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“With the shield or upon it”. Military death and cowardice in Sparta

Sparta is often portrayed as a military society and her citizens in various and unorthodox forms might appear to support this perception. However, when one looks more closely at the treatment of cowards, various aspects have drawn out in several papers.

After the publication of the first study on the matter by Jeffrey H. Lang (see *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 101, 1982, pp. 1-12), I found that Sparta and the Peloponnese were the focus of many studies. The main subject of the attention was the Spartan law of cowardice, and especially of the killing of the coward who was killed in the same battle. The main subject of the attention was the Spartan law of cowardice, and especially of the killing of the coward who was killed in the same battle. The main subject of the attention was the Spartan law of cowardice, and especially of the killing of the coward who was killed in the same battle.

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Sparta is often *portrayed* as a military society, and her attitudes to valour and cowardice at first sight appear to support this perception. However, when one looks more closely at the treatment of cowards¹, matters appear less clear-cut in several respects and suggest that the “win or die” mentality was a guideline rather than an all-encompassing requirement.

Closely linked with the issue of valour is the problem of cowardice, as it is explained by Xenophon’s remark: “He [sc. Lycurgus] made it clear that happiness was the reward of the

¹ After the publication of the detailed study on the *tresantes* by J. Ducat (*The Spartan ‘tremblers’* [in:] S. Hodkinson, A. Powell (ed.), *Sparta and War*, The Classical Press of Wales 2006, pp. 1-55), it may seem a waste of the authors’, and especially of the readers’ time to publish other studies devoted to the same topic. The main body of this article was written before Ducat’s text appeared. It has, obviously, taken me a long time to decide whether further work on this makes any sense; finally, having read some other studies devoted to Sparta, I have decided that it is not necessarily reasonable to resign from all attempts to formulate new thoughts on an issue after an outstanding study on it has appeared. I also think that some views, even if subjective and inadequately documented, deserve to be brought to the scholars’ attention. With this thought I have decided to publish, after all, these remarks on the Spartan *tresantes*. I am very grateful to Stephen Hodkinson and Anton Powell for their insightful analysis of the first version of this paper. Their remarks on both the general and the particular issues definitely influenced my reasoning; yet, not only due to the appropriate courtesy, I want to state that neither of them bears any responsibility for the final shape of my text, and for its inadequacies I alone am responsible.

good (*agathoi*), misery the reward of the bad² (*kakoi*)” (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* IX, 3). The reference of *agathos* i *kakos* is certainly not limited to the sphere of military matters, although this is where it is manifested in the most vivid manner. On the battlefield, the *agathos* displays courage, the *kakos* – cowardice. Heroism and cowardice had an almost equal importance in the construction of Spartan ideology. In Sparta, death of a soldier-citizen on the battlefield, that is *kalos* or *euklees thanatos*, which constituted an important element of hoplite morality, played a particularly crucial role³. Tyrtaios, who set the pattern for Spartan values in the classical period, glorifies this kind of death, seen as a sacrifice for the benefit of the homeland:

*For it is fine to die in the front line,
a brave man fighting for his fatherland*
(Tyrtaios fr. 10, 1-2)

This is practically the only kind of sudden, violent death that appears noble, both to the Greek and to the Roman mind. It becomes a source of eternal fame, not only for the fallen man, but also for his family, and finally for the entire homeland:

*[...] his own dear life he loses, in the front line felled,
his breast, his bossed shield pierced by many a wound,
and of his corselet all the front, but he has brought
glory upon his father, army, town.
His death is mourned alike by young and old; the whole
community feels the keen loss its own.*

² Henceforward the term *agathos*, which Michael Lipka (*Xenophon's Spartan Constitution. Introduction. Text. Commentary*, Berlin 2002) translated as “brave”, I render as “good”, and *kakos* (according to Lipka “coward”), as “bad”. Xenophon’s text is given here in the translation by Lipka, all other translations are from The Loeb Classical Library.

³ N. Loraux, La “belle mort” Spartiate, *Ktema* 2, 1977, p. 105.

*People point out his tomb, his children on the street
his children's children and posterity.
His name and glorious reputation never die;
he is immortal even in his grave,
that man the furious War-god kills as he defends
his soil and children with heroic stand.*

(Tyrtaios fr. 12, 23 sqq.)

Glorification of *kalos thanatos* had a very practical character: it defined the pattern of behaviour proper for a soldier-citizen, thus leading Spartans to victory⁴. “This too is one of Lycurgus’ admirable institutions: he brought it about that an honourable death (*kalos thanatos*) was preferable to a life of disgrace in the city. For, investigation would reveal that fewer of these [sc. who prefer an honourable death] die than those who prefer to retreat from danger” (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* IX, 1)⁵. Intrepidity of its soldiers granted Sparta also a political advantage, since “all want some kind of alliance with the good” (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* IX, 2). It is not surprising, therefore, that the heroic death of a warrior was at the centre of interest of the *polis*. Those who fell “in war”, and only those, had in Sparta the right to be honoured with a special memorial⁶. The privilege of having the name of a man fallen

⁴ N. Loraux, op. cit., p. 110.

