel lack of evidence to either confirm or deny that he underwent the same training.

Pausanias, regent and general of the Greek coalition during the Persian Wars, provoked suspicion while he was campaigning against Persia when it was discovered he was corresponding with the Persian King. Recalled by the state on this suspicion of medising, Pausanias returned to Sparta, at which point he was able to secure an acquittal. Leaving Sparta once more on the pre-text of continuing the campaign against Persia, he renewed his contact with the Great king. He had been seduced by the idea of becoming the hegemon of all Greece.\(^\text{153}\) Unlike Agesilaos, however, Pausanias craved this power, and was susceptible to the manipulations of the Persian king. He lacked the same level of devotion to Sparta exhibited by Agesilaos – just like Kleomenes. The indoctrination of the Agoge made Agesilaos’ devotion to Sparta stronger than any temptation of power or wealth. While it is possible that Pausanias benefitted from that same training, his attitude seems to speak against it.

\(^{151}\) Plu. Mor. 224b. \\
\(^{152}\) Th. 1.128-136. \\
\(^{153}\) Hdt. 5.32.
Alone, this is strong evidence that the *Agoge* effectively inured Spartans against outside influence. The contrast Agesilaos provides, as the only Spartan king to be trained in the *Agoge*, allows us to see how he compares to those who did not. It overcame the natural human drive for self-aggrandizement and replaced it with a stronger concern for the welfare of the state. Unsurprisingly, this sentiment — Sparta before themselves — is echoed in the other Sayings. One such echo comes from Kallikratidas (c. ??? – 406 BCE), a Spartan navarch that had served during the Peloponnesian War. Appointed to replace Lysander in 406 BCE as admiral of the Spartan fleet, Kallikratidas’ career as admiral lasted only a short time. After winning a minor victory he was killed in action at the naval defeat at Arginousai (c. 406 BCE). This Saying comes from that same period:

Προθυσάμενος δέ, ώς ἠκουσε τοῦ μάντεως σημαίνεσθαι διὰ τῶν ἐμπύρων τῷ μὲν στρατῷ νίκην τῷ δὲ στρατηγοῦντι θάνατον, οὐδὲν καταπλαγεῖ ἐπὶ τὴν ἐμπύρων, ἕλιπέν τε στρατηγὸν. Καταπλαγεῖς οὖν ἄνθρωπος Κλέανδρος ἡγεμόνα ἤρμησεν ἐπὶ τὴν ναυμαχίαν. Ἀποθάνει τῶν σωμάτων τετράδες ἐπὶ τὴν προσώπην τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τῆς πόλεως. Ἀποδεικνύει τῇ πληρέστερη κατά τὸν πατρίδο. Ὅπου δὲ τοις πολεμίοις, ἐλαττωθήσεται.

And having sacrificed, when he heard from the diviner that there were indicated by the burnt offerings victory to the fleet but death for its admiral, not the least bit scared he said: ‘The affairs of Sparta are not decided by one man, for if I die that state shall not be harmed: but if I retreated from the enemy, it would be.’ So designating Kleandros admiral after himself, he ordered [them] into the sea battle, and died fighting.

Once again, as we saw with Agesilaos, Kallikratidas, who is considered by many scholars to represent the old-school Spartan, is completely unconcerned with his own survival. As long as his city is not injured by his death, he is ready and willing to sacrifice himself if the need is great enough. For Kallikratidas, it was a decision that required neither hesitation nor reservation. The record of this incident gives us an idea of the level of devotion to their city that seems to have been expected by outsiders of Spartans. This was the measure by which others would have been gauged. It is also extraordinary for the simple fact that it was reported. Whether or not this was an authentic standard by which all Spartans were expected to

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154 Plu. *Ages*. 1. Here Plutarch outlines the custom that the Spartan heir apparent would be exempt from the *Agoge*.
155 Plu. *Mor.* 222f.
abide by remains uncertain. Just as Agesilaos was willing to put the city’s good before his own, Kallikratidas was willing to put the city before his own life, and we see a similar devotion in other Spartans.

Our next saying comes in the form of two separate, but parallel, Sayings. The first Saying is attributed to Brasidas (C. ??? – 422 BCE), a Spartan general from the first decade of the Peloponnesian war. While he appears several times in Thucydides’ account of the war he was best known for his command in Thrace and his death at the battle of Amphipolis in 422 BCE.157 With only a small force of Helots and mercenaries he accomplished a great deal, shattering Athenian hopes for control of the area while demonstrating a clear talent for command. For his effort he was even added as one of the founder-heroes of Amphipolis after his death in defence of the newly-liberated city.158 This anecdote comes from the period around his death:

ἐπεὶ δὲ συνέβη πεσεῖν αὐτόν ἔλευθεροῦντα τοὺς ἐπὶ Θρᾴκης Έλληνας, οἱ δὲ πεμφθέντες εἰς Λακεδαίμονα πρέσβεις τῇ μητρὶ αὐτοῦ Ἀργιλεωνίδι προσήλθουν: πρῶτον μὲν ἤρωτησεν εἰ καλῶς ὁ Βρασίδας ἐτελεύτησεν: ἐγκωμιαζόντων δὲ τῶν Θρακῶν καὶ λεγόντων ὡς οὐδεὶς ἄλλος ἐστὶ τοιούτος, ἀγνοεῖτε, ‘ἔπει, ὦ ξένοι: Βρασίδας γὰρ ἦν μὲν ἄνηρ ἁγαθός, πολλοὺς δὲ ἐκείνου κρεῖττονας ἔχει ἡ Σπάρτη.’159

And when it happened that he fell liberating the Greeks in Thrace, ambassadors sent to Lacedaemon came to his mother Argileonis. First she asked if Brasidas had died well, and when the Thracians [began] praising [him] and saying that there was no other such as this, ‘You are mistaken,’ she said, ‘O strangers: for Brasidas was a good man, but Sparta has many greater than him.’

Again, although the speaker here is his mother, it does reveal the same kind of mindset that prevailed with the previous two sayings: while Sparta itself is important, individual Spartans are not. While his mother admits that he was a brave and talented individual, his death is not a huge blow, as Sparta has many more to replace him. It may seem somewhat callous for a mother to deride her own son in this way. However, in this vein of patriotic service to the state, an individual’s concerns about his standing matters

157 For example, see the battle of Methone (Th. 2.25), as an adviser to Knemus and his fleet (Th. 2.85), and the Corcyran civil war (Th. 3.69-76). Amphipolis is discussed at Th. 4.75-5.11.
158 Cartledge (2003), pg. 188.
159 Plu. Mor. 219d-e.
little. By saying his death does not harm Sparta she is reinforcing that idea. His death does not matter because the state can replace him — and to a Spartan, the fact that there are others better able to take his place, that is all that matters.

Along the same lines we have a saying from Paidaretos (c. ??? – 411 BCE), who died serving as a Spartan harmostes in Chios during an Athenian siege. Much like Brasidas’ Saying, this Saying expresses the very same attitude that Spartans had towards personal standing:

οὐκ ἐγκριθεὶς δ’ εἰς τοὺς τριακοσίους, ἢτις ἐν τῇ πόλει πρωτεύουσα τιμή τῇ τάξει ἦν, ἴλαρός καὶ μειδιών ἀπῆλε: ἀνακαλεσαμένων δ’ αὐτὸν τῶν ἐφόρων καὶ πυνθανομένων διὸ τι γελᾷ, εἶπε, ἃ δὶ τι συγχαίρω τῇ πόλει τριακοσίους κρεῖτ τονάς μου πολίτας ἔχοση.\(^\text{161}\)

[When] not admitted into the three hundred, the honor that was highest in importance in the city, he departed cheerful and smiling: and [when] he was summoned by the ephors and asked on what account he was happy, he said: ‘Because I rejoice in a city which has three hundred citizens better than me.’

Both Paidaretos and Argileonis express very similar outlooks on personal standing in Sparta. Being the best was not about the distinction that it carried, but rather in how it served the state. While there was still pride to be had in being considered the best, these individuals show that Spartans valued their utility to Sparta more than their own standing. With Paidaretos, we can see that idea even more clearly. While being one of the three hundred elite is one of the highest honours that an individual Spartan could attain, Paidaretos is more pleased to know that there are three hundred other Spartans more qualified for the position than himself.\(^\text{162}\) To us, this may seem ridiculous, but for a Spartan, the welfare of the state is more important. As long as the state is better off, their own concerns and vanity do not matter. If there are three hundred men better able to serve the state than himself, a Spartan has a reason to be cheerful.

The final example we have of Spartan patriotism comes from the large collection of Sayings attributed to unknown Spartans. Within the corpus of the Apophthegmata Lakonika, there are Sayings

\(^{160}\) A harmostes was a Spartan term for military governors. They were entrusted with the control of subjected or conquered cities. See Th. 8.40.

\(^{161}\) Plu. Mor. 231b-c.

\(^{162}\) For more discussion of the royal bodyguard, see Th. 5.72.
attributed to a total of 30 unknown women. This anonymity comes as no great surprise – no doubt a by-product of Greek culture. In that culture, those families that could afford the practice would sequester their female members from any contact with the outside world. This comes from a deep suspicion of female fidelity around non-relative men. As a result, however, very few Greek women find their way into the source tradition.¹⁶³ So it comes as no surprise that so few Sayings are attributed to named Spartan women. Gorgo, Argileonis, Grytias and Damatria represent the only Spartan women whose names are recorded in the source tradition. That does not mean, however, that these anonymous women do not have anything to contribute to the discussion. In fact, one unknown Spartan woman echoes the ideas held by these other Sayings:

έτέρα ἀκούσασα τεθνάνα τὸν υἱὸν ἐν μάχῃ καθάπερ ἐτέτακτο 'κάτθετε2 αὐτόν,' ἔφη, ἄναπληρωσάτω δὲ τὴν ἐκείνου τάξιν ὁ ἀδελφός.¹⁶⁴

Another woman, when she heard that her son had died in battle right at his place in the line, said: ‘bury him and let his brother fill his place.’

Although this seems incredibly callous at first, when we look at it from the same angle as the other Sayings, a very clear picture of the Spartan model comes through. The mother’s seemingly callous nature distracts us from a key feature of Spartan education.

That education taught Spartans to set a low value on their own life in relation to Sparta. By doing so, Spartans would be conditioned to unthinkingly act in the state’s interest rather than in their own. In this light, the Sayings described above can be better understood. Agesilaos is not concerned with his own interests, as they do not matter if the state is not benefitted by them. Kallikratidas, believing that his death would aid the state, freely accepts it, since the state held more intrinsic value to him than his own life. Paidaretos was happy to be told he was not good enough for the 300 because that meant Sparta had an abundance of capable citizens that could serve her better. Argileonis is similarly untroubled by her son’s

¹⁶³ McHardy (2008), pg. 50.
¹⁶⁴ Plu. Mor. 242α.
death, as Sparta had others to take his place. Finally, the anonymous Spartan mother does not show much
grief at the death of her son simply because she was more concerned that his place be filled by another.
After all, his brother could serve Sparta just as well as he did. In each and every one of these cases, the
over-arching idea is that Spartans valued the state’s welfare above their own. In a way, claiming unique
value to the individual would cheapen the state – putting their perception of their ability above the state’s.
If they could do something the state could not otherwise manage, it meant the state was vulnerable.
Spartans, through their devotion, had created an all-powerful state upon which they could lavish their
attention. To claim indispensability was to attribute weakness to the state, and that was simply out of the
question. By breaking down their sense of self the state could become the most important thing to them.

However, just how much of this is true remains the question. Dividing the Spartan mirage from
the typical Spartan here is difficult. While Kleomenes represents a case that argues against the
authenticity of patriotism as a normal Spartan characteristic, he would not have experienced the Agoge
like the typical Spartiate. He would not have experienced the same upbringing and hardship that made
men like Kallikratidas or Agesilaos who they were. Instead, we need to look elsewhere in Spartan history
for examples of devotion. The obvious example in favor of devotion as a Spartan characteristic is the battle
of Thermopylai. The Spartans’ doomed last stand in the pass is clear evidence that normal Spartans, even
kings, were willing to lay down their lives for Sparta without hesitation. Even the helots, the Spartan slave
class, stayed to fight beside their masters, despite the chance for freedom that a victorious Persia
represented.\footnote{Hdt. 7.201-234.}

The clearest evidence in opposition to this idea would be the Spartan surrender of Pylos (c. 425
BCE) during the Peloponnesian War.\footnote{Th. 4.31-38.} As Thucydides tells us, the Spartan garrison on Pylos, when given
the option, chose to surrender rather than fight to the bitter end. After a long engagement, heavy
casualties, and an enemy that refused to face them on equal terms, but instead showered them with ranged attacks. They chose to live instead of dying in a hopelessly one-sided engagement with no hope of injuring their enemy. Unlike their counterparts at Thermopylae, these Spartans were frustrated by an enemy content to wear them down from afar. So instead of dying without any benefit to Sparta, or inflicting any damage to her opponents, they surrendered. This would be a clear sign that real Spartans did not quite match up with their ideal model, if not for the following passage:

This event caused much more surprise among the Hellenes than anything else that happened in the war. The general impression had been that Spartans would never surrender their arms whether because of hunger or any other form of compulsion; instead they would keep them to the last and die fighting as best they could. It was hard to believe that those who had surrendered were the same sort of people as those who had fallen.\textsuperscript{167}

Based on this observation, by Thucydides himself no less, it is clear that the Pylos episode represents an extreme deviation from the norm. The devaluation of their own lives was a key feature for all Spartiates. Pylos simply marks a unique instance where Spartans, robbed of any chance to aid their city with their death, were willing to surrender, possibly since they were fighting other Greeks, and there was no shame to this surrender.\textsuperscript{168} Thucydides makes it clear that Pylos was a singular event in Spartan history, and that the contrary was the norm expected from Spartan warriors, no doubt from long-standing precedent. Even the famously anti-Spartan Thucydides could recognize how unique Pylos was in Spartan history, and not a reflection of Spartans as a whole.

Based on the above evidence, it is clear that this is one aspect of the Spartan mirage that is supported by historical precedent. The ideal that others created of Spartans when it came to devotion and patriotism was clearly based on historical precedents. Spartans had a reputation long before, and after, Thucydides’ time for diehard devotion to their city’s cause. Clearly it was well-earned, as his admission makes it seem that no other Spartan force had surrendered before. Pylos represents a deviation

\textsuperscript{167} Th. 4.40.
\textsuperscript{168} As stated explicitly at Th. 4.38.
from a long-standing pattern of devotion, patriotism, and heroic sacrifice for the good of the state. Kleomenes and Pausanias represent outliers along this spectrum. The average Spartiate, who we are trying to better define through the character traits outlined in the Spartan mirage, would have been Agoge trained, much like Agesilaos. In many ways Agesilaos represents the core of what a Spartan was, and the contrast he represents in this situation, when compared to Kleomenes, is that the Agoge fostered devotion. Through the rigours of its brutal training, Spartans found a deep sense of themselves as one small, insignificant piece of the Spartan community. Although Pylos casts some doubt on the authenticity of devotion as a core Spartan value, the weight of evidence seems to point in the opposite direction. As a result, we can say, with some confidence, that Spartans were devout patriots willing to die for their city.
Chapter Three: Iron Nerves

As the first chapter no doubt has made clear, one of the Agoge’s driving motivations was to break down each individual’s concern for himself and enshrine patriotic devotion in its place as the individual’s core motivation. However, this de-valuation of the individual had a secondary benefit – it contributed to their battlefield cohesion. The Spartans and other Greek city states utilised the same fighting formation on the battlefield: the hoplite phalanx. The Greeks had collectively adopted this style of fighting in the period following the collapse of Mycenaean civilization, and the onset of the Greek Dark Ages. While dates of adoption vary widely between scholars, the phalanx had been adopted around the same time that the Lykourgan reforms had been put into place in Sparta. The timing, and the manner of its adoption, however, is a concern for a different paper; instead, our focus here is on what made the phalanx successful in the field, and what could destroy its cohesion. Every Greek army depended on discipline and a cohesive formation to survive an engagement. Without it they were easy prey for their enemies.