⁵ See E. Luppino Manes, *Un progetto di riforma per Sparta. Le “Politeia” di Senofonte*, Milano 1988, p. 83.

⁶ S. Hodkinson points out that since the times of Tyrtaios (from whose texts it transpires that fallen warriors were buried in Sparta with honours, and their graves “remained visible to subsequent generations”) “a major change” occurred towards “memorials unconnected with the place of commemorative monuments burial” (S. Hodkinson, *Property and Wealth in Classical Sparta*, London 2000, pp. 251-257). This major change may have been related to the widening of Sparta’s military reach: as long as the fighting took place relatively close to home, it was technically feasible to bring back the dead and bury them in the country, but when their campaigns

abroad *en polemo* (see Plut. *Lyk.* 27, 3; *Mor.* 238 d and IG V, 1, 701-703, 707-708, 918, 921, 1124-1125, 1320, 1591)⁷ inscribed on a commemorative memorial sharply contrasts with the uniform anonymity of burials in Sparta, the only exception from which was the solemn grandeur of burial ceremonies of kings (Hdt. VI, 58)⁸.

Death for the homeland was the main topic of songs composed in Sparta (Plut. *Lyk.* 21, 2). A song celebrating those who fell in the so-called 'Battle of the Champions', fought between Spartans and Argives in the year 546/5, was sung during the Gymnopaïdiai⁹. A stone plaque extolled the names of all men who died at Thermopylae (Paus. III, 14, 1)¹⁰; moreover, par-

took the Spartans increasingly further away, their burial rituals had to change.

⁷ Eighteen inscriptions from Sellasia were published by A. Papanikolaou, Epithymbion ex arkhaias Sellasias, *Athena* 76, 1976/1977, p. 202-204. See S. Hodkinson, Social Order and the Conflict of Values in Classical Sparta, *Chiron* 13, 1983, p. 259, and esp. his *Property and Wealth*, pp. 250-254 and remarks by W.K. Pritchett, *The Greek State at War*, IV, Berkeley-London 1985, p. 244-246. During the salvage excavations conducted in the southern part of Sparta by the Greek Archaeological Service some inscriptions were found, of which one refers to a soldier who fell during a war (*em polemo*) – *BCH* 119, 1995, p. 876; SEG XL 285. The latest study by Polly Low mentions 24 known stelai (of which 20 are published) commemorating men fallen "in war" (P. Low, *Commemorating the Spartan War-Dead* [in:] S. Hodkinson, A. Powell (ed.), *Sparta and War*, The Classical Press of Wales 2006, p. 86 and note 3.

⁸ M. Toher, *Greek Funerary Legislation and the Two Spartan Funerals* [in:] M.A. Flower, M. Toher (ed.), *Georgica. Greek Studies in Honour of George Cawkwell*, London 1991, p. 171; S. Hodkinson, *Property and Wealth*, p. 262-3.

⁹ S. Hodkinson, *Property and Wealth*, p. 257.

¹⁰ R. Ball, Herodotos' list of the Spartans who died at Thermopylai, *Museum Africum*, 1976, 5, 1-8; P. Low, *Commemorating the Spartan War-Dead*, p. 99-101.

ticular remembrance was accorded to those who excelled in valour. Separate sanctuaries were erected to the memory of Leonidas, as well as Alpheios and Maron (Paus. III, 12, 19; 14, 1), sons of Orsiphontas (Hdt. VII, 227). The memory of others survived, too: as Herodotus reports, one Dieneces showed particular wit, for when it was said that the Persians are so many that when they release their arrows the sky will grow dark, he remarked that it was so much the better, for the Greeks would be more comfortable fighting in the shade, not in the sun (Hdt. VII, 226). Two other Spartans, who due to illness were sent by Leonidas to Alpenoi, were thus given a chance to save their life (Hdt. VII, 229, 1). On hearing that the Persians have approached the Spartan positions from the rear, one of them, Eurytus, put on his armour and ordered a helot to lead him to battle, where he threw himself into the *melée* and died (Hdt. VII, 229, 1). The other, named Aristodemus, lacked courage to do so. He saved his life, but condemned himself to the contempt of his fellow citizens¹¹. How powerful a weapon that could be, is clearly demonstrated by Aristodemus's later fortunes, which bear out Xenophon's remark – that Lycurgus awarded a “happy life” (*eudaimonia*) to the brave, while the bad were given an “unhappy” life (*kakodaimonia*). At the battle of Plataeae Aristodemus acquitted himself heroically and won the admiration of other Greeks – but not of the Spartans, who never forgave him a moment of weakness from a year before: “According to my judgment, he that bore himself by far the best (*aristos*) was – states Herodotus – Aristodemus, who had been reviled (*oneidos*) and dishonoured (*atimie*) for being the only man of the three hundred that came alive from Thermopylae; and the next after

¹¹ See J. Ducat, *Spartan 'tremblers'*, p. 34-38.

him in valour were Posidonius and Philokyon and Amompharetus. Nevertheless when there was talk, and question who had borne himself most bravely, those Spartans that were there judged that Aristodemus had achieved great feats (*erga megala*) because by reason of the reproach under which he lay he plainly wished to die, and so pressed forward in frenzy (*lyssonta*) from his post (*taxis*). Posidonius had borne himself well with no desire to die, and must in so far be held the better man (*aner agathos*)” (Hdt. IX, 71, 2-4). Honouring the memory of the fallen men was a pan-Hellenic custom, but in Sparta it was given special status. And although the particular cases are rarely recorded – for instance, it is known that there was in Sparta a monument to Brasidas (Paus. III, 14, 1), who in the year 422 died at Amphipolis – certainly the appropriate actions were to a large extent routine.

While those who fell on the battlefield were honoured and commemorated, those who survived a victorious battle were treated with great respect.

*Or if in winning his proud spear-vaunt he escapes
the doom of death and grief's long shadow-cast,
then all men do him honour, young and old alike;
much joy is his before he goes below.
He grows old in celebrity, and no one thinks
to cheat him of his due respect and rights,
but all men at the public seats make room for him,
the young, the old, and those of his own age.
This is the excellence whose heights are now must seek
To scale, by not relenting in the fight*
(Tyrtaios fr. 12, 35-44)

To the victors went fame and honours¹². They were gener-

¹² N. Loraux, op. cit., p. 110.

ally respected. The best fighters received awards for valour (*aristeia*)¹³. In the year 480 the Lacedaemonians accorded an olive wreath to Eurymachides for his bravery, and at the same time gave an award to Themistocles for wisdom and astuteness (Hdt. VIII, 124). In the year 431 Brasidas, as the first during the Peloponnesian War, was honoured in a similar way. Some of those who had shown extraordinary courage were awarded equally extraordinary honours, sometimes including even heroicisation¹⁴.

As Demaratus says to Xerxes, in depicting the Spartan character (Hdt. VII, 104, 5), "law (*nomos*) is their master (*despotes*), whom they fear"; it orders them to "never flee from the battle before whatsoever odds, but abide at their post and there conquer (*epikrateein*) or die (*apollysthai*)"¹⁵. This picture is familiar from the poetry of Tyrtaios, and is again found in the Thermopylae epigram, commemorating the death of Leonidas's soldiers. It seems that in some situations "beautiful death" was in Sparta a categorical imperative from which there was no retreat¹⁶.

However, bravado was not tolerated. After the battle of Plataeae, as has been said before, the Spartans refused an award to Aristodemus, since he did commit heroic deeds, but only leaving the ranks in his frenzy (Hdt. IX, 71, 3)¹⁷. In this case the real reasons were connected with the infamy which lay on

¹³ On *aristeia* see W.K. Pritchett, *The Greek State at War. Part II*, pp. 276-290.

¹⁴ See S. Hodkinson, *Social Order*, p. 259.

¹⁵ The context of this remark is discussed by N. Tigerstedt, *The Legend of Sparta*, I, Stockholm 1971, p. 95 ff.

¹⁶ N. Loraux, *The Experience of Tiresias. The Feminine and the Greek Man*, Princeton 1995, p. 63.

¹⁷ See J.F. Lazenby, *The Spartan Army*, Warminster 1985, p. 57.

Aristodemus for his “cowardice” at Thermopylae, but it is nevertheless obvious that in the hoplite formation there was no place for individual, “Homeric” displays of prowess, since those put at risk the lives of fellow soldiers.

The atmosphere of blind obedience or thoughtless discipline, however, was not as prevalent in the Spartan army as common opinion would have it. There are several examples of disobedience. The first one concerns lochagos Amompharetus, who in 479 at Plataeae refused to comply with the orders of the commander-in-chief (Hdt. IX, 53, 55). This “ridiculous insubordination”,¹⁸ as Nicolle Loraux termed it, could have led to the complete defeat of the Greek army. Amompharetus died in the battle and was later honoured for valour he had displayed. In no place, neither relating the opinions of Spartans nor speaking in his own name, does Herodotus suggest that Amompharetus’s behaviour was in any way reprehensible. Also Thucydides’ description of the battle of Mantinea in 418 shows that at least Spartan commanding officers, if not ordinary soldiers, were not necessarily accustomed to blind compliance with orders they had received.