The main component of successful hoplite warfare was the ability of hoplite forces to work together to resist the enemy, but this went beyond simply fighting side-by-side. Unlike the more brazen type of fighting depicted in the Iliad, or lauded by Herodotos in the aftermath of Plataia, the hoplite phalanx needed a more specialized form of courage. For a phalanx to succeed required that its hoplites held their position no matter what. As the hoplite panoply, together with their shield, rendered retreat difficult, hoplites relied on their comrades not to run away when faced with the enemy. Every hoplite was responsible not only for his own protection, but for that of his left-hand neighbor. Due to its design, the hoplite shield provided protection for that left-hand neighbor’s flank. Each hoplite had to trust his neighbor to protect his exposed flank, just as he was entrusted with his other neighbor’s protection. In a way, the phalanx worked on trust and nerve as much as on discipline and cohesion. The phalanx could
only prevail if the hoplites could trust one another not to run – with that secured the phalanx was a powerful formation, if strategically inflexible.\textsuperscript{169}

On the other hand, Homeric combat had been much more focused on individualistic courage, and its echoes can be seen in Greek combat as late as Herodotos.\textsuperscript{170} With the advent of the phalanx, however, Spartans came to realize that a different kind of courage was essential to its success: nerve. Spartans recognised that the ability to stand and maintain position in the formation was more important than individual displays of bravery. Several \textit{Sayings} support the idea that Spartans valued nerve over this antiquated, performative bravery. Spartans could not abide cowards, and they could be brutal to someone who shirked his duty out of cowardice. For a truly brave individual, they could even overlook physical limitations, as the following \textit{Sayings} bear witness to. By examining these \textit{Sayings} and comparing them to Spartan history, we will be able to see that having an iron nerve was typical of both the real and imagined Spartan. With their reduced sense of self-worth, Spartans were well-conditioned for the rigours of phalanx combat.

Unsurprisingly, the first \textit{Saying} that hints at this type of courage comes from Agesilaos, a veteran of many battles during his long reign. Thus, when he is alleged to have said the following, it no doubt came from long, hard-earned experience:

\begin{quote}
ἐπιζητοῦντος δὲ τινὸς διὰ τί Σπαρτιάται μετ’ αὐλῶν ἀγωνίζονται, ἔφη, ἃν, ὅταν πρὸς ρυθμὸν βαίνωσιν, οἱ τε δειλοὶ καὶ οἱ ἀνδρεῖοι φανεροὶ ὑσιν.'\textsuperscript{171}
\end{quote}

And when one was wishing to know why Spartans fight accompanied by the sound of the flutes, he said: ‘so that, when they advance in a measured motion, both the cowardly and the brave are visible.’

\textsuperscript{169} The phalanx was extremely strong, but could not be moved with ease – shifted in and out of combat – on the battlefield. Once two phalanges engaged, any tactical finesse was next to impossible.

\textsuperscript{170} Note Herodotos’ lauding of Aristodemos at Hdt. 9.71, whereas the Spartans dismiss Aristodemos for his recklessness.

\textsuperscript{171} Plu. \textit{Mor.} 210f-211a.
With the pipes defining the tempo of the advance, the Spartans would have been locked to a certain pace. They could neither walk faster, nor hang back, as either action would put the formation at risk, opening up gaps that could be exploited by the enemy. It forced both the over-enthusiastic, and the reluctant, to maintain position and advance at a steady pace, or be marked out by their comrades. This would require a much more steady courage than the older Homeric form.

All throughout their training, Spartans would have been conditioned and trained to move together at the pipes’ command. Maintaining that steady pace – contrary to their inclinations either to shy away from contact, or race towards it – required remarkably solid nerves. What is important for the Spartans specifically, is that their sense of community and patriotism that was encouraged with the breakdown of the individual would directly help them in this situation. As he valued himself less and the community more, the Spartan hoplite would have been better able to stand his ground against the enemy, his concern more on the state’s success than his own survival. As Agesilaos points out, when the Phalanx advances, those who lag behind and those who press forward can clearly be distinguished. As a result, Spartiates advanced as a single unified mass, so that no one could be accused of either cowardice or excessive displays of bravery on the battlefield.

This idea was hammered into them day in and day out, and our next two Sayings clearly prove that this idea, advancing as a single unit, was very much a part of the Spartan mindset. They are very similar in concept and detail – and there is a good chance that they represent a single event in Spartan history rather than two separate episodes. The first instance comes from the Spartan Androkleidas:

Ἀνδροκλείδας ὁ Λάκων πηρωθεὶς τὸ σκέλος κατέταξεν αὐτὸν εἰς τοὺς πολεμιστὰς: ὡς δ᾽ ἐνίσταντο τινὲς διακωλύοντες ὅτι ἐπεπήρωτο, ἄλλ᾽ οὐ φεύγοντα, ἐἶπε, ἐμὸν τὸς γὰρ ἀντιτεταγμένος μάχεσθαι. 172

Androkleidas the Laconian, mutilated in his leg, arranged himself among the warriors. As some were making opposition, hindering him, since he had been maimed, he said: ‘But it is necessary that I fight against the opponents not fleeing, but remaining (where I am).’

172 Plu., Mor. 217c.
Similarly, another saying is attributed to Agesilaos:

\[\text{θεωρήσας δὲ τινα Λάκωνα χωλόν ἐπὶ πόλεμον ἐξιόντα καὶ ἵππον ἤτοις, \text{οὐκ} \text{αισθάνη,} \text{ἔφη, ὅτι} \text{οὐ} \text{φευγόντων} \text{ἄλλα} \text{μενόντων} \text{ὁ} \text{πόλεμος} \text{χρείαν} \text{ἔχει;}^\text{173}\]

When he observed a lame Laconian going to battle and seeking for a horse, ‘Do you not understand,’ he said, ‘that the war has need not of those who run away, but of those who remain (where they are)?’

Both of these anecdotes follow a similar outline: they both prominently feature a lame Spartan and argue that fighting in the phalanx does not require the ability to run, but rather to stand your ground against the enemy. Within Sparta’s historical record, this anecdote is the only place Androkleidas appears in the source tradition, while Agesilaos is well-known. This makes him impossible to place historically – he may very well have been the lame Spartan Agesilaos speaks to. Whether or not these two Sayings represent a single event in Spartan history is a secondary issue however. What is important is the idea that standing your ground in combat was more important than being able to run in the Spartan model. This would have been especially important in Agesilaos’ case as he was both crippled and one of the few Spartan kings to have undergone the Agoge.\textsuperscript{174}

A key part of the Spartan system was an emphasis on being physically capable and whole – especially at birth – and the fact that a crippled leg could be overlooked is significant.\textsuperscript{175} The true value of a Spartan was not their speed, but instead their ability to hold their position in the line despite their proximity to the enemy. It was a very different mentality compared to that valued by Homeric warriors. Spartans would have had to cope with the anxiety of approaching battle at that steady space, unable to relieve that tension of their own accord. Holding their position was crucial, as has been mentioned above, since each hoplite protected the flank of the man to his left. The Spartans, because they had been taught

\textsuperscript{173} Plu., Mor. 210f.
\textsuperscript{174} Plu. Ages. 1. Here Plutarch outlines the custom that the Spartan heir apparent would be exempt from the Agoge.
\textsuperscript{175} I refer here specifically to the idea that Spartan children were first examined by the elders before they were approved to be reared. Weak, sickly, or deformed children would be exposed to the elements. See Plu. Lyc. 16.1-2.
to put the state before their own interests, were the best men for this task and thus the least likely to run. They knew that if they ran they would injure the state that they served, whereas their death could benefit it.

The next example of steady nerves we have comes from Demaratos. Demaratos is a unique character in Spartan history. He reigned in Sparta from c. 515–491 BCE, at which point he was deposed on the grounds of his supposed illegitimacy. Ariston, his father, had originally believed that he was not Demaratos’ father, as Demaratos had been born very early following his marriage to this, his third, wife. It was also revealed by Herodotos that, when he spoke with his mother about it, she revealed that he had two potential fathers: Ariston, or the cult hero Astrabakos. She says that the hero’s spirit visited her just before Ariston returned home; so Demaratos’ paternity was in question. As Ariston had proclaimed it impossible he was Demaratos’ father (although he later accepted Demaratos as his son), and Delphi confirmed this was the case, Demaratos was deposed before voluntarily going into exile in Persia where he joined the court of Darius.  

Herodotos likely had access to Demaratos’ descendants in the Troad region of Asia Minor, who still inhabited in the area during Xenophon’s time. Herodotos frequently used Demaratos to point out the Spartan contributions to ultimate Greek victory against the Persians.

In Herodotos’ narrative we see a confident individual still very much in love with his country despite how he had been treated. This saying no doubt dates from the period of his reign in Sparta:

ἐρωτήσαντος δὲ τινὸς διὰ τί τοὺς μὲν τὰς ἀσπίδας παρ’ αὐτοῖς ἀποβαλόντας ἀτιμοῦσι, τοὺς δὲ τὰ κράνη καὶ τοὺς θώρακας οὐκέτι, ἃτι, ἔφη, ταῦτα μὲν ἐαυτῶν χάριν περιτίθενται, τὴν δὲ ἀσπίδα τῆς κοινῆς τάξεως ἑνεκα.’

After someone asked why they punished those among them who threw away their shields, but they did not punish those who cast aside the helmets and the breastplates, he said: ‘Because these are put on for their own sake, while the shield is put on for the sake of the common line of battle.’

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177 See for example Hdt. 7.101-105, 7.209, 7.234-239, etc. In each instance Demaratos is used in fictionalized accounts of discussions with Xerxes to highlight different features of Spartan character, such as their tenacity or courage.
178 Plu., Mor. 220a.
As has been previously stated, each man in a hoplite phalanx carried a large, concave shield that, in formation, protected the exposed flank of the man beside him. In that sense, each hoplite bore a shield as much for his comrades’ protection as his own. Casting away one’s shield was only necessary in the event of flight, as it was too heavy to carry while running with any hope of escape. If a hoplite had abandoned it, he had essentially placed his own safety and well-being over that of his comrades and state. Much as Demaratos mentions, while Spartans donned their armour for their own protection, their shields were used for the protection of their neighbors on behalf of Sparta. To throw it aside meant that they had forsaken both their comrades and their state, and thus had no right to claim citizen status.

In Sparta, where they had been trained to put the good of the state above their own interest, this kind of action was unacceptable. While they were allowed to care about their own well-being, it was only supposed to be a secondary concern. On the battlefield such concern was a liability, and could put the entire state at risk. That was why they had focused on breaking down the individual – they were trying to curb this kind of reaction on the battlefield. They wanted to instill patriotism in their soldiers so that they would have the nerve to hold the line as long as their comrades still fought. They took up their shields for the sake of their community, but casting it away was the purest act of self-interest.

For a Spartan entering the battlefield, his mind was supposed to be focused on advancing the state’s interests. He should not have been willing to leave the field while the enemy still fought – so, for a Spartan, there were only two options available:

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\text{ἄλλη προσαναδιδοῦσα τῷ παιδὶ τὴν ἄσπιδα καὶ παρακελευομένη, ‘τέκνον,’ ἔφη, ‘ἡ τὰν ἣ ἐπὶ τᾶς.’}^{179}
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Another woman, giving the shield to her son, exhorted him saying: ‘Son, either this or upon this.’ This is perhaps the single most famous quotation in the entire *Apophthegmata Lakonika*. A Spartan was either to return with his shield, alive, or dead upon it, showing that he had not run from the enemy. The

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179 Plu. Mor. 241f.
absence of his shield showed him to be a coward – as he had cast it aside to make his escape. Thanks to the weight of the hoplite shield, no Spartan could flee the field with it in hand. The Spartan had to either win, and bear his shield home honorably, or be struck down and borne home upon it, his honor intact.

Other Sayings from Unknown Spartan women also echo this sentiment. Cowardice was held as a great evil even by Spartan women – especially Spartan mothers:

ἄλλη ἀκούσασα, ὅτι ὁ υἱός αὐτῆς ἐν παρατάξει ἀνδραγαθήςας ἀπέθανεν, ‘ἐμός γὰρ ἦν,’ εἶπε. περὶ δὲ τοῦ ἐτέρου πυθομένη ὅτι ἀποδειλάσας σώζεται, ‘οὐ γὰρ ἦν ἐμός,’ ἔφη. 180

Another woman after hearing that her son, who had behaved in a manly way in the line of battle, had died said: ‘Yes, he was mine.’ But when she learned about her other son that he was safe, after having acted cowardly, she said: ‘No, he was not mine.’

The approval and censure of a Spartan mother tells us how the typical Spartans would see such individuals. She gladly acknowledges her deceased son, who had the courage to stand his ground. Just standing his ground in the phalanx against the enemy earns his mother’s admiration. There is no discussion of heroic exploits beyond this – leading us to the conclusion that strong nerves alone were praise-worthy.

The cowardly son, on the other hand, is disowned and demonized by his mother. She despises him because of his cowardice, even though it saved his life. This reaction may seem harsh, but based on what we know of hoplite combat, the cowardly son must have, out of necessity, cast aside his shield in order to escape the enemy. This would mean that the battle had gone badly for the Spartans and he had abandoned his comrades. No mention is made of whether he fought bravely while the line held, instead the focus is on the fact that, unlike his brother, he did not have the courage to hold his position. By discarding his shield and running, he put his own safety ahead of the safety of his comrades, and thus the welfare of Sparta. By doing so he so earned the ire of both his mother and his community.

This social sanction for cowardice is echoed in a much earlier work: the Iliad. In the Iliad we see the heroes mentioning how they feel obligated to fight on account of social pressures. As princes, the 180 Plu. Mor. 242a.
warrior class in Mycenaean society, they needed to show that they deserved the benefits that they received because of their status. This attitude can be seen in the discussion between Glaukos and Sarpedon:

Glaukos, why is it you and I are honoured before others with pride of place, the choice meats and the filled wine cups in Lykia, and all men look on us as if we were immortals, and we are appointed a great piece of land by the banks of Xanthos, good land, orchard and vineyard, and ploughland for the planting of wheat? Therefore it is our duty in the forefront of the Lykians to take our stand, and bear our part of the blazing of battle, so that a man of the close-armoured Lykians may say of us: "Indeed, these are no ignoble men who are lords of Lykia, these kings of ours, who feed upon the fat sheep appointed and drink the exquisite sweet wine, since indeed there is strength of valour in them, since they fight in the forefront of the Lykians."

It is also echoed by Hektor:

Then tall Hektor of the shining helm answered her: 'All these things are in my mind also, lady; yet I would feel deep shame before the Trojans, and the Trojan women with trailing garments, if like a coward I were to shrink aside from the fighting; and spirit will not let me, since I have learned to be valiant and to fight always among the foremost ranks of the Trojans, winning for my own self great glory, and for my father.'