“It turned out, then, as he [*sc.* King Agis] gave this order at the very moment of the attack and on a sudden, that Aristocles and Hipponoidas refused to move over” (Thuc. V, 72, 1). The reaction of the polemarchs proves that they did not hesitate to question the decisions of the king who was their supreme commander. They certainly did consider it their right, but in their case the outcome was different than in the case of Amompharetus, since, as Thucydides relates, they were afterwards exiled from Sparta (Thuc. V, 72, 1). The charge is certainly strained, formu-

¹⁸ N. Loraux, *op. cit.*, p. 112=*idem*, *The Experiences of Tiresias*, p. 69.

lated to suit the need of the moment. The allegation of cowardice did not encompass insubordination. On the other hand it is curious that the refusal to comply with orders in itself was not a basis for a separate accusation. The abuse of powers, however, could be. The occupation of the Kadmeia by Phoibidas in 382 (Xen. *Hell.* V, 2, 25-32) and the attack on Piraeus by Sphodrias in 378 (Xen. *Hell.* V, 4, 20-33), both actions unauthorised, resulted in the trials of the commanders.

It is interesting that the instances of insubordination (or at least of some independence) do not concern only the commanding officers. When at the battle of Mantinea the Spartans moved to attack the protected summit occupied by the enemy forces, "one of the older men, seeing that they were going against a strongly defended place, called out to Agis that he thought to cure one ill with another, meaning that the motive of his present unseasonable eagerness was to make amends for the culpable retreat from Argos. Agis, then, whether on account of this call, or because it suddenly struck him, too, that some other course was better than one he was following, led his army back again in all haste without coming into conflict" (Thuc. V, 65, 1-3).

Victory at the battle of Nemea in 394 the Spartans owed largely to the insubordination of one soldier: "[...] but the Lacedaemonians did come upon the Argives as they were returning from the pursuit, and when the first polemarch was about to attack them in front, it is said that someone shouted out to let the front ranks pass by. When this had been done, they struck them on their unprotected sides as they ran past, and killed many of them" (Xen. *Hell.* IV, 2, 22).

Proclaiming the glory of its victorious soldiers and honouring the memory of the fallen, Sparta also needed cowards to set

off and reinforce the ideal of a dauntless, triumphant warrior-hoplite¹⁹. Cowardice and valour, as has already been mentioned, played almost equal parts in Spartan ideology:

*You know that those who bravely hold the line
and press toward engagement at the front
die in less numbers, with the ranks behind
protected; those who run, lose all esteem (arête).
The list is endless of the ills (kaka) that hurt
the man who bears to think the coward's thoughts:
for it's a bad place, as he flees the fray,
to have his wound, between the shoulders-blades,
and it's a shameful sight to see him lie
dead in the dust, the spear-point in his back.*

(Tyrtaios fr. 11, 11-20)

While the victors brought glory and fame to Sparta, the losers, those who had failed, brought disgrace upon the land. In the final count the price to pay for that was terrible; witness the unfortunate Aristodemus. In the year 390 a similar fate befell the soldiers of a Spartan *mora* stationed at Lechaion, who on their way back to Sparta walked into an ambush set by the peltasts of Iphicrates (Xen. *Hell.* IV, 5, 10). About 250 Spartans were killed (Xen. *Hell.* IV, 5, 12-17). An unexpected defeat caused, understandably, a great stir among the Spartans, but their further reactions seem less obvious. "Now inasmuch as such calamity had been unusual with the Lacedaemonians – writes Xenophon – there was great mourning throughout the Laco-nian army, except among those whose sons, fathers and brothers had fallen where they stood; they, however, went about like victors, with shining countenances and full of exultation in their

¹⁹ See N. Loraux, op. cit., p. 112 note 52=idem, *The Experiences of Tiresias*, p. 69 n. 57.

own misfortune" (Xen. *Hell.* IV, 5, 10). It is noteworthy that the shield-bearers who took the bodies back to Lechaion early in the battle got away unscathed.

The destruction of the Spartan *mora* from Lechaion was, from the point of view of the entire Corinthian war, an episode of little importance. Xenophon mainly points out the fact that a defeat, especially one so complete, and in a skirmish with soldiers in light armour at that, was a new experience for Sparta, and stresses the reaction of the Spartans – the reaction which was as alien to other Greeks²⁰ as it is to us. Strictly speaking, there is no explicit evidence that it was the reaction strange to other Greeks²¹ but this time *argumentum ex silentio* speaks in favour of common sense.