In each of these episodes, the heroes express a desire to separate themselves from combat. The rigours, fear, and tension are a great weight on their minds – but they felt obligated to go into battle regularly. In Homeric culture, bravery needed to be regularly displayed before witnesses to maintain a prince’s reputation. This is similar to the case of the Spartan hoplite: no one remembers your previous accomplishments and reputation if you disgraced yourself in the most recent battle. They both have to display their skill and courage at each and every opportunity. The only real difference is that the hoplite goes into combat as part of a unit, and stands with his comrades. If any of them run, the unit as a whole

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182 *Iliad* 6.440-446.
is weakened and rendered potentially vulnerable. The hero goes into battle alone, and if he runs, he does not leave anyone else vulnerable. Instead, his cowardice is entirely his own to suffer.

On the whole, the desire to claim the brave son, and shun the cowardly, shows us the value that Spartan society placed on nerve. They did not so much value the man that rushed into combat – instead they valued the individuals with the nerve to hold their position and fight.¹⁸³ In each and every case the Spartans value the hoplite who holds his own. For them it was not about flaunting your bravery, as it was for heroes like Hektor, Odysseus or Achilles, but fighting to live. We see this sentiment expressed best in the aftermath of Plataia:

Much the greatest courage was shown, in my opinion, by Aristodemos... However, when, after the battle, the question of who had most distinguished himself was discussed, the Spartans present decided that Aristodemos had, indeed, performed great deeds, but that he had done so mainly to retrieve his lost honor, rushing forward with the fury of a madman in his desire to be killed before his comrades’ eyes: Posidonio, on the contrary, without any wish to be killed, had fought bravely, and was on that account the better man.¹⁸⁴

Spartans did not care about individual acts of suicidal bravery. Instead it was that communal drive behind fighting that was of the highest value to them, and the Agoge did an excellent job reinforcing it. Those hoplites, encouraged to put the good of Sparta before themselves, and brought up in a culture where cowardice was despised, were that much less likely to run. They would hold their ground because they fought not for their own sake, or out of a hyper-masculine desire for admiration, but for their unit and their community.

Taking these Sayings as a whole, we can see that both the Agoge and Spartan society were perceived to shun cowardice in any form, and to value those who had the nerve to stand their ground. The emphasis on nerve over heroic acts is clear from the above examples, but it is interesting to look at its evidence within the historical narrative. One instance that seems to prove the contrary comes from

¹⁸³ Consider once again the story of Aristodemos. See Hdt. 9.71.
¹⁸⁴ Hdt. 9.71.
Plutarch’s Life of Lykourgos. Agesilaos is confronted with the aftermath of the battle of Leuktra, the famous Spartan defeat at the hands of Thebes in 371 BCE. The Spartan king, an epitome of the Spartan ideal, is faced with the task of deciding the fate of the Spartans who survived the battle. Although it is not stated outright, the underlying assumption is that they survived because they had fled the field. As the number of survivors was great, and they could significantly sway state politics, Agesilaos chose to let the laws rest for a day, pardoning them. Cartledge reasons that Agesilaos did not want to risk depriving so many citizens of their rights, lest they act together and start a revolution. In a way Agesilaos was not so much condoning their actions as making an accommodation for such a large body of citizens. This makes sense considering the relatively small number of Spartan citizens that would have been left. Having such a large body of former citizens present at home, with no rights but still able to bear arms, would have been both counter-intuitive and politically volatile. It was more expedient, both for the welfare of the state and for the preservation of his own kingship, to pardon them.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, we hear in Herodotos of the fate of the survivors of Thermopylai. Contrary to popular belief, there were in fact Spartan survivors of the battle. According to Herodotos there were three survivors. Aristodemos we have already met – who, along with another Spartan named Eurytos, had been afflicted by an acute inflammation of the eyes and sent to nearby Alpenoi to recuperate. Aristodemos, when they both heard that the Persians had found the secret path, stayed back, while his comrade Eurytos had a helot lead him to the beleaguered Greek force. Arriving as the battle was turning against the Spartans, Eurytos blindly rushed into the thick of the fighting and promptly died. Aristodemos, however, returned home and suffered the derision of his people. He was branded a ‘trembler’ (τρέσας) by his fellow Laconians, denied the comforts of home, becoming an object

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185 Plu. Ages. 30.2-6.
186 Cartledge (2002), pg. 252.
187 Hdt. 7.229-231.
of ridicule.\textsuperscript{188} This social sanction was so great that it drove Aristodemos into attacking the Persians wildly at Plataia, hoping to die, and thus to show his fellow Spartans that he was not a coward.

Similarly, another Spartan, by the name of Pantites, also survived the battle. This third survivor had been dispatched as a messenger into Thessaly, but had dallied in returning. Having tarried, he received word that his comrades were dead, and so he went home. Returning home to Sparta he found himself scorned by both friends and family.\textsuperscript{189} Just like Aristodemos, he suffered the extreme ridicule and hatred of his community. Unlike Aristodemos, Pantites could not take it, and killed himself. In these two cases both Spartiates experienced the rancour of their society because of their perceived cowardice. To be branded a trembler was to be despised by the entire community; after all, no hoplite could trust them to guard their flanks. This condemnation was so great that they were both driven to end their lives, one way or the other. It was only by showing that they were not afraid of death that they could escape that contempt.

It remains uncertain which of these instances better represents the idea of Spartan courage. While the \textit{Apophthegmata Lakonika} represents an idealized fabrication of what outside observers perceived were authentic Spartan values, these episodes in Spartan history provide us with a frame of reference from which to examine them. In this situation, it is probably more important to note that, in any society, there is no single rule for dealing with this kind of behavior. Just like with any society, mores and values sometimes have to shift to accommodate extenuating circumstances. Aristodemos and Pantites were scourged because they were individual cowards and thus were subjected to social sanction. They stood out starkly when compared to their large body of fallen comrades. They had been part of the elite 300 Spartiates relegated to the king’s bodyguard on the battlefield. They were supposed to represent the best soldiers Sparta could field. The fact that they survived while their comrades fell, even considering

\textsuperscript{188} Hdt. 7.230-231.
\textsuperscript{189} Hdt. 7.232.
the circumstances of their survival, was enough to condemn them. While Herodotos postulates that Aristodemos may not have been sanctioned if Eurytos had not acted as he did, Pantites stands as a clear example of how Spartans treated tremblers.\footnote{Hdt. 7.229.}

The survivors of Leuktra were spared the same treatment because there were just so many of them, and so few Spartiates left.\footnote{Sparta had recently suffered a significant drop-off of citizen numbers, not just from casualties (although that was a contributing factor) but as a result of their inability to pay their stipend to the messes. Many Spartans lacked the requisite wealth to pay their monthly stipend to the communal messes and were thus stripped of citizen status.} The battle had been a calamity for the Spartan citizen body, and so they were spared ridicule. Xenophon tells us in no uncertain terms that Agesilaos, when faced with the decision to execute Sphodrias, chose to spare him as “Sparta needs soldiers like this.”\footnote{X. Hell. 5.4.32.} Plutarch’s reasoning that they would have fomented revolution seems far-fetched, but the fact remains that they represented a large body of trained soldiers. When one considers that they had been trained since early childhood to put Sparta first, this idea of revolution seems less likely. Whatever the case may be, the fact is that Leuktra marks a significant deviation from normality. Just like Pylos, Leuktra was unique in Spartan history and should not be seen as a representative incident.

Pylos was similarly unique in the idea that it represents a further acknowledgement that there was no single guideline by which these individuals were to be judged. When the survivors of Pylos returned, they were at first not punished at all, but after a time – in which several of them gained political offices – they were deprived of their citizen rights. This is a logical response, in line with what we have seen so far in Spartan society’s reactions to such conduct. What is truly odd, however, is that, after a time, their rights are restored to them.\footnote{Th. 5.34.2.} This was no doubt due to the growing scarcity of available Spartiates. The state was just beginning to realize it lacked the same citizen numbers it had benefitted from during the Persian Wars, and so was willing to overlook this infraction to bolster those numbers. Circumstance
seems to have played a significant role in how Spartans viewed cowardice. While the mirage would have us think all Spartans despised cowardice, the reality is much different. The aftermath of Leuktra, Pylos and Thermopylae all show very different reactions to the same infraction. The social backlash against cowardice was different in each case, dominated by the events and circumstances impacting Spartan society at that time.

In any case, there is no clear way to define how Spartans viewed cowardice – probably because there was no set rule or guideline to follow. Each situation warranted its own response. The Spartans clearly valued those with the nerve to stand their ground and fight as a unit over individual bravery, but the rules about how to react to such things were not etched in stone. The Agoge sought to instill a steadfast courage in its adherents, to stiffen their nerves so they could stand their ground beside their comrades. They were trained to fight together, not as individuals. When it came to cowardice, Spartans judged each case on the circumstances and the man involved. In that way the Spartan mirage differs from the reality of Spartan society. While the mirage would have you believe that cowardice was treated with a blanket response of hostility and hate, this was not always the case. They despised and punished those who valued their own safety above that of their comrades, but in the interest of the state, they were able to overlook some shortcomings.

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194 Although pardoning such actions was very rare. See Plu. Mor. 240f, specifically the Spartan woman Damatria.
195 After all, Aristodemos and Pantites actively made a choice to act as they did, while the survivors at Leuktra were as much victims of chance as cowardly survivors.
Chapter Four: Obedience

It is a well-known fact that Sparta, as a militaristic society, trained its male population from the tender age of seven to be capable hoplites and committed citizens. Throughout ancient times, Greece was a politically-volatile area, each city state vying for regional supremacy. With no over-arching authority to impose any kind of limit on inter-state conflict, Greece was in a near constant state of war. There was continuous competition for land, wealth, and resources – and the Greeks were rarely hesitant to decide such affairs on the battlefield. As a result of this state of affairs, Sparta had to be perpetually prepared to defend its interests against other Greeks. As the previous two chapters have made clear, Sparta carefully conditioned its male population so that they would develop certain characteristic traits. Patriotism was enshrined as a personal value to ensure that each individual would always put the good of Sparta before their own interests. Strong nerves were fostered so that they, as hoplites, would better be able to hold their position in the phalanx, despite the conditions of combat or proximity to the enemy. A further trait to potentially be added to this list is somewhat unsurprising, but key to creating an effective fighting force in any period of history: obedience. In a style of fighting so reliant on formation, quick obedience could be crucial at certain moments. Sparta was also unique among Greek city states in that it had a clear chain of command from the kings all the way down to the individual rank-and-file hoplites.

Thus, a trait we can see portrayed in the Spartan mirage is the idea of strict obedience. While obedience is typically key to the efficiency of any fighting force, the Greek case is somewhat unique. If the characteristic structure of the phalanx is factored into the discussion, obedience was not quite as necessary to its operation as in other periods. Therefore, whether or not an obedient Spartan was authentic is the purpose of this chapter to discuss. When we compare actual events to the image presented in Plutarch’s *Apophthegmata Lakonika*, a clearer picture can be established. Based on a comparison of these sayings to Spartan history, we can more definitively decide if obedience was an actual, or a perceived, feature of the authentic Spartan.
The first saying comes from Theopompos, a Eurypontid Spartan king who reigned from 720-675 BCE. One thing Theopompos is well-known for is the establishment of the ephorate as a limiting measure on royal authority. The ephors were a way to prevent the kingship from becoming a tyranny – a problem somewhat endemic in Greece during that era. Theopompos did so because he was more interested in guaranteeing the longevity of Sparta’s dual monarchy than in his own individual power. Theopompos also does not appear in Herodotos, Thucydides, or Xenophon, as he pre-dates their periods of focus. Finally, he is also the Spartan king, who is credited with launching the subjugation of Messenia. Beyond that, we know very little about him – just like many Spartans, he left very little of himself behind.

This saying, however, tells us something about both him and Spartan society:

λέγοντος δέ τινος ὅτι ἡ Σπάρτη σῶζεται διὰ τοὺς βασιλεῖς ἀρχικοὺς ὄντας, ἄνω ἐφη, ἄλλα διὰ τοὺς πολίτας πειθαρχικοὺς ὄντας. When someone was saying that Sparta was preserved through the king’s skill in command, ‘Not so,’ he said, ‘but it is through the citizen’s ready obedience.’

Theopompos here is countering the idea that his own talent, or any Spartan king’s talent for that matter, has any bearing on the state’s well-being. Despite the obvious benefits to his own reputation of such talk, Theopompos outright denies it. Instead, he emphasizes that its citizens’ obedience preserves the state more than the kings’ skill at command. It is more than likely that we are supposed to interpret a military dimension to this saying. For a king entrusted with a long, hard campaign against Messenia, as well as personally valuing adherence to the laws, this sentiment fits well with what we know of his history. For one such as Theopompos, the readiness of the citizens to follow commands could be seen to preserve the state better than any talented commander.

To a large extent, this saying seems to portray authentic Spartan characteristics as well as the largely one-dimensional quality of Greek warfare. Until Alexander’s time, wars were fought mostly by

198 Plu. Mor. 221e.
infantry-based armies, typically accompanied by a smattering of cavalry and missile-infantry provided by the wealthy and poor classes of each city. Once the phalanges engaged, there was little else these other forces could do to tip the balance. Most Greek cavalry was not equipped to break the weak and vulnerable flanks of a phalanx, typically lacking the numbers and the necessary equipment to do so. At best, these non-infantry forces could harass the flanks of an enemy phalanx, or, in a worst case-scenario, provide a screening force to give a broken phalanx time to either retreat or re-form.

For a commander, who as social conventions dictated had to fight with his troops, there was very little to be done once battle was joined. In the thick of the fighting, a Greek commander could not have a solid overview of the battlefield, and, as the hoplites were mainly citizens, they lacked the discipline for fine manoeuvres. Even the Spartans, the finest hoplites in Greece, could not really do much once the phalanges had engaged. Once they had made contact, they could not disengage without the risk of presenting an opening for the enemy to exploit. So, in a way, Theopompos was exactly right – Sparta’s victory or defeat did not rely on his command ability at all.

Outside of combat, at the strategic level, talented commanders could have an influence. At the tactical level, however, battles between Greek city states were not drawn out feints and counterattacks. Much of the battle was focused on bringing the two phalanges into contact, and the stronger side breaking the weaker. Campaigns would begin and end very quickly, both sides heading for a large enough field for both phalanges to form and engage. It was more a test of strength than a test of cunning. Alongside that, based on the density and weaknesses of the formation, the phalanx was not capable of deft movements. For all intents and purposes, the king just needed to get his troops to the battlefield. Beyond that, their skill and numbers would decide everything else. Obedience was necessary, however, as the hoplites needed to listen to their commander in order to fight effectively during the battle. In a way, the capacity of the Spartans to heed his command exceeded the need for the king to be tactically innovative. Spartans could and would heed their king’s command on the battlefield; in fact, it is clear that they were the best
equipped in Greece to follow his orders. However, whether they would need to do so on the battlefield is another issue.\(^{199}\)

Whether or not Spartans needed to heed commands on the battlefield, it is hard to argue that they were not obedient. In particular, one such individual that stands out in this regard is Agesilaos. Once again, we look to Agesilaos to shed light on the Spartan model:

άλλοτε δ᾽ ἐρωτώμενος διὰ τί μάλιστα παρὰ τοὺς ἄλλους εὐδαιμονοῦσιν οἱ Σπαρτιάται, ‘διότι,’ εἶπε, ‘παρὰ τοὺς ἄλλους ἄσκοψιν ἄρχειν τε καὶ ἄρχεσθαι.’\(^{200}\)

But at another time he was asked for what reason especially the Spartans were prosperous compared with other [Greeks], ‘Because,’ he said, ‘compared with the others they train both to rule and be ruled.’

As we have discussed in previous chapters, the Agoge would have spent time breaking down the individual identities of its adherents and subordinating them to the group. The idea was not to make mindless drones, but rather individuals who could take orders and give them, adapting and acting as the situation dictated. An individual’s concern for himself was a potential liability on the battlefield. If he placed his welfare well above the welfare of others, there was the chance he might flee at the worst possible moment. Thus they needed to weed that instinct out, ensuring that their hoplites could follow orders while putting aside their own concerns. This was doubly important for those in command – they had to learn how to take orders before they could be entrusted with command. That way they would not squander the lives entrusted to them, or ask something of their subordinates that was not possible. They needed to understand the realities of both sides of the command relationship in order to be able to command most effectively.

Even with effective command, however, the phalanx would not survive contact if they did not maintain formation, as emphasized in the previous chapter. Hoplites needed to be disciplined, and the

\(^{199}\) The window for battlefield manoeuvres is short when the phalanges are moving towards engagement. One example of this is at the battle of Mantinea – although whether the order to change position was refused due to time restrictions, or out of pride, is uncertain. See Th. 5.71-72.

\(^{200}\) Plu. Mor. 212c.
best way to ensure proper discipline was for them to have a distinct chain of command that they all
recognized and obeyed. This is well-documented in the *Lakedaimonion Politeia* attributed to Xenophon—
though some scholars doubt the authenticity of this particular work. For example, the writing style is far
too simple for Xenophon, such as attributing the creation of every single Spartan institution to
Lykourgos.\(^\text{201}\) In any case, the author was close enough in time to Xenophon that it makes no difference
for our concerns. For it to be attributed to Xenophon, the writer had to have lived between 412-371 BCE,
the only period when Sparta posted *harmostai* abroad.\(^\text{202}\) What is really important about this work,
however, is not when it was written, nor by whom, but the information it relates about the Spartan chain
of command.

That chain of command, as the *Lakedaimonion Politeia* tells us, placed a commander over each
sub-division of the Spartan army. The Spartan army was formed of 6 *morai*. Each *mora* had a *polemarchos*
in command, and was further sub-divided into 4 *lochoi*, commanded by a *lochagos*. Each *lochos* was then
divided into 4 *pentekostyes*, commanded by a *pentekonter*, and finally into 4 *enomotai*, commanded by
an *enomotarches*. The 6 *polemarchoi* were the army’s senior commanders, and would have been the
king’s direct subordinates. The Spartan army had a clearly delineated chain of command, unlike other
Greek city states that used broader organizational structures simply to speed up the process of forming a
battle line.\(^\text{203}\) Just as Thucydides mentions:

So, too, if an order has to be passed along the line, it is done in the same way and quickly becomes
effective, as nearly the whole Spartan army, except for a small part, consists of officers serving
under other officers, and the responsibility for seeing that an order is carried out falls to a great
many people.\(^\text{204}\)
Clearly the Spartan army had a more finitely articulated chain of command and could more easily communicate orders than any other Greek city state. With such a clear chain of command, the Spartan army straddled the dividing line between being a professional army and a citizen army.205

Along this same line, we have our next Saying, attributed to Agis, son of Archidamos, a Eurypontid king who ruled 427-400 BCE. Agis lead Sparta through much of the Peloponnesian War, and so represents one of the most experienced battlefield commanders Sparta had. He was also the king who chose to act on Alkibiades’ advice to fortify and occupy Dekeleia in 413 BCE, which ultimately brought an end to the war.206 The Saying attributed to him shares a great deal with the ideas expressed above:

ἐρωτηθεὶς δὲ τί μάλιστα μάθημα ἐν Σπάρτῃ ἀσκεῖται, ‘τὸ γιγνώσκειν,’ εἶπεν, ‘ἄρχειν τε καὶ ἄρχεσθαι.’207

But being asked what lesson was especially practised in Sparta, ‘Knowing,’ he said, ‘both to rule and be ruled.’

In a militarised state like Sparta, there was as much a need for experienced and competent commanders as for obedient soldiers. This Saying tells us that Spartans first learned how to obey orders so that they would be better able to give them. Just as Agesilaos expressed in the previous Saying, Spartans believed that the best commanders were those who had experienced both sides of the command relationship. They had served under others, and knew what it took to be a good leader. Having experience on both sides of this command structure would better allow them to empathize with those at their command.

Empathy with the soldiers under their command was key to creating wise commanders. Another benefit of this training format was that Spartan commanders had a respect for the source of their authority: the law. The next saying we have is attributed to Archidamos, the son of Zeuxidamos, a Eurypontid king who reigned from 469-427 BCE.208 This is the same king for whom the initial part of the

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205 For a visual breakdown of the Spartan army’s organizational structure, as I have perceived it from the text, see Appendix One.
206 Cartledge (2003), pg. 162, 196.
207 Plu. Mor. 215d.
Peloponnesian War, which began in 431 BCE, was named (the Archidamian war). Archidamos knew where authority truly lay in Sparta:

Ἀρχίδαμος ὁ Ζευξιδάμου, πυθομένου τινὸς αὐτοῦ τίνες προεστήκασι τῆς Σπάρτης, ‘οὶ νόμοι καὶ τὰ ἀρχεῖα,’ ἐφη, ‘κατὰ τοὺς νόμους.’ 209

Archidamos, the son of Zeuxidamos, when someone asked him who ruled Sparta, ‘The laws, and the magistrates,’ he said, ‘according to the laws.’

For a Spartan, the laws were the beginning and end of legitimate authority. Even to the kings, the laws were the supreme authority, as checks and balances within the system prevented the accumulation of too much power in any one person’s hands. In all reality, the kings, outside the battlefield, were little more than normal citizens. After all, even the kings could be subjected to the penalties of the Lykourgan system, as the ephors had been empowered to enforce them.

Unsurprisingly, we see this same idea expressed in an anecdote attributed to Agesilaos:

καὶ πάλιν σημαντεῖοι δὲ ὕπο τῶν ἐφορῶν ἔνεκα τῆς τοῦ περιστηκότος τὴν Σπάρτην Ἑλληνικοῦ πολέμου αἰτίας διὰ τὰ ὕπο τοῦ Πέρσου διαπεμφθέντα χρήματα, εἰπὼν τὸν ἀγαθὸν ἀρχοντα δεῖν ὑπὸ τῶν νόμων ἀρχεσθαι, ἀπέπλευσε τῆς Ἀσίας πολὺν ἑαυτῷ πόθον τοῖς ἑνταύθα Ἑλλησι καταλιπών. 210

And having been summoned by the ephors since the Greek war had surrounded Sparta because of the money spread around by Persia, after saying that a good commander must be ruled by the laws, he sailed away from Asia leaving behind a great yearning for him among the Greeks there.

For both Agesilaos and Archidamos, the laws and ephors represented the beginning and end of legal authority. For those dedicated to the preservation of Sparta, the laws were the highest authority and no one was exempt from their command. Thus when Agesilaos was recalled, he made no effort to vacillate or delay – he obeyed without question. For the same reason Archidamos responded the way he did, acknowledging the supreme authority the laws had over him and every other Spartan. While individuals may have acted contrary to the interests of Sparta, specifically Pausanias after Plataia, Sparta’s command structure was constant, and their obedience to the law clear.

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209 Plu. Mor. 218c.
210 Plu. Mor. 211a-b.
The real question, however, is whether or not obedience was an authentic Spartan value. While we have effectively established the perception of the obedient Spartan, what remains to be established is its authenticity in the lens of the historical evidence. Two events in the historical record particularly stand out as moments where obedience was clearly a part of the authentic Spartan character. The first such instance can be seen when we look at the memorial inscription recorded by Herodotos for the Spartan dead at Thermopylai: “Go tell the Spartans, you who read: / We took their orders, and here lie dead.” Thermopylai is a prime example of Spartans obeying orders despite the hopelessness of their situation. If there was ever a time for obedience and discipline to breakdown, it would have been at Thermopylai, where the Spartiates knew they were doomed. There had been hope that they could hold the pass, but once the goat path was discovered, that hope quickly vanished. Despite this, the Spartans stayed and fought beside their king to the bitter end.

Beyond the obvious role obedience played in keeping the Spartan forces together at Thermopylai, the second example from the historic record takes this idea even further. In Thucydides’ account of the battle of Mantinea, we can see the value Sparta put on obedient action. During the initial, pre-battle manoeuvres, two Spartan lochagoi, named Aristocles and Hipponoidas, were ordered to shift position from the right wing to fill up a gap in the line. What happened next is quite interesting – Agis had hoped to strengthen his line against the Mantineans while maintaining a numerical superiority on his right, but it was not to be:

What happened, however, was that, since the orders were given at such short notice and when the armies were actually on the move, Aristocles and Hipponoidas refused to go where they were told to go – because of this they were later found guilty of cowardice and banished from Sparta. Aristocles and Hipponoidas likely were not cowards; instead they had baulked at the idea of being ordered to move from the right wing, a place of honor in the hoplite battle line. Being placed on the right wing was

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211 Hdt. 7.228.
212 Th. 5.71-73.
213 Th. 5.72.
an honor, usually reserved for the best soldiers available. The soldiers on the far right would have been the most exposed, with no one to guard their exposed side, while being faced with the enemy’s left wing, which would present no weaknesses. As Thucydides tells us, phalanges had an unconscious tendency to crowd to their right, each hoplite trying to keep his unarmed side under the protection of his neighbor’s shield.\textsuperscript{214} This is because the man on the extreme right hesitates to present his flank to the enemy, and angles his body away causing the entire phalanx to follow suit. Thus the best troops were placed there to combat this tendency. Since most commanders extended their right past the enemy’s left wing – ostensibly to keep their exposed right from contact with the enemy – putting their best troops on the right would help to break the enemy left and fold up their line.\textsuperscript{215}

If we then consider the fact that the Spartans held the place of honor on the right, being ordered to a position on the left could be seen as an insult to one’s pride. Typically, Spartans do not question orders like this, but in this light it makes sense why they refused. The most important idea to take from this episode is not the disobedient Spartan. This is one of only two instances in Spartan history where a Spartan disobeyed his commander’s orders. What is important is that they were convicted of the charge of cowardice and banished, the most severe form of punishment available short of execution. Spartans put a high value on obedience, and an even higher censure on disobedience.

The other example we have of disobedience has a different outcome for the Spartan involved, largely due to extenuating circumstances. This episode occurs in Herodotos, and comes from the account he provides of the prelude to the battle of Plataia. Just before the battle, one Spartan refused to obey orders and nearly doomed the Greek cause, but at the same time is one of the main reasons for its success. The Greeks had been suffering from attacks by Persian cavalry that had all but severed their supply lines.\textsuperscript{216} The Greek commanders had decided to withdraw to a more defensible position. They wanted to shift

\textsuperscript{214} Th. 5.71. \\
\textsuperscript{215} Th. 5.71. \\
\textsuperscript{216} Hdt. 9.49-52.
position to a site with open supply lines and terrain that would limit the effectiveness of cavalry. They had decided to withdraw under the cover of darkness in order to avoid being caught in the open, where the Persian cavalry could envelop and destroy them. But when the order came down the line to Amompharetos, the son of Poliades and commander of the Pitanate lochos, he refused the order to retreat.²¹⁷ Amompharetos did this because he believed that following these orders would dishonour him, as he would be abandoning his position in the face of the enemy. Pausanias, Spartan regent and commander of the Greek allied forces, did not want to abandon this lochos to the enemy, and so he delayed his retreat. As the other Greek troops retreated, or were in the process of retreating, the Spartans delayed, and they slowly lost the cover of night.

In fact, the Spartans delayed so long that daylight arrived, and Pausanias finally ordered his troops to withdraw, leaving Amompharetos and his lochos behind. The argument between Pausanias and Amompharetos had become heated, but still he had refused to move, and so Pausanias left him, knowing he would be convinced to move once they had withdrawn far enough away. Not wanting to be left alone to face the enemy, Amompharetos finally obeyed his orders and followed Pausanias. Unfortunately, this was also about the same time that the Persians found the other Greek positions abandoned and began their pursuit. Eventually the Spartans, Tegeans, and Athenians, delayed by their late start, were drawn into a pitched battle – and the rest, as they say, is history.

The infuriating part of this episode is that we do not know how the Spartans would have treated this specific refusal to obey orders, as any discussion of Amompharetos in Herodotos is influenced by two factors. First of all, Amompharetos was one of the three Spartans who was judged to have distinguished

²¹⁷ According to Herodotos, this lochos was drawn from a suburb of Sparta on the river Eurotas. See Hdt. 9.53-57. However, as Kelly discusses, Thucydides denies that this Pitanate lochos had ever existed. Kelly takes this a step further, arguing that the language of Thucydides’ account indicates that this lochos may have been the 300 hippeis charged with protecting the Spartan king on the battlefield. As the hippeis had been used to escort VIPs before (Hdt. 8.124.3), it is likely they were acting as Pausanias’ personal guard. I am not convinced by this line of argument, as it hinges on a single misplaced dative that could be interpreted in several ways. See Kelly (1981), pg. 31, 36, Lee (2004), pg. 310-311, and Th. 1.20.3.
themselves in the battle.\textsuperscript{218} The second reason, and probably the more important, is that Amompharetos died in the ensuing battle and was buried with the highest honors.\textsuperscript{219} On account of this, it is hard to judge how the Spartans would have treated Amompharetos had he survived the battle. If we extrapolate from the similar event in Thucydides, the battle of Mantinea, he may have been charged with cowardice and banished.\textsuperscript{220} Although whether or not he would have been convicted remains uncertain – after all, he did eventually obey those orders, distinguished himself on the field, and the Persians were destroyed with minor casualties for the Spartans. As a result, we cannot be certain how he would have been judged, though it is likely it would not have been as positively received as the response his death provoked.

Contributing to the perception that all Spartans were essentially obedient drones is the fact that it is hard to find examples of Spartans disobeying orders. Amompharetos, Hipponoidas, and Aristokles represent only two isolated incidents in the historical record. There are instances where Spartans acted without orders, but in those situations, they were typically acting out of a desire to benefit Sparta. Interestingly, Pausanias, when he was charged with medizing and had been entertaining the idea of betraying Greece, still responded to the ephors’ command to return to Sparta to stand trial.\textsuperscript{221} Although Thucydides comments that Pausanias was certain he could acquit himself of the charges through bribery, this is likely Thucydides’ anti-Spartan sentiment leaking through. The most important idea here is that although he was working against the state in many ways, although not openly, he still obeyed its command. He could just as easily have sailed for Persia and avoided the trial entirely, but instead he returned.