Similar behaviour was observed after the battle of Leuctra in 371 (Xen. *Hell.* VI, 4, 16; Plut. *Ages.* 29, 2-7). After four of the seven hundred Spartans taking part in the battle fell in the fight (Xen. *Hell.* VI, 4, 15; Paus. IX, 13, 11-12), the polemarchs began negotiations to recover the bodies and conclude an armistice. The word of the defeat reached Sparta on the last day of the Gymnopaïdiai. The ephors ordered the celebrations to proceed as usual and had the families of the dead informed of the death of their kin, but forbade them any display of mourning.

"And on the following day one could see those whose relatives had been killed going about in public with bright and

²⁰ S. Hodkinson questioned this proposition of mine, saying that "we need some evidence for this assertion". The fact alone that Xenophon remarked on the Spartan's reaction demonstrates that in his opinion it was unusual enough to merit a description.

²¹ Similarly as the reaction of the Athenian women, recorded by Herodotus, was strange; apparently, after the failure of the campaign against Aegina they killed the only surviving man with their brooches (Hdt. V, 87).

cheerful faces, while of those whose relatives had been reported as living you would have seen but few, and these few walking gloomy and downcast" (Xen. *Hell.* VI, 4, 16. See also Plut. *Ages.* 29, 5-7). In both cases the fallen men were probably treated as heroes and the survivors were reviled. The fact that the latter were treated with disdain is obvious; heroization of the first remains conjectural, as there is no direct evidence. In any case, a question thus arises, how exactly was cowardice (*anandria*) understood in Sparta²². It is quite improbable that mainly those who left their shield and escaped from the battlefield were regarded as cowards, as was the case, for instance, in Athens²³. A greater severity may be assumed here; in the case of Spartans, the expectations were probably higher.

It has already been mentioned that those who did not manage to live up to the requirements of the Spartan code of conduct were stigmatised. According to Demaratus, a Spartiate was obliged to conquer or die. Otherwise all he could expect was shame and dishonour (Hdt. VII, 232; IX, 71). This is a piece of propaganda, but the remainder of Herodotus's story corroborates these official principles. Thermopylae, to which especially the enduring renown of Sparta is due, is an illustration of the Spartan principles put into practice.

Herodotus (VII, 219-222) partly explains why Leonidas remained in position, fighting to the end, although he was aware that his entire unit of 300 men was doomed to inescapable death. Herodotus relates that the Spartans could not betray the laws of their country and leave the post. Moreover, by his deed Leonidas expected to win great fame. In Herodotus's opinion,

²² See J. Ducat, *Spartan 'tremblers'*, pp. 11-15.

²³ See N. Loraux, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

the death of the soldiers led by Leonidas was inevitable anyway, because according to the Delphic oracle the Spartan king had to die; otherwise Sparta would be destroyed by the barbarians (Hdt. VII, 220, 4).

Whatever the real state of affairs, Spartan soldiers at Thermopylae were from the very beginning aware that their mission was suicidal, or at least had to take this possibility under consideration. It was not accidental that King Leonidas took with him "a picked force of the customary three hundred, and those that had sons" (Hdt. VII, 205, 1). The situation described here by Herodotus is an extreme one. Because of the Persian invasion the Spartans, and the Greeks in general, were faced with very radical choices. Usually, even during wars, though the heart of the matter remained the same, the choices were less fundamental.

In the year 546/5 the 'Battle of the Champions' was to decide whether the disputed frontier territory of Thyrea was to belong to Sparta or to Argos (Hdt. I, 82). From the battle, in which on each side took part three hundred warriors, only three emerged alive: two Argives, called Alkenor and Chromios, and one Spartan, Othryades. While the two ran to Argos to spread the news of the Argive victory, the Spartiate stripped the corpses of the enemies and carried their arms to his camp. When the next day the main bodies of the two armies appeared on the battlefield, both the Argives and the Spartans claimed victory: the first, because two of their side had survived, the latter – because it was a Spartan warrior who removed the armour and retained control of the field, while the two enemies reputedly escaped from it. The head-on battle could not be, of course, avoided at this point. Spartans emerged victorious. And here begins the part of the story which is most interesting to us. It appears that the Spartans might reasonably have been grateful

to Othryades; after all, it was partly to him that they owed the favourable outcome. And indeed, they did remember that this victory swayed the fate of Thyrea: to commemorate the battle they henceforward wore long hair (while the Argives, on the contrary, cut theirs short as a sign of mourning). However, "Othryades, the one survivor of the three hundred – writes Herodotus – was ashamed, it is said, to return to Sparta after all the men of his company had been slain, and killed himself on the spot at Thyrea" (Hdt. I, 82, 7-8).