Based on the above evidence, it is clear that obedience was an authentic feature of Spartan society. While Amompharetos was able to get away with disobedience, that was only due to the honorable

\textsuperscript{218} Hdt. 9.71.  
\textsuperscript{219} Hdt. 9.85.  
\textsuperscript{220} Th. 5.71-73.  
\textsuperscript{221} Th. 1.128-135.
nature of his death. Had he survived the battle, he likely would have been sanctioned by the state much as Hipponoidas and Aristokles were. Alongside this idea is that fact that Pausanias, although contemplating medizing, still obeyed the state’s orders. Clearly the Spartan state valued obedience, both the Agoge and Spartan society instilling that trait in its citizens. Alongside this, the Spartan army had a clearly demarcated chain of command, showing that obedience was expected of each Spartan when an order came down the line. Just as with nerve, obedience was a valuable trait for a hoplite to have, and the Spartan army was structured to foster it. Based on the clearly articulated chain of command that is well-represented in several ancient authors, the sanction of disobedient Spartans, and the odd case of Pausanias, it seems clear that obedience was an authentic trait of the typical Spartan. While obedience may vary from person to person, Spartans, as a whole, seem to have shared a strong adherence to discipline and order.
Chapter Five: Contempt for Wealth

Of all the character traits that have been attached to the Spartan mirage over time, contempt for wealth has always been considered a defining Spartan trait. From the very first establishment of the laws of Lykourgos, Spartans have always been believed to have an inherent urge to shun wealth. Alongside this disregard for wealth, they are also typically portrayed as having nothing but contempt for those who value it. Spartans value nothing in excess, to the point where they even limit how verbose they are. Laconic utterances and the terse nature of many Spartan interactions with outsiders are well-documented historically and directly leads us back to this contempt for wealth and luxury. Thus, it is no surprise that the Apophthegmata Lakonika shows definite evidence of the Spartan contempt for wealth. It is the purpose of this chapter to evaluate to what extent a contempt for wealth was typical of the authentic Spartan – or whether it was more an aspect of the Spartan mirage. By thoroughly examining several sayings from Plutarch’s Apophthegmata Lakonika and comparing them to historical events, we can see to what extent the Spartan mirage reflected a valid aspect of Spartan culture.

It should also come as no surprise that any discussion of Spartan frugality must of course begin with Lykourgos. The man himself is quite the historical enigma. Herodotos supports the idea that he was a single individual that created the entire Spartan government and education system. It seemed to have emerged, Athena-like, from his mind, fully-formed and whole. Yet setting a date to his lifetime is very difficult. It is also clear that Sparta’s government was not a single, monolithic creation. Some aspects were created in the initial foundation, but others were clearly established afterwards. The ephorate is one such example of a later addition, while the gerousia was likely a surviving feature of a previous system.

The historicity of Lykourgos, however, is not our intended focus here. Whether he was a single man, or multiple, is neither the focus of this chapter, nor this paper in general. Whether we follow

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222 Hdt. 1.65-66.
Herodotos, who places Lykourgos at a time before the reigns of Leon and Agasides (as the regent of his nephew Labotas, approximately 870-840 BCE), or Aristotle, who linked him to the swearing of the original Olympic truce (776 BCE), or someone else, is not important. Neither his precise dating, nor whether the Spartan government was his monolithic creation, an utterance of the Delphic Oracle, or the culmination of the work of multiple Lykourgan-esque individuals over an extended period of time, is not the issue. The point is that the Lykourgan system instituted certain practices and policies with the direct intent of removing wealth as a divisive element in Spartan society.

Thus, the usage of iron currency, the common messes, the sumptuary laws, etc., were all intended as direct measures to limit wealth’s influence within the Spartan community. With barriers to the accumulation of wealth, along with strict sumptuary laws that restricted dress, diet, and even the tools that could be used when constructing a home, the benefit of having great wealth was drastically reduced. By removing ways of displaying wealth, logic dictates that Spartan society would have experienced a corresponding drop in the desire for it. That was the intent behind Lykourgos’ austerity measures – to inhibit its effects on Sparta’s citizens.

After all, wealth was a very divisive feature in Greek society, not just in Sparta. They were living in an era where the riches of the Mycenaean palace society were just beyond living memory but still a part of their culture. That society had been divided into classes defined by the accumulation of wealth and driven by the desire to attain more at the expense of others. Consider also the idea that each ancient society we have evidence of: Athens, Rome, etc., prominently featured a social hierarchy defined

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223 For the timing of the reigns of the Spartan Kings, see Bradford (2011), pg. 1, Hdt. 1.65, and Cartledge (2003), pg. 64.
224 See Hdt. 1.65 for the tale of Lykourgos’ visit to the oracle at Delphi.
225 X. Lac. 7, and Plu. Mor. 227c
226 Homeric raiding culture tended to emphasize the seizure of the wealth of other princes. This was a way to both bolster your funds and your reputation.
Lykourgos the lawmaker wishing to convert the citizens from their current way of living to a more modest way of life, and to make them good and noble, for they were living decadently, he reared two young puppies born from the same mother and father. He accustomed one towards gluttony, permitting it [to stay] in the house, while bringing out the other, he trained it for the hunt. Then, after bringing them into the assembly, he placed down some bones and delicious treats, and he released a hare. Since each of them went to what was customary and one of the two subdued the hare, he said, ‘Do you see, o citizens, that, although these are sprung from the same line, in their life training they turned out very different from each other? And do you see that training is more effective than nature with regard to good actions?’

But others say, that he did not raise puppies, who had been born from the same [parents], but one from domestic stock, while the other from those fond of the chase. Thereafter he trained the one from inferior stock to the hunt, and he accustomed the one from the better stock only to luxury. Then when each of them went to what they were accustomed, he, having made manifest how much training could contribute towards better and worse actions, he said, ‘Certainly not, o citizens, the noble birth, admired among the masses, nor descent from Herakles is of any help for us, if we do not do those things by which he proved himself more worthy of fame, and better born of all men, by training and learning what is good throughout our entire life.’

Lykourgos did what he could to render the desire for wealth, and accumulation of it, inert.

It is in this vein of thought that we have our first saying attributed to none other than Lykourgos himself:

Lykourgos ὁ νομοθέτης βουλόμενος ἐκ τῆς προὐπαρχούσης διαίτης τοῦς πολίτας εἶς σωφρονεστέραν βίου τάξιν μετάγειν καὶ καλοκαγαθικὸς ἀπεργάζεσθαι ἀβροδίαιτοι γὰρ ἦσαν δύο σκύλακας ἀνέθρεψε ταύτοῦ πατρός καὶ μητρὸς γενομένους καὶ τὸν μὲν εἴθυσε περὶ λυχνείας οἴκοι ἔσας· τὸν δὲ ἐπαγόμενος ἦσκησε περὶ κυνηγείας. Ἡταίρα ἄγανων εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν ἔθηκεν ἀκάνθας καὶ λυχνείας τινᾶς, ἀφήκε δὲ καὶ λαγών: ἐκατέρου δ᾽ ἐπὶ τὰ συνῆθη ὄρμησαντος καὶ θατέρου τὸν λαγὼν χειρωσαμένου, εἶπεν, ὅρατε, ὦ πολίται, ὅτι ταύτοῦ ἐγένους ὑπάρχοντες ἐν τῇ τοῦ βίου ἀγωγῇ παρὰ πολὺ ἄλληλων διάφοροι ἀπέβησαν, καὶ ποιητικωτέρα τῆς φύσεως ἢ ἀσκησις πρὸς τὰ καλὰ τυχάνει;’

Τινὲς δὲ φαίνει, ως οὐ παρῆκε σκύλακας, οἳ ἐκ τῶν αὐτῶν γενομένων ἐτύχανον, ἀλλ᾽ ὁ μὲν ἐξ οἰκουρῶν, ἔτερος δ᾽ ἐκ κυνηγετικῶν κάπετα τὸν μὲν ἐκ τοῦ χείρονος γένους πρὸς τὰ κυνηγεία ἦσκησε, τὸν δὲ ἐκ τοῦ ἀμείνονος περὶ λυχνείας μόνον εἴθυσεν εἰθ᾽ ἐκατέρου ἐφ᾽ ἀ εἴθυστο ὄρμησαντος, φανερὸν ποιήσας ὅσον ἡ ἀγωγὴ πρὸς τὰ ἀμείνων καὶ χείρι συλλαμβάνεται, εἶπεν, ὅτι οὐκοῦν καὶ ἡμᾶς, ὦ πολίται, οὐδὲν οὐ παρὰ τοὺς πολλοὺς χαμαμαμεμένη εὐγένεια καὶ τὸ ἀφ᾽ Ἡρακλέους εἶναι ὄννησιν, εἰ μὴ πράττομεν δι᾽ ἂν ἐκεῖνος ἀπάνταν ἀνθρώπων ἐπιδοξότερος καὶ εὐγενέστερος ἐφάνη, ἀσκοῦμενοι καὶ μανθάνοντες καλὰ δι᾽ ὅλου τοῦ βίου.227

by economic net worth. To combat the effects of greed and wealth, Lykourgos did what he could to render the desire for wealth, and accumulation of it, inert.

227 Plu. Mor. 225f-226b.
Within this saying, much of Lykourgos’ intent behind his outlawing of wealth and luxury can be better understood. According to this anecdote, even the strongest people, with a long history of past virtues and achievements, can be undone by the insidious nature of wealth and luxury. It’s the simple argument of nature vs. nurture. Genetic inheritance only accounts for so much; upbringing, in many cases, is far more important. He considered the Spartans to be the strongest tribe of Greeks, but out of a fear of what wealth could do to even good-natured men, he enshrined within Spartan culture barriers to wealth. It was a counter-measure against how divisive it had become in Greek culture.

By doing this, Lykourgos hoped to defuse the damaging nature of wealth and greed. However, there were other ways that wealth could come into a Spartan’s possession. Such was the reasoning behind the following saying attributed, once again, to Lykourgos:

πυνθανομένου δέ τινος, διὰ τί τούς τῶν πολεμίων νεκρούς ἀπηγόρευσε σκυλεύειν, ἵππως, ἐφη, ‘μὴ κυπτάζοντες περί τὰ σκῦλα τῆς μάχης ἀμελῶσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν πενίαν ἄμα τῇ τάξει διασώζωσι.’

When someone was asking why he had forbidden the despoiling of enemy bodies, ‘So that,’ he said, ‘they do not neglect the battle, poking about the spoils, but also that they preserve their poverty together with their place in the line of battle.’

There are two very obvious intentions behind this directive. First, it was intended to maintain formation and discipline on the battlefield. As has been stated several times previously, the phalanx relied on discipline and maintaining a solid formation to prevail over the enemy. If hoplites were leaving the formation in order to loot the dead, it left their comrades fatally exposed to an enemy counterattack. Such actions could spell ruin for Spartan interests.

The second intent, as clearly stated in the above saying, is more in line with the system Lykourgos was credited with establishing. By devaluing wealth as a social status symbol (as it was very difficult to show off your wealth as a Spartan citizen in his system) he hoped not only to prevent the accumulation of wealth, and luxurious living, but the insinuation of such wealth into Spartan society. He wanted to keep

228 Plu. Mor. 228f-229a.
the Spartan population united and devoted to the state, instead of to their own interests. If they were not vigilant, wealth could come to divide their society into classes, something that would cause persistent animosity between the wealthy and poor. Thus he needed to prevent foreign wealth from entering Spartan hands in any way – hence the moratorium on looting enemy bodies.

Our second witness to Sparta’s collective contempt for wealth is Pausanias, the son of Kleombrotos, who served as regent for his nephew Pleistarchos. This same Pausanias featured in a previous chapter, where his role as leader of the allied Greek forces was discussed. After Plataia, Pausanias was soon corrupted by the Persian king’s influence. When he was forced to return to Sparta on accusations of medizing a second time, he was sealed in the temple of Athena of the Brazen House. The *Apophthegmata Lakonika*, however, directly relates to the period before Pausanias’ temptation, likely taking place around the time of Plataia. This is likely, since this anecdote bears close resemblance to a similar episode in Herodotos that will be discussed later. The saying is as follows:

μετὰ δὲ τὴν ἐν Πλαταιαῖς κατὰ Μῆδων γενομένην νίκην τοὺς ἀμφὶ αὐτὸν ἐκέλευσε τὸ προπτομασμένον Περσικὸν δείπνον παραθέειν: τούτου δὲ θαυμαστὴν πολυτέλειαν ἔχοντος, ‘νὴ τοὺς θεοὺς,’ ἐφη, ‘λίχνος ἦν ὁ Πέρσης, ὅτι τοσαῦτα ἔχων ἐπὶ τὴν ἠμετέραν ἠλθε μᾶζαν.’

And after the victory at Plataia over the Medes had happened he ordered to serve to those of his circle the Persian meal the one they had prepared. Since this (i.e. the meal) had a marvellous sumptuousness, ‘By the Gods!’ he said, ‘The Persian was greedy, that having so much he came (to take) our barley cakes.’

Here Pausanias is expressing a sentiment that is clearly Spartan: contempt for wealth. To Pausanias, the fact that the Persians had put so much effort into accumulating wealth, at the cost of their personal ability, is deplorable. By putting submitting to their greed, they had left their country exposed on account of their own inadequacy. Such a situation was unthinkable for a Spartan, as Agesilaos urged his friends:

tοῖς δὲ φίλοις παρίγγειλε μὴ χρήμασιν, ἄνδρεία δὲ καὶ ἀρετὴ σπουδάζειν πλουτεῖν.

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229 For the full tale, see Th. 1.128-135.
230 Plu. Mor. 230e-f.
231 Plu. Mor. 210f.
He urged his friends to endeavour to be rich not in money, but in bravery and virtue.

Much as Agesilaos exemplifies, Spartans would be mortified if their own ability to protect the state fell short on account of preoccupation with wealth. It showed a clear mismanagement of priority to a Spartan, and the contempt that comes from Pausanias is clear.

This Pausanias, however, does not sound much like the same Spartan we discussed previously. The Pausanias we discussed before in the historical record was tempted in his correspondence with the Persian king by the prospect of becoming the hegemon of Greece. What we do not know is if the temptation was purely on account of the position, and the power it brought, or if wealth played a significant factor in it. From the context of Pausanias’ and Agesilaos’ sayings, Spartans had a very clear contempt for those individuals who valued wealth over ability. They themselves would rather be strong and poor, than rich and weak, and they have nothing but contempt for those who preferred the opposite. At least that is the sense we can glean from these sayings. That is what they were perceived to think, whether or not the historical record supports this is yet to be seen.

What we can perceive from the sayings is that, to the other Greeks, the Spartans valued things beyond wealth, things that money could not buy. Much of the motivation behind greed was for it to act as a mark of social distinction. As Spartans were restricted in their displays of wealth (diet, dress, abode, etc.), they looked for other avenues to distinguish themselves. In this vein we have two separate sayings from Nikander and Charillos, both of them 8th Century Eurypontid Kings. The sayings themselves are nearly identical, varying only slightly in content. Charillos’ saying is as follows:

πρὸς δὲ τὸν πυθόμενον διὰ τὸ κομώσων εἶπεν, ὅτι ‘τῶν κόσμων ὁ φυσικὸς καὶ ἀδάπανος οὗτός ἐστι.’

And to the one who asked why they let their hair grow long he said ‘Because this is a natural and inexpensive adornment.’

Nikander’s saying presses the same idea, merely adding beards to the ‘natural means’ of male adornment:

232 Plu. Mor. 232d.
πυθομένου δέ τινος διά τί κομώσι καὶ πωγωνυτροφοῦσιν, ἅτι, ἐφη, ἑκάτων κάλλιστος καὶ ἀδαπανώτατος ἀνδρὶ ὁ ἰδίος κόσμος.'233

When someone asked why they let their hair grow long and let their beards grow, ‘Because,’ he said, ‘for a man his own adornment is the best and the most inexpensive of all.’

As luxuries such as food, jewelry, rich clothing, and extravagant housing were restricted by Lykourgan laws, the only thing that remained to set a Spartan apart were natural adornments such as their facial hair. As they could not use wealth to artificially set themselves apart, they had to use something far more natural – and inexpensive.