Othryades was not a typical coward, but he was not, if it can be judged from the lack of information, afterwards honoured in Sparta²⁴. The impression we get, perhaps wrongly, is that by his suicide he was trying to escape the fate of Aristodemus after Thermopylae. "When Aristodemus returned to Lacedaemon he was disgraced and dishonoured; this was the manner of his dishonour, that no Spartan would give him fire, nor speak with him; and they called him for disgrace, Aristodemus the coward (*tresas*)" (Hdt. VII, 231). Herodotus adds, however: "But he repaired all that was laid to his charge in the fight at Plataeae". It is difficult to say, on the basis of this account, whether Aris-

²⁴ On the other hand it may be just a coincidence that in the preserved literary tradition there survived only that, shall we say, didactic aspect of Othryades's life. From the fact that in the inscription dating from the 2nd c. AD, enumerating the „ephors" (SIG³ 1265), the name of Othryades appears beside those of such distinguished Spartans as Cleomenes, Lysander, Gylippus, Brasidas and Leonidas, it can be inferred that either at the later date the assessment of his behaviour changed, or, which seems more probable, he had always belonged to the "pantheon" of Spartan heroes, and only Herodotus's account, by stressing the circumstances of Othryades's death, evokes associations with *tresantes*. With regard to Othryades, see J. Dillery, Reconfiguring the Past: Thyrea and Thermopylae, and Narrative Patterns in Herodotus, *AJPh* 117, 1996, pp. 227-229.

todemus was formally pronounced to be a coward. He may have been called that without official grounds, perhaps in order to make his dishonour cut deeper. Certainly it was the case of a total social exclusion; yet Herodotus does not say anything of any legal grounds which would make Aristodemus officially a coward. Anyway, the Spartans showed him much more leniency than the Athenian women showed their only compatriot who survived the campaign against Aegina (Hdt. V, 87).²⁵

“It is said too – as we find out from the further remarks of Herodotus – that another of the three hundred, whose name was Pantites, was saved alive, carrying a message into Thessaly; he also returned to Sparta, but being there dishonoured, hanged himself” (Hdt. VII, 232). Pantites’s only fault was that he did not die with the others. Perhaps he could have returned in time to join the battle, or perhaps the mission to Thessaly took place at a slightly earlier period? Unfortunately, we have no way of knowing²⁶. But what we do know is that the Spartans could mete out a coward’s punishment also to those whom we would hardly regard as such. 292 soldiers remaining of the Sphacteria garrison, among them about 120 Spartiates, full citizens, surrendered to the Athenians after consulting the Spartan government. The authorities, being asked what the garrison was supposed to do, left the decision to those trapped on the island under one condition: that they were forbidden to act in a dishonourable way (Thuc. IV, 38, 3). Obviously the surrender was found to be a dishonour, because after the captives returned from a several-year imprisonment in Athens, they were faced

²⁵ See above, note 21.

²⁶ On doubts concerning the Pantites account, J. Ducat, *Spartan 'tremblers'*, p. 34.

with punishment. It is interesting that several of them were appointed to offices before, fearing a revolution, the Spartans decided to act against them. It suggests some doubts on the Spartan's part concerning the evaluation of the Sphacteria events. On the one hand, undoubtedly, the offense of the Sphacteria prisoners of war was not entirely clear, while on the other the very numbers of offending soldiers would complicate matters²⁷.

With regard to the "beautiful death", in the Spartan system of values there appear many contradictions. The strange status of the *tresantes*²⁸, degraded, but at the same time remaining a part of the society, merits attention. The exclusion of the *tresantes* was not total²⁹. They played the role of a living warning and an incentive to noble behaviour³⁰. Regarded as "cowards", they were sentenced to the punishment of *atimia*, that is deprivation of *time*. Apart from that rather general statement, the majority of detailed issues remains, to say the least, disputable. Moses Finley sees *tresantes* as a technical term,³¹ and indeed this view is generally accepted³²; but those who broke the Spartan rules of behaviour were in some sources called "the bad" (*kakoi*), as opposed to "the good" or "the beautiful" (*agathoi, kaloi*) who acted in accordance to the rules. It is also unclear, as shown by

²⁷ J. Ducat, *Spartan 'tremblers'*, p. 38.

²⁸ Basic work regarding the *tresantes*: J. Ducat, *Spartan 'tremblers'*. Earlier works: V. Ehrenberg, RE, s.v., *tresantes*, VI A 2 (1937), col. 2292-2297 and N. Loraux, op. cit., pp. 108-113. See also Michael Lipka, *Xenophon's Spartan Constitution*, pp. 174-180.

²⁹ J. Ducat, *Spartan 'tremblers'*, pp. 29-30.

³⁰ N. Loraux, op. cit., p. 112.

³¹ M. Finley, *Sparta and Spartan Society* (in:) idem, *Economy and Society in Ancient Greece*, London 1981, pp. 24-40 (note 7, p. 254).

³² See J. Ducat, *Spartan 'tremblers'*, pp. 8-10.

MacDowell,³³ whether the punishment meted out to cowards was of a permanent or temporary character.

It is certain, on the other hand, that these punishments were considered more important in Sparta than in other Greek poleis, as attested also by the fact that their introduction was ascribed (by Xenophon at least) to Lycurgus: "For he thought [*sc.* Lycurgus], it seems, that only the victims directly affected are harmed by those who enslave others, or rob, or steal something, while entire cities are destroyed by the bad and the cowards (*kakon kai anandron*)" (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* X, 6).

Some of the punitive measures seem to result from acts of law, others to be an element of social custom. In the first case we have an impression that a separate decision as to the way of punishment is taken in each individual case. It is definitely so in case of the men who surrendered at Sphacteria: "But as to their men who had been taken on the island and had given up their arms, fearing that these might expect to suffer some degradation because of their misfortune and if they continued in possession of the franchise might attempt a revolution, they disfranchised them (*atimous epoiesan*), though some of them now held office, and with such a disfranchisement that they could neither hold office nor have the legal right to buy or sell anything. In the course of time, however, they were again enfranchised (Thuc. V, 34, 2). Thucydides does not clarify their status; it is not known whether they were pronounced to be *tresantes*, which is rather doubtful, but the decision to punish them certainly meant that they were counted among the *kakoi*.

³³ D.M. MacDowell, *Spartan Law*, Edinburgh 1986, p. 46. See J. Ducat, *Spartan 'tremblers'*, pp. 33-35.

Of all the events of this war – as Thucydides comments on the Sphacteria episode – this came as the greatest surprise to the Hellenic world; for men could not conceive that the Lacedaemonians would be induced by hunger or any other compulsion to give up their arms, but thought that they would keep them till they died, fighting as long as they were able; and they could not believe that those who had surrendered were as brave as those who had fallen. And when one of the Athenian allies sometime afterwards sneeringly asked one of the captives taken on the island, whether the Lacedaemonians who had been slain were brave men and true (*kaloï kagathoi*), the answer was, that the shaft, meaning the arrow, would be worth a great deal if it could distinguish the brave (*tous agathous*), indicating that it was a mere matter of chance who was hit and killed by stones and bow-shots (Thuc. IV, 40).

According to MacDowell,³⁴ a man guilty of cowardice not only could not hold office, but was probably prevented from taking part in any political activity, membership in the assembly included, although MacDowell does add that neither Thucydides nor Plutarch, who mentions the ban on holding office (Plut. *Ages.* 30, 3), states that expressly. Moreover, we know that some of captives from Sphacteria were elected to office before the decision was taken to punish them.

Also, the Sphacteria *atimoi* could not legally “buy or sell anything”. This regulation is not entirely clear to us³⁵. It is not impossible that Thucydides, ignoring the formal prohibition, existing in Sparta, on buying and selling the *kleroi*, refers here to the actual state of affairs, where, as proved by Stephen Hod-

³⁴ D.M. MacDowell, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

³⁵ D.M. MacDowell, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

kinson, transactions involving land were not only possible, but widely conducted³⁶. In Ducat's opinion, the Sphacteria prisoners of war retained their *ius utendi*, and lost the *ius abutendi*³⁷. We can wonder whether Thucydides does not limit his report to the most important issues: in the political sphere to the ban on holding office, and in the economic and social sphere to the ban on selling and purchasing or, which is more probable, does not mention all the punitive measures used in this case.

There are some reasons to believe that the above-mentioned punitive measures may have been only temporary. It was certainly so in the cases of Aristodemus³⁸ and the Sphacteria prisoners, although on the other hand MacDowell³⁹ maintains that the measures taken against the latter group might have been out of the ordinary, since there could have been some doubt or disagreement whether they were really cowards. It was in the best interest of the polis to create a means for *kakoi* to recover their status after disgrace. After Leuctra, when the three hundred men who survived the battle did not meet with *atimia* thanks to King Agesilaus, they were given a chance to reestablish their reputation in the expedition against Mantinea (Plut. *Ages.* 30; *Mor.* 191 c; Polyainos II, 1, 13). According to Michell,⁴⁰ there existed clearly delineated boundaries, which a Spartan could not overstep. But in the year 371/70 the reality was far more complicated. Not only from the objective point of view

³⁶ See especially the most recent publication by S. Hodkinson, *Property and Wealth*. But according to Hodkinson, what is meant here is the ban on buying and selling merchandise in the market (op. cit., pp. 84-85).