What is even more interesting is that this saying is clearly grounded in historical fact. We see evidence of this practice in the lead-up to the battle of Thermopylae. In Herodotus’ narrative, we hear of the Persians sending a scout ahead to survey the Greek positions in the pass in order to get an estimate of their numbers. By chance, the Spartans happened to be taking their turn in the guard rotation, and the scout observed them exercising and combing their hair in preparation for death.234 Of course, it is unlikely that Herodotus was able to talk to the actual scout dispatched; instead it is far more likely that this episode, just like many of his episodes involving either the Persians or the Great King himself, was crafted from historical facts to create a credible and entertaining narrative. Either way, we can see that the Spartan practice of caring for their hair is an authentic historical fact. If we can take this saying at face value – that they used their hair as a way to set themselves apart – then it was likely out of a contempt for more expensive displays of status. If we can say that much, then it is clear that the regulations against wealth were a true aspect of Spartan culture.

The best example we have of Spartan culture is, of course, Agesilaos, the verbose Spartan king. There are two sayings attributed to Agesilaos in particular that get at the heart of Lykourgos’ motivations in structuring his system the way he did. While there are sayings that outline his actions, they are little

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233 Plu. Mor. 230b.
234 Hdt. 7.208-209.
more than anecdotal regurgitations of what we already know about Lykourgan reforms. Agesilaos’ sayings, however, show us what an actual Spartan may have thought:

πρὸς δὲ τὸν ἐπιθαυμάζοντα τὴν μετριότητα τῆς ἔσθητος καὶ τῆς τροφῆς αὐτοῦ τε καὶ τῶν ἄλλων Λακεδαμονίων ἀντὶ ταύτης, ἐφη, τῆς διαίτης, ὥς ἔγεν, τὴν ἐλευθερίαν ἄμωμεθα.’

And to those honouring the moderation of the clothing and food both of him and of the other Lacedaemonians, ‘At the price of this way of life,’ he said, ‘o stranger, we reap freedom.’

Agesilaos did a lot of campaigning outside of Greece, so it is likely that this particular episode comes from one of his campaigns in Ionia. There, the man he was addressing was likely accustomed to superiors who ate sumptuous dinners as a mark of their station. That very attitude, however, is what the Lykourgan messes were intended to counter. No one was to eat privately – not even the kings – so that they could all be seen as equals. Communal meals were not the mark of a poor state, but rather, much as Agesilaos points out, a mark of their freedom. To Agesilaos, and the other Spartans who had undergone the Agoge, they had been freed from the desire for wealth that had divided other city states. They were free from the pursuit of wealth and the destructive passions that it could excite.

The other saying attributed to Agesilaos describes a similar statement:

θεασάμενος δὲ ἐπὶ τῆς Ἀσίας οἰκίας κεκτημένον τετράγωνος ὑφομομένην δοκοῦ ἡρώτησε τὸν κεκτημένον εἰ τετράγωνα παρ’ αὐτοὺς φύεται ξύλα: φαμένου δὲ οὔ, ἄλλα στρογγύλα, ἃ ὑπεν, εἰ τετράγωνα ἃν, στρογγύλα, ἃν ἐπείτε, εἰ τετράγωνα ἃν ἐπείτε;’

And having beheld a home in Asia covered by a roof with squared timbers he asked the owner if the trees grew square for them: and saying that they did not, but round, ‘What then?’ he said, ‘if they were square, would you make them round?’

Here Agesilaos is criticizing what he thinks is a pointless waste of effort. To him, it is an absurd indulgence of wealth to make something that naturally occurs as round square. Spartans were limited by law in the construction tools they were allowed to use, and likely could not have pulled off the same effect, as they were only allowed an axe or a saw. For a Spartan, such pointless indulgence is contemptible, as they

235 Plu. Mor. 210a.
236 Plu. Mor. 210e.
237 Plu. Mor. 227c.
would consider the effort expended in changing the beam from circular to square a pointless waste of energy. In the contempt that Agesilaos clearly showed for this indulgence we can see the culmination of Lykourgos’ intent when he crafted his system.

When Lykourgos set out his laws, he had one specific goal: to keep Sparta unified and strong by rendering greed inert. Ultimately he failed, but in Agesilaos’ case he succeeded. He knew the effect that the pursuit of, and indulgence in, wealth could have on even the best of people – and naturally he considered the Spartans to be the best of all. Thus he did his best to instill in the Spartans a contempt for wealth and luxury so that it would not shape the future of Sparta, nor influence Spartan minds. In fact, as Kleomenes tells us, any who was perceived as a threat to this balance was ejected from Sparta, just like Meandrios, the tyrant of Samos.238

Unfortunately, just as with Pausanias, Kleomenes is not the most ideal example of the Spartan contempt for wealth. His career is actually some of the best evidence against this trait’s authenticity, due in no small part to his susceptibility to foreign bribery. From Herodotos we have the Aristagoras episode that features Kleomenes quite prominently.239 After failing to convince the Spartan king to aid the Ionian revolt, Aristagoras began offering Kleomenes larger and larger bribes. When the sums started to become exceedingly large, Kleomenes’ daughter, Gorgo, finally spoke up, warning her father that Aristagoras was trying to corrupt him.240 Kleomenes promptly left the room, and Aristagoras was forced to return home without securing Spartan aid.

The idea that Kleomenes let himself be so tempted, and did not leave until his daughter broke her silence, would be damning evidence against the idea that Spartans were contemptuous of wealth. However, there is a caveat to this episode, and it has been brought up before in regards to the Spartan

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238 The tyrant arrived with a great wealth of treasure, and tried to buy the king’s aid. Kleomenes resisted and advised the ephors to deport the tyrant, lest his influence infect the citizens. See Plu. Mor. 224a-b.
239 Hdt. 5.49-51.
240 For the full episode, see Hdt. 5.51.
kings: he was not *Agoge* trained. As a king, Kleomenes did not undergo *Agoge* training as Agesilaos did, and as a result, the same values were not instilled in him as they were in others.\(^{241}\) Without any experience of the *Agoge*, the same level of indoctrination would not have influenced him as it would have Agesilaos.

This indoctrination was not foolproof and, although only alleged, there is evidence of a Spartan being bribed into action. Sphodrias, who was mentioned fleetingly in a previous chapter, was believed to have been bribed to attack the Peiraius: “By a bribe, so it was said, they induced Sphodrias, the Spartan governor at Thespiai, to invade Attica, so that he might force Athens into war with Sparta.”\(^{242}\) This alleged action, with the goal of seizing the Peiraius, is the only instance that can be found of a normal Spartan succumbing to the temptation of wealth. When Xenophon discusses this episode, he highlights the fact that the bribe was said to have happened. Unlike elsewhere in Xenophon’s narrative, where a deed is known to have happened for certain, there is doubt here in Xenophon’s words that this happened – which takes away from the story’s credibility. What also does not fit in this story is that later on, Sphodrias was in danger of being sanctioned for his action, and Agesilaos had him acquitted, ostensibly due to the link between his son and Sphodrias’ son Kleonymos.

This seems instead like a colorful alternative explanation for a more mundane reason: lack of evidence. Likely Xenophon chose this narrative instead of the more mundane result that the case was dismissed on lack of evidence. The most probable explanation is that Sphodrias had acted as Phoibidas had, hoping to seize the Peiraius for the good of Sparta. As a result, Agesilaos spared him, as his service before had been exceptional.\(^{243}\) Supporting this idea is the fact that Sphodrias and his son would later die fighting for their king, true to his word that he would not fail Sparta again.\(^{244}\) As a result, Sphodrias marks out a unique, but flawed, instant in Spartan history. There is the possibility that he may have accepted a

\(^{241}\) Plu. *Ages*. 1. Here Plutarch outlines the custom that the Spartan heir apparent would be exempt from the *Agoge*.

\(^{242}\) X. *Hell*. 5.4.20.

\(^{243}\) X. *Hell*. 5.4.32.

\(^{244}\) X. *Hell*. 5.4.33.
bribe to act as he did, but his conduct afterward does not support this. Nor does the way Xenophon

discusses the alleged bribe in his narrative. Based on such faulty evidence, it would be unfair to question
the authenticity of Spartan contempt for wealth. As evidence against the authenticity of this perceived
value, Sphodrias is a flawed example.

Gylippos, the Spartan commander dispatched to Syracuse to take command against the Athenian
expedition, however, is a solid example that not all Spartans were immune to greed. Entrusted with funds
intended for the state treasury, Gylippos stole from the sacks, cutting open the bottoms to avoid breaking
their seals, not knowing each bag contained a list of the quantity inside. When his treachery was
discovered, he went into self-imposed exile from Sparta. However, as a result of this weakness of
character, Plutarch tells us that Spartan society adapted, restricting the access of foreign currency into
Sparta. Instead, the infamous Spartan iron currency, dipped in vinegar to make it brittle, was proposed
for use instead of foreign gold or silver. Although opposed by Lysander’s friends, the possession of foreign
money became a crime punishable by death. By removing the ability to accumulate wealth, the ephors
hoped to create a lasting solution for Gylippos’ infraction.\(^{\text{245}}\) That hope, however, was in vain, and it is no
surprise that Aristotle and others in the 4\(^{\text{th}}\) century BCE attribute Sparta’s downfall to greed.\(^{\text{246}}\)

However, this is one of only a few examples where a Spartan may have given into greed, which is
significant when one considers that the Pythia, the famous prophetess of Delphian Apollo, is known to
have been bribed on multiple occasions.\(^{\text{247}}\) From a different angle, the best evidence in favor of Spartan
contempt for wealth can be found in Pausanias’ reaction after the battle of Plataia in Herodotos’
narrative.\(^{\text{248}}\) Pausanias, in the Persian camp after the battle, had the Persian and Spartan cooks each
prepare the type of dinner they were accustomed to serve their superiors. When he has the two tables

\(^{\text{245}}\) See Plu. Lys. 16.1-17.3.
\(^{\text{246}}\) Cartledge (2002), pg. 271.
\(^{\text{247}}\) On oracular bribery, see Th. 5.16, and Hdt. 5.63, 6.123. Gylippos, the Spartan commander dispatched to Syracuse, after all, secretly stole funds intended for the Spartan treasury from Syracuse. See Plu. Lys. 16.1-17.1.
\(^{\text{248}}\) Hdt. 9.82.
laid out side-by-side, Pausanias was so struck by the contrast between the two that he summoned the other Greek commanders. So overcome by incredulity, he felt compelled to point out the irony that such a wealthy people would come to attack and enslave such a comparatively poor country. This is the kind of contempt that Lykourgos sought to make a Spartan norm, but it is unclear whether or not Pausanias was Agoge trained or not. As he was not in the direct line of succession, but he had sons who would later rule, it is unclear where he would fall in the royal hierarchy. As he served as regent for the under-age Pleistarchos, it is unlikely that he was a prime candidate for rule. Thus whether he underwent the Agoge like Agesilaos, or not, remains uncertain.

Despite this, even if Pausanias was not Agoge trained, we can see that contempt for luxury and wealth inspired by Spartan culture when he discusses the two dinners: “Men of Greece, I asked you here in order to show you the folly of the Persians, who, living in this style, came to Greece to rob us of our poverty.” His reaction embodies the contempt that Lykourgos hoped would safeguard Spartan interests against greed. Spartans valued their freedom above all else, and Lykourgos instilled in them a contempt for wealth so that they would be free from the greed that dominated others. So when Agesilaos says they reap freedom from a life of modest possessions, he is not just talking about political freedom, but freedom from inner turmoil as well.

To conclude – based on what historical evidence there is (and there is a noticeable absence of Spartans giving in to bribery), the balance of Spartans show a definite contempt for wealth. The alleged bribery of Sphodrias is only one potential instance where a normal Spartan gave into greed, whereas Gylippus, although more certain, represents a single isolated instance. Pausanias’ reaction to the stark contrast between Persian and Spartan fare is a clear indication that the contempt Spartans were perceived to have for wealth was deeper than just a perception by other Greeks. Paired with the Spartans combing

249 Hdt. 9.82.
250 Plu. Mor. 210a.
their hair before the battle of Thermopylai, it is obvious that Spartans held a genuine contempt for wealth.

This contempt was instilled by Lykourgan laws and regulations, and fulfilled two purposes. First, it maintained the system that gave Sparta an edge on the battlefield. Second, it freed the community from the deleterious effects of greed and luxury. This concept is more than just the echoes of the Spartan mirage. Frugality was a way of life for the Spartans – they were trained from boyhood to make due with less than adequate resources. Thus it is understandable that that’s how they learned to live their lives.

Once greed was allowed to take root, however, it would be the undoing of everything Lykourgos had created.
Chapter Six: Spartans and Death

One feature of modern military training that we see made mention of time and time again, is the determined effort by the commanding officer to break down the individual. This is done to make them more pliable and obedient, but also to create stronger unit cohesion and solidify inter-personal bonds. Of course, this process is not foolproof. Naturally, it has varying degrees of success, since not everyone can be influenced by these measures. Some personalities are too strong to be broken down by this treatment, while others have too strong a will to let themselves fully submit to another’s control. On the whole, however, these measures typically have a single goal: to make the individuals undergoing the training more effective on the battlefield. Naturally, the Spartans had their own such system, and it has been repeatedly discussed in preceding chapters: the Agoge. This grueling education system sought to encourage the formation of certain features in their charges. These are traits that we have already discussed: patriotism, contempt for wealth, solid nerves, and obedience. However, one such trait that we have not yet discussed in this vein would be the Spartan relationship with death. To fully understand all that is encapsulated in this idea, one needs to consider several features specific to the world of Greek combat.

First of all, phalanx combat was not free from bloodshed. Although each participant boasted a great deal of heavy armour, battles between phalanges could still be very bloody engagements. The battle of Mantinea in 418 BCE, fought by the Spartans against an allied Argive and Athenian force, was one such bloody encounter.251 The Athenians and Argives numbered 8000 when the battle began, but when their line finally broke, their casualties escalated quickly: 1100 of them fell, compared to a negligible number of Spartans and Peloponnesians. Even with all the armour that hoplites wore – shields, bracers, greaves,

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251 Note that all numbers are approximations from the episode, see Th. 5.66-74.
breastplates, helmets (both Corinthian and other styles), etc. – a phalanx of hoplites could still suffer high casualty rates if their line broke.

Nor was phalanx combat easy on the senses – the entire battle would have been a cacophony of shouting, screaming, and the crash of bronze. Nearly every impact of a weapon, from arrow to spear, would have been against bronze. That noise itself would have been deafening. When it is combined with the cries of the wounded and dying, and the yelling of the combatants battering at one another, it would quickly become overwhelming. It would have been a horrifying environment for every individual involved. It would have been even worse with the othismos – the communal push of the line, forcing the hoplites forward with the intent of breaking the enemy phalanx with one communal effort.252 This press forward, with each shield braced against a comrades’ back to transmit the force onto the enemy line, would have been enormous. If any one hoplite buckled under the strain, he could very well have been crushed by the weight of bodies.

If we put ourselves into the sandals of one such hoplite, we can imagine what such an experience was like. If we assume this typical hoplite had chosen to wear a Corinthian-style helmet, it would have had significant sensory effects on him. This helmet style provided the greatest protection for the hoplite’s head, but it was at the cost of a drastically limited field of view and the complete loss of peripheral vision, not to mention significant auditory impairment. Along with that, the hoplite would have been forced to focus on a single avenue of advance. Any distraction from the enemy advancing towards him could be fatal. With everything going on around him, and with a heightened sensitivity to danger, the hoplite would have been overloaded with sensory inputs, straining both his mind and body. On top of this, the hoplite then had to deal with something even more vicious and unrelenting: fear.

Even with all these sensory inputs, and that fear gnawing away at them, Spartans were famed among their Greek compatriots for their confidence on the battlefield. They could handle this fear far

252 For more discussion of the othismos, and its interplay with phalanx combat, see Luginbill (1994), pg. 51-61.
better than any other Greeks. But, the obvious question is how they managed to maintain this confidence in such situations. The Agoge clearly had some part in making Spartans better able to endure their fear in a phalanx-engagement. By examining the evidence contained within the Apophthegmata, and comparing it to historical evidence, we can see to what extent Spartan training was tailored to influence the Spartan relationship with death. The Agoge, created at a time when the phalanx was the main style of combat favoured by the Greeks, would have taken its features into account when it was created. Lykourgos would have seen the effect it had on Spartans and tailored his combat training to better prepare future hoplites for combat.

The best way to prepare them for combat, however, was not to try and eliminate that fear of death. Instead, the Agoge did its best to foster in them a respect for it, so that they would be able to act in spite of it, but still with caution. With this training, Spartans could hold together better than their opponents, and thus we see the perception in the Spartan mirage that Spartans had the strongest nerves. They did not lack fear, but instead had been trained to cope with it. After all, courage is not about the absence of fear, an absence of fear can make one reckless. Instead, true courage is the ability to act despite the influence of fear. Spartans were simply better prepared to deal with that fear of death, which was conducive to building strong nerves.

Once again, for an insight into the Spartan mentality, we must turn to a saying attributed to Agesilaos. In this case though, Agesilaos is not alone in his thinking. Instead, his sentiment is shared by Agis, the Spartan king who Agesilaos succeeded upon his death.²⁵³ This Agis lead Sparta throughout much of the Peloponnesian war, having inherited the conflict from his father, Archidamos. When we consider these two sayings, we can see an uncanny similarity between them. Agis and Agesilaos seem to have been attributed two nearly identical sayings. This is not unique within the Apophthegmata Lakonika, duplication is infrequent, but still happens, such as with Charillos and Nikander. While some of this

²⁵³ X. Hell. 3.3.1.
duplication is due to manuscript errors and textual corruption, it is also possible that Agesilaos inherited this sentiment from his brother at some point. As they lived so close together in time, it is hard to know for sure. Whatever the case is, their close proximity in time means that it is no great surprise that they’ve been attributed such similar sayings. Agesilaos represents such a verbose entity in the Apophthegmata Lakonika that he may have been attributed the saying out of habit as much as out of mistaken identity. Whatever the case is, Agis’ saying is as follows:

\[ \text{ἐρωτηθεὶς δὲ πῶς ἀν τις ἐλεύθερος διαμένοι, 'θανάτου καταφρονῶν,' ἔφη.} \]

Being asked how one might remain free, ‘By despising death,’ he said.

Whereas Agesilaos’:

\[ \text{ἐρωτώμενος δὲ πῶς μεγάλην δόξαν περιεποιήσατο, 'θανάτου καταφρονήσας,' ἔφη.} \]

Being asked how he had acquired a great reputation, ‘Having despised death,’ he said.

At first, these sayings may seem a bit odd. The connection that exists between, in Agis’ case, freedom and death, and in Agesilaos’ case, reputation and death, is unclear at first. What is important in both these anecdotes is the subtextual elements that they are referring to. Once these unspoken elements are considered, the image is much clearer. To better understand these sayings, we need to observe them through the lens of phalanx combat, and the experience of it. Only then can we truly understand what these warrior kings truly meant.

Approaching these sayings logically, the only way for someone to remain free is by preventing someone else from taking control of them. As a Spartan, the best way to prevent someone else from taking control of you was by ensuring the state’s survival as an independent entity; this is likely what Agis is referring to. Taking this a step further, the only way for a warrior like Agesilaos to make his reputation was through leadership on the battlefield. Naturally, the biggest obstacle for any hoplite would have been

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254 Plu. Mor. 216c.
255 Plu. Mor. 210f.
a fear of death – it was the greatest enemy of a solidly-formed phalanx. Thus, by ‘despising death,’ these two Spartan kings could counter the effect that fear had on the battlefield. That was how Spartans were able to operate so confidently in combat situations. By refusing to let fear have a hold on them, they were able to act when others might have been paralyzed into inaction. Just as they held contempt for wealth and luxury (and their proponents), they also had a contempt for death. At least that was the perception of the other Greeks regarding the Spartans. They believed that Spartans had no fear of death, which only made facing them that much more daunting.

Along a similar line, we have a parallel saying by a 6th century Agiad King named Anaxandridas. With his reign pre-dating both Agis and Agesilaos’ time, there is a chance that their more extreme stance towards death was a later shift, or evolution, from his own. In any case, his saying bears a strong resemblance to both of his predecessors’:

άλλου δὲ ἔρωτῶντος διὰ τὶ ἐν τοῖς πολέμοις Σπαρτιᾶται θαρσαλέως κινδυνεύουσιν, ἃτι, ἔφη, ‘ἀιδέσθαι περὶ βίου μελετῶμεν, οὐχ ὠσπερ οἱ ἄλλοι φοβεῖσθαι.’

When another asked why the Spartans ventured so boldly in wars, ‘Since,’ he said, ‘We train to respect life, not to fear it as others [do].’

This saying, though taking the Spartans’ relationship with death to a lesser extreme (respect instead of scorn), underlines the same basic sentiment expressed by Agis and Agesilaos. Instead of letting a fear of what could happen dominate their actions, Spartans respected life as well as its eventual end. They did not let fear control them. They had a respect for death and thus they could move with confidence and purpose in the face of danger.

This presents a second, potential meaning to Agis’ saying. Perhaps, when he was referring to his freedom, he was referring to something more internal than freedom from control. Perhaps he was referring to remaining free from the fear of death that he sees controlling others. By refusing to let fear control him, Agis was able to remain truly free and in control of his life.

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256 Plu. Mor. 217a.
Along a different line, we have a relatively unknown Spartan, Hippodamas, who is very much in control of his life – more particularly, how he wants it to end. Hippodamas is similar to the Spartan Androcleidas in a previous chapter. Just like Androcleidas, Hippodamas was not a famous king or general. In the Spartan historical tradition just like with Androcleidas, this anecdote is Hippodamas’ only appearance, though it has been postulated that his death and this anecdote occurred around the battle of Megalopolis in 352 BCE.  

His saying shows us how an ordinary Spartan viewed death:

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\text{Ἱππόδαμος, ὅτε Ἀγις Ἀρχιδάμῳ παρετάττετο, συμπεμφθεὶς τῷ Ἀρχιδάμῳ ἐς Σπάρτην ἔκει τὰς χρείας παρέχεσθαι, ἐφ᾽ ἄλλ᾽ οὗτος, ἐφ᾽ ὀ ioutil καλλίω θάνατον ἀποθανοῦμαι ἢ ὑπὲρ Σπάρτας ἀνδραγαθῶν.: ἦν δὲ βεβιωκὼς ὑπὲρ τὸ ὀγδόηκοντα ἐτή: καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα λαβὼν τὰ ὀπλα καὶ στὰς ἐν δεξιῷ τοῦ βασιλέως, μαχόμενος ἀποθνῄσκει.}
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Hippodamos, when Agis was lining up on the battlefield beside Archidamos, after he was sent with Agis to Sparta to perform duties there, ‘But indeed,’ he said, ‘won’t I die a more beautiful death here, performing brave deeds for Sparta?’ And he had lived over 80 years: and after this, having seized his arms and having taken his stand on the king’s right side, he died fighting.

This relatively unknown Spartan seems to have had no fear of death. Likely his age was exaggerated, as Spartans retired from active duty well before so advanced an age, but the sentiment expressed loses none of its force. It was also unlikely that such an old Spartan would have been stationed so close to the king himself; instead the king would have been surrounded by the Spartan elite guard, the *hippeis*. Thus, either his age was exaggerated and he was one of those elites, or he was in particularly good shape for his age.

No matter how exceptional an individual he was, a reputation for cowardice was not something that could be easily dispelled. This is maybe why Hippodamas reacts as he does. If we view the episode from his position, Hippodamas wants to avoid the fate of Aristodemos and Pantites after they returned home alive after the battle of Thermopylai. They were ridiculed and shunned by the Laconian community because they lived when others had died. He would have been considered a coward if he was sent as a messenger on the eve of a battle and his comrades were soundly defeated. Hippodamas, trained as he

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257 Talbert (2005), pg. 163.
258 Plu. Mor. 222a.
was to react rather than fear death, had a decision to make between a shameful life and an honourable death. Lacking that fear, it was an easy decision to make.

The final saying, coming from an unnamed Spartan youth, represents another active decision by a Spartan to die rather than live in shame. Just like Hippodamas, this Spartan chooses his fate:

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\text{ἕτερον παιδάριον, ἐπεὶ παρῆν ὁ καιρός, ἐν κλέπτειν νενόμιστο τοὺς ἐλευθέρους παίδας ὃ τι τις δύνατο καὶ μὴ λαθεῖν αἰσχρὸν ἦν, ὡς ὁ ἥσυχος παίδες ζῶν ἔκλεψαν ἀλωπέκιον καὶ ἔδοσαν αὐτῷ φυλάττειν, παραγενόμενων τῶν ἀπολωλεκτῶν ἐπὶ ζήτησιν, ἔτυχε μὲν ὑποβαλὼν τὸ ἀλωπέκιον ὑπὸ τὸ αὐτοῦ ἰμάτιον, ἀγριαίνοντος δὲ τοῦ θηρίου καὶ τὴν αὐτοῦ πλευράν κατεσθίοντο μέχρι τῶν σπλάγχων, ἤρεμει, ἵνα μὴ γένηται καταφανῆς. ὡς δὲ ἦστερον ἐκείνων ἀπελθόντων ἐθεάσαντο τὸ γεγονὸς οἱ παίδες καὶ ἐμέμφοντο, λέγοντες ἄμεινον εἶναι φανερὸν ποιῆσαι τὸ ἀλωπέκιον ἢ μέχρι θανάτου κρύπτειν, 'οὐ μὲν ὁμών,' εἶπεν, 'ἀλλά κρύπτον ταῖς ἀλγηδοῖς μὴ ἐνδόντα τελευτάν ἢ περίφωρον γενόμενον διὰ μαλακίαν τὸ ἕξο τοὺς ἀλγηδός περιβοιῇ' ἀσθαρί.\]

With regards to another boy, when it was the proper time, in which it was customary for the free boys to steal whatever they could and it was shameful not to escape notice, when the boys with him stole a baby fox alive and gave it to him to watch, after arrived those who had lost it in their searching, he happened to put the little fox under his cloak. Although the animal went wild and ate his side up to the inwards parts, he did not move, in order not to be clearly seen. When later, after those departed, the boys beheld what had happened and blamed him, saying it would have been better to let the fox be seen than to hide it unto death, ‘Not so,’ he said, ‘but it is better not to give in to pain and to die than by being detected through weakness to preserve a life by shame.’

To this Spartan youth, his whole world revolved around these iron-bound rules that had been drilled into him day after day for much of his life. Growing up in such a society, this Spartan youth likely perceived that there could be no room for leniency when it came to honour and shame. To survive by disgracing himself was not something he could accept – he would have considered it an admission of weakness.

Instead, rather than admit to weakness, he chose to die with his honour intact. Even if his friends and community could understand why he might have chosen to let himself be discovered, he himself would not have been able to live with the perceived disgrace of it. Instead, staying silent and accepting his death, in line with the rules and values that had been instilled in him and his comrades in the \textit{Agoge}, was

\[259 \text{Plu. } \textit{Mor. } 234a-b.\]
something he could accept. He was more afraid of dishonor than death, and so he chose it freely over a life knowing that he only lived as a result of his own weakness.

From these sayings, we can derive something of the relationship that Spartans had with death that other Greeks perceived as truth. Now of course we need to compare this image, as we have it from the *Apophthegmata Lakonika*, to the actions of Spartans in the historical tradition. There are several examples of Spartans choosing death over a disgraced life. One good example is Eurytos and Aristodemos. Both of these episodes have been discussed previously in relation to Spartan nerve, but, based on its similarity to the unknown Spartiate youth’s anecdote, it bears being mentioned again.

Eurytos and Aristodemos were among the Spartans fighting at Thermopylai, and, as the story goes, they were both afflicted with an acute inflammation of the eyes.260 In such a state they were incapable of engaging the enemy, so Leonidas had them sent to Alpeni to recuperate. Word reached them later that the Greek position had been compromised, and these two Spartans then had a choice to make. They could wait, recuperate, and return to Sparta, or they could do as Eurytos decided to. Eurytos, when he heard the news, immediately called for his armour and had a helot lead him to the site of the battle. Once he made it there, as Herodotos tells us, Eurytos plunged into the thick of the fighting and died.

Much as Herodotos tells us in the episode, Eurytos likely could have chosen to remain at Alpeni with Aristodemos and recover fully before returning home.261 If both Spartans had acted alike, Herodotos postulated that neither would have been scorned by the community. Although, if the tale of Pantites is anything to go by, this is not a sure thing.262 If we assume that this episode in Herodotos’ narrative is a legitimate occurrence – and there are no reasons to doubt it – then the option did exist, and Eurytos represents a direct parallel to the Spartan youth in the previous saying. In both cases an honourable death held more appeal than a disgraced life directly because that fear of death was not much of an issue for

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260 Hdt. 7.229.
261 Hdt. 7.229.
262 Hdt. 7.232.
either Spartan. Eurytos had to have been even more frightened, lacking eyesight as he was and surrounded by an overwhelming amount of auditory input. Despite all that, he made his choice, his nerves and his training keeping him steady and confident throughout.

The best example we have contrary to this trait’s authenticity is the Spartan surrender at Pylos.\(^{263}\) The Spartan contingent there – a force mainly of hoplites – was under heavy attack from the Athenians, who refused to come to grips with the Spartans. Instead, they kept up a constant missile barrage on the Spartan positions, causing significant casualties, while keeping out of reach. Finally, when offered the chance to surrender, and having received word from their leaders on the mainland not to ‘do anything shameful,’ they surrendered, which shocked even Thucydides, who was vocally anti-Spartan.\(^{264}\) This choice to give in to the enemy casts some doubt on the idea that Spartans did not fear death, but there are some issues with this episode. The tone of incredulity that comes from Thucydides’ description of the event does seem to indicate that this event was unheard of in Spartan history. Coupled with that, the sentiments expressed by the surrendering Spartiates tells us it may have been less to do with a fear of death, and more out of pragmatism. After all, “spindles (by which he meant arrows) would be worth a great deal if they could pick out brave men from cowards.”\(^{265}\) To the Spartans, Pylos likely did not seem a position worth the loss of their lives in a seemingly futile effort. They did not see the point of fighting to the bitter end for such an insignificant piece of territory, when they were unable to injure the enemy. They did not see the same kind of shame in it that Eurytos, or the unnamed Spartan youth, saw in their own situations. Thus for them surrender was a viable alternative to dying for a pointless cause.

Of course, combat on Pylos would still have been incredibly harrowing and terrifying, so whether the Spartiates were too frightened to continue, or considered it unworthy of a heroic sacrifice, is uncertain. However, based on the sum total of these sayings, along with the historic tradition and the

\(^{263}\) See Th. 4.37-41 for the story of their surrender.
\(^{264}\) Th. 4.38.
\(^{265}\) Th. 4.40.
sheer uniqueness of Pylos from typical Spartan engagements, the Spartans clearly held a psychological edge over their fellow Greeks. From youth to old age, Spartans were perceived to despise death. By doing so, they were capable of great deeds, able to move freely on the battlefield while their opponents feared to move. Based on the historical evidence of Eurytos, and the inadequacy of Pylos as evidence to the contrary, Sparta’s education system clearly set out to, if not eradicate, then diminish the fear its charges had of death. Freed from that fear of death they were capable of great feats of heroism and sacrifice, and Sparta was able to remain the premiere Greek military state until the advent of Macedonia.
Conclusions: The Authenticity of Perception

Over the preceding five chapters, we have isolated several aspects of the Spartan mirage and compared their tenets to events that can be corroborated within the historical tradition. Each time we have examined an idea, we have relied on more than just the opinions of the historians reporting the events. Instead, we’ve looked at each event separately and how it related to the traits being scrutinized. Our focus was not only on what the historians – Xenophon, Herodotus, Thucydides, etc. – had to say about the event, but on the event itself. The particulars of each event gave us an undeniable insight into how actual Spartans reacted to events.

By comparing these events to the Greek perceptions that formed the Spartan mirage, we could better judge the historical authenticity of these ideas enshrined in the Apophthegmata Lakonika. The Apophthegmata Lakonika hails from a time long after Sparta’s heyday as a Mediterranean power. They come from a time when even the Spartans themselves had forgotten who they had been, and began to look back in search of their lost heritage. As a result, Plutarch’s compendium of sayings captured one thing better than its actual intended target: the perceptions of Sparta held by outsiders. The sayings were essentially every rumor, urban legend, and anecdote that had been mentioned concerning the Spartans. They were every idea that other Greeks cities believed was the truth concerning the secretive Laconian state. And in many ways this Spartan mirage, as I have shown over the course of the previous five chapters, included characteristics that were in many ways authentic and congruent with historical events.

In the first chapter, we considered the perception, culled from the Apophthegmata Lakonika, that Spartans were raised to put the state before themselves. The fostering of a deep sense of patriotism was clearly evidenced by sayings attributed to Agesilaos, Kallikratidas, Paidaretos, Brasidas, and an unknown Spartan woman. Each saying expressed the same sentiment – that the individual, and his concerns, were negligible, even expendable, compared to the state’s welfare. Any amount of individual lives was a fair price to pay to safeguard the state’s interests.
This was the sentiment clearly expressed in the *Sayings of the Spartans*. When compared to the historical evidence, a clear picture of its authenticity resolved. While the Pausanias and Pylos episodes were potentially damning evidence to the contrary, there were issues that rendered their content inert in this argument. Pausanias, as a Heraklid, may not have received the same indoctrination as other Spartans, and so was more susceptible to outside influence. Pylos, on the other hand, stands out as a significant departure from this perception. What compromises its validity in this argument was just how much of a surprise it was to Thucydides and others, marking it out clearly as an exceptional event within Spartan history. For that reason, along with the evidence in favor, such as the battle of Thermopylai, the weight of evidence seems to point in favor of this trait’s authenticity. Looking at the arguments as a whole, and the flaws in each, it is clear that Spartans were patriotically indoctrinated. They were conditioned within the *Agoge* to devalue their own lives in relation to the state, in order that they see themselves as expendable if it advanced the interests of the state.

The second chapter, on the other hand, focused on the idea of nerve within Greek phalanx combat. Greek combat had evolved from the performative bravery of the Homeric/Mycenaean style to a more steadfast kind that was valued in phalanx combat. The fast-burning bravery of Homeric combat was not of use in this very different style of fighting. Instead, hoplites needed to have a more slow-burning courage that allowed them to hold their position against the enemy despite the tension that proximity inspired. They had to have the nerve to wait for the clash and not rush forward into it (thus disrupting the formation). The phalanx relied on steady nerves and effective teamwork to win the day.

The Spartans trained their youths with the phalanx in mind, aiming to make them more effective hoplites. They instilled a strong value for nerve over acts of extravagant individual courage. This was clearly evidenced by sayings from Agesilaos, Androcleidas, Demaratos, and another unnamed Spartan.

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266 See Hdt. 7.201-234, and Th. 1.128-136, 4.31-38.
267 Plu. *Ages.* 1. Here Plutarch outlines the custom that the Spartan heir apparent would be exempt from the *Agoge*. 
woman. Once again, each saying had the common feature that holding your position despite fear was more admirable than any other trait, as it benefitted the state. After all, if the phalanx could not hold together against the enemy, the state’s interests would be compromised.

Once again, the historical tradition was used to determine if this characteristic, featured in the Spartan mirage, was authentically Spartan. Evidence against the high valuation of nerve in Spartan society focused on the treatment of the ‘tremblers’ after the battle of Leuktra, as detailed by Plutarch. Evidence in favor focused on the stories of Aristodemos, Pantites, and the reward for valour after the battle of Plataia, as detailed by Herodotus. The reaction in each of these situations of the Spartan community to cowardice/courage by individual Spartans, or groups, represents something of an inconsistent picture. They clearly valued iron nerves over acts of suicidal bravery, as the decision by the Spartans to award the prize for bravery to another instead of Aristodemos in the aftermath of Plataia is clear evidence of. But the reaction after Leuktra shows us that even Sparta’s laws could be bent in certain circumstances. The survivors of the disaster at Leuktra experienced a very different reaction from their community when compared to Aristodemos or Pantites. Both of these individuals were driven by social sanction and scorn into suicide, either by hanging or by combat. The Leuktran survivors, however, saw no removal of their citizen rights, likely due to their number and the small size of the Spartan citizen body at that time.

In the third chapter we considered the extent to which Spartans were conditioned to obey orders. On the Greek battlefield, until the advent of combined-arms tactics with Alexander, most battles did not rely on complex tactical manoeuvres. Instead, most battles between Greeks devolved into prolonged shoving matches, the losing city’s phalanx usually being the one who broke first under its opponent’s othismos. At the strategic level, feints and deception were still a part of military campaigning. However, since citizen soldier armies were being used, campaigns tended to be short and with only limited

268 Hdt. 9.71.
269 Hdt. 7.229-232.
objectives (so that the citizens would be home for the harvest). Few states other than Sparta ever trained a force of professional soldiers, and typically only in small numbers.\textsuperscript{270} Sparta, on the other hand, prided itself on having the only real soldiers in Greece.

As the only real force of soldiers on the ancient Greek battlefield, Spartans were perceived to be obedient drones, and obedience featured prominently in the \textit{Apopthegmata Lakonika}. As Sparta was the only Greek city to have a clearly delineated chain of command, it makes sense that other Greeks would see them as naturally obedient – an essential trait for a militaristic society. Theopompos, Agesilaos, Agis, and Archidamos were specifically attributed anecdotes that expressed this idea. All of these sayings share the idea that Spartans were perceived to be obedient citizens, drones under the State’s control. Even the kings bowed before the law, at least according to the sayings.

The historical evidence in this case confirmed this trait’s authenticity as well. The clearly delineated structure of the Spartan chain of command, as described by both Xenophon and Thucydides, is a clear indication that Sparta had an effective apparatus for distributing orders. The disobedience of Amompharetos at Plataia presents something of an issue, as he never faced sanction for his crime, as his death bought him exemption from this. Hipponaidas and Aristokles, however, did not have such luck, and they were stripped of their citizenship and banished from Sparta for much the same crime that Amompharetos committed. In fact, the traitorous Pausanias, who came very close to betraying his fellow Greeks, heeded the command of the ephors despite his corruption. All of this historical evidence, when taken as a whole, shows us that Spartans clearly valued obedience in their soldiers. The \textit{Agoge} not only trained them to put the state before their own interests, but it also made them effective and obedient soldiers on the battlefield.

In the fourth chapter, we saw one of the most Spartan characteristics outlined in sayings attributed to Lykourgos, Pausanias, Nikander, Charillos, and Agesilaos. Each of these sayings outlined the

\textsuperscript{270} For example the elite Argive corps, Th. 5.67.
contempt, instilled both in Spartans and in their society, for wealth and decadence, the enemy of the Lykourgan system. Lykourgos had done his best to limit the divisiveness of greed in Sparta. Without overt ways to accumulate or display wealth, its intrinsic value was limited, and greed was relatively scarce in Sparta. After all, such a practice could cause factionalism in a society, dividing people into the have and have-nots, an undesirable situation in the eyes of Lykourgos.\footnote{Hdt. 1.59.} The messes and other measures had been designed with that aim in mind: to prevent greed from influencing its citizens and inhibiting their ability to work together.

Within the historical tradition, we can see solid evidence that Spartans were conditioned to scorn wealth. Evidence to the contrary is limited to the Kleomenes and Sphodrias episodes, as instances of Spartiates being bribed was relatively unheard of.\footnote{Hdt. 5.51.} Once again, the Kleomenes episode is inadequate as evidence against the authenticity of Spartan austerity, as Kleomenes was exempt from the rigours of the Agoge.\footnote{Plu. Ages. 1. Here Plutarch outlines the custom that the Spartan heir apparent would be exempt from the Agoge.} He had also encountered similar situations, such as with Meandrios of Samos, without his daughter’s aid, and had not been seduced.\footnote{Plu. Mor. 224a-b.} Likewise the Sphodrias episode presents uncertain evidence, as Xenophon indirectly expresses doubt as to its authenticity. As Sphodrias was acquitted of charges of corruption, and he served faithfully until his death, it is hard to see this episode as valid evidence to the contrary. Evidence in favor of this trait’s authenticity, however, can best be found in Pausanias’ reaction to the Persian fare prepared by the captured cooks after the battle of Plataia.\footnote{Hdt. 9.82.} His contempt for the Persians’ decadence is quite obvious in this episode, to the point that he needs an audience to witness it. Spartans put great stock in being free from the insidious nature of wealth, and it is clear from the historical evidence that wealth and greed were not an issue for the typical Spartan. They had been indoctrinated
into a healthy contempt for wealth and could not easily be corrupted by it (though their kings could be another story at times).

While the fourth chapter focused on Spartans and wealth, the final chapter focused on the relationship that Spartans had with death. The Sayings from Agis, Agesilaos, Anaxandridas, Hippodamas, and an unnamed Spartan youth all tell us that Spartans were raised not to fear death, but to respect it. By doing so, they were believed by the other Greek cities to be able to act that much more confidently on the battlefield. After all, fear is a great enemy on the battlefield, especially for a phalanx. Every hoplite relied on another for protection, but as long as they held together, they were a force to be reckoned with. The sensory input on the ancient battlefield was also huge, coupled with the hearing and vision impairment based on the style of helmet worn, together they would have only made that fear worse. Also, despite the sheer amount of armor worn, casualties could be high for the losing side. They were not bloodbaths like other periods of history have seen, but for the level of technology and the amount of protection worn, casualties were comparatively high.

The fear of such an encounter, and the possibility of death, could cause even a well-ordered phalanx to rupture. So the Spartans were believed to have inoculated themselves against it. The historical evidence does seem to bear this statement out for the most part. Against it, the best evidence we have is, once again, Pylos, where the Spartiates surrendered to the Athenians; although we cannot be certain they surrendered out of fear or out of contempt for the Athenians.\footnote{Th. 4.40.} It was also exceptional in Spartan history, as has been expressed above, and the same reasons make its validity in this situation as well uncertain. The evidence in favor focused on the story of Eurytos, and his choice to meet his death with honor, rather than to survive because of his weakness. The congruency of his choice to that of the unnamed Spartan youth makes this trait seem that much more authentic. While doubts can be raised concerning Pylos, Eurytos tilts the weight of evidence in favor of this trait’s authenticity.
All in all, these perceptions of the Spartans have been borne out by historical fact, although their extent may have been exaggerated over time in several cases. It makes sense that they have some grounding in historical fact, if we consider the fact that Plutarch may have compiled the sayings as source material for the Spartan Lives. All of the perceptions of the Spartans, even if their extent was exaggerated, had some grounding in historical events. Every rumour, every story of fanciful deeds, has a kernel of truth in it – after all, there has to be an origin from which they began.

The more important idea, however, is that, if we can identify features like these from the sayings, and dig deeper into them, we can certainly identify more elements within the Spartan mirage that have historic grounding. It also opens up the Apophthegmata Lakonika to further scholarship, which has otherwise neglected it. As was discussed in the introduction, Spartan history was somewhat taboo after the Second World War, due to how the Third Reich twisted and manipulated Spartan history and culture to support their own ideals. The recent revival of Spartan and Peloponnesian studies has steered clear of the Apophthegmata Lakonika, as its content is heavily influenced by the Spartan mirage. But this study shows us that some aspects of it can have value as a source – even if we cannot always take them at full face value.

The next steps in this regard would be to explore other values in the sayings. Values such as pragmatism, humility, laconism, Spartan ideas of kingship, etc., these are all explicitly described in the Apophthegmata Lakonika. An examination of these values could help us to fill some of the blanks that exist in the Spartan historical tradition due to the careful control of outside access by the Laconian state. Since the state worked so hard to limit foreign influence, and no Spartan memoirs, or records survive, the sayings represent an access to the ordinary Spartan available nowhere else. Something of the leaders and the more famous Spartiates has always managed to survive in the histories of outside states, such as Herodotos, Thucydides, etc. However, very little of non-royal Spartans exists. There is the odd mention of

\[277\] Talbert (2005), pg. 137.
a normal Spartiate in Xenophon, but even that is very rare (considering the time the historian spent around actual Spartans). The *Apophthegmata Lakonika* needs to be considered as a legitimate historical source and given the same scholarly interest as other works. They clearly have a strong grounding in Spartan history and can give us a deeper insight into the Spartan mind and society not present elsewhere. It is through the *Apophthegmata Lakonika* that we can discover more about the Spartans than we know now.

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278 For example Klearchos, a Spartan exile, see X. *Ana*. 1.2.7-13.
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Appendix One: The Spartan Chain of Command
Appendix 2 – Consulted Passages by Chapter:

Chapter One
1. Plu. Mor. 213e
2. Plu. Mor. 222f
3. Plu. Mor. 219d-e
4. Plu. Mor. 231b-c
5. Plu. Mor. 242a
6. Th. 4.40

Chapter Two
1. Plu. Mor. 210f-211a
2. Plu. Mor. 217c
3. Plu. Mor. 210f
4. Plu. Mor. 220a
5. Plu. Mor. 241f
6. Plu. Mor. 242a
7. Iliad 12.310-321
8. Iliad 6.440-446
9. Hdt. 9.71
10. X. Hell. 5.4.32

Chapter Three
1. Plu. Mor. 221e
2. Plu. Mor. 212c
3. Th. 5.66.2
4. Plu. Mor. 215d
5. Plu. Mor. 218c
6. Plu. Mor. 211a-b
7. Hdt. 7.228
8. Th. 5.72

Chapter Four
1. Plu. Mor. 225f-226b
2. Plu. Mor. 228f-229a
3. Plu. Mor. 230e-f
4. Plu. Mor. 210f
5. Plu. Mor. 232d
6. Plu. Mor. 230b
7. Plu. Mor. 210a
8. Plu. Mor. 210e
9. X. Hell. 5.4.20
10. Hdt. 9.82

Chapter 5
1. Plu. Mor. 216c
2. Plu. Mor. 210f
3. Plu. Mor. 217a
4. Plu. Mor. 222a
5. Plu. Mor. 234a-b
6. Th. 4.40