³⁷ J. Ducat, *Spartan 'tremblers'*, p. 31.

³⁸ *Contra* S. Link, *Sparta Kosmos*, Darmstadt 1994, p. 23.

³⁹ D.M. MacDowell, op. cit., p. 46.

⁴⁰ H. Michell, *Sparta*, Cambridge 1964², p. 45.

punishing Aristodemus, or even of the 120 Spartiates of Sphacteria was a different thing than punishing as many as 300 soldiers who survived Leuctra. It was an instinct of self-preservation that did not allow the Spartan society to penalise so many citizens, since soon, in the year 370, Sparta had to withstand a Theban invasion on its own territory. As Ducat astutely observes, “the severity of the sanction (...) was not proportional to the gravity of the offence, but inversely proportional to the number of those guilty”⁴¹.

Measures enumerated so far do not represent the entire arsenal of punishments meted out to Spartan *kakoi*. Herodotus (VII, 231) and Xenophon (*Lak. Pol.* IX, 4-6) describe a kind of social exclusion. Xenophon discusses the punishment for the *tresantes* in the most detailed way, describing how Lycurgus granted a “happy life” to the good, and condemned the bad to an “unhappy” one (*Xen. Lak. Pol.* IX, 3)⁴².

“For whenever someone proves bad (*kakos*) in other cities – explains Xenophon – he has only the bad reputation of being a bad one (*kakos*), but the bad one goes to the same public places as the good one (*agathos*) and takes his seat and joins in physical exercise, as he likes. But in Lakedaimon everyone would be ashamed to accept a bad one (*kakos*) as a messmate or as an opponent in a wrestling bout” (*Lak. Pol.* IX, 4). Xenophon’s description is not free from exaggeration, it can actually be seen as “an idealized picture”⁴³; after all, cowardice was punished in other poleis also⁴⁴. As Ducat rightly maintains, “in Greek eyes

⁴¹ J. Ducat, *Spartan ‘tremblers’*, p. 48.

⁴² For a detailed analysis of Xenophon’s account, see J. Ducat, *Spartan ‘tremblers’*, pp. 18-23.

⁴³ J. Ducat, *Spartan ‘tremblers’*, p. 34.

⁴⁴ See M.R. Christ, *The Bad Citizen in Classical Athens*, Cambridge University Press 2006, pp. 94-95, 118; J. Ducat, *Spartan ‘tremblers’*, p. 10.

the status of tremblers was not exclusively a Spartan entity”⁴⁵. The act of publicly disgracing the cowards was reported to have been introduced by Charondas, who had them sit in the agora for three days in a woman’s clothing (Diod. XII, 16, 1-2). Also, the Athenians were certainly not as lenient as Xenophon would have them⁴⁶. However, if we believe his account, it would transpire that there the penalties did not extend to the spheres of life he describes. First of all, in Sparta a *kakos* could not take part in *syssitia*⁴⁷, in Xenophon’s account called *syskenion*, which was a duty of every citizen who enjoyed full rights. On completing his twentieth year of life a Spartiate joined one of the *syssitia*, where every day he ate his meals. Xenophon certainly does not mention a ban on admitting the “bad” ones to a *syssitia* (when a twenty-year-old man wanted to join a *syssitia*, the decision was in every case taken by its members in a secret ballot), since an act of cowardice could have been committed only by a soldier – and a Spartan served in the army from his twentieth on to the sixtieth year. With an exclusion from a *syssitia*, however, a Spartiate was automatically relegated to the category of second-class citizens, those conventionally called the *hypomeiones* by modern scholars.

“Frequently such a man is not picked when they select teams for ballgames, and in choruses he is relegated to the most ignominious positions” (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* IX, 5)⁴⁸. This means that a “bad” man was not thrown out of the community altogether, but only removed to its fringes⁴⁹. Those penalties had both real

⁴⁵ J. Ducat, *Spartan ‘tremblers’*, p. 8.

⁴⁶ M.R. Christ, *The Bad Citizen*, p. 123.

⁴⁷ See J. Ducat, *Spartan ‘tremblers’*, p. 18.

⁴⁸ See J. Ducat, *Spartan ‘tremblers’*, pp. 19-20.

⁴⁹ See J. Ducat, *Spartan ‘tremblers’*, p. 27.

and symbolic character. Although no doubt very painful for the punished men, in my opinion they were also (or maybe mainly) addressed to the entire body of citizens and constituted a public manifestation of the values cultivated in Sparta. A “bad” man was denied all the usual forms of respect which it was customary to extend to a “good” warrior-citizen.

“He must give way in the streets and rise from his seat even for younger men” (*Lak. Pol. IX, 5*). In a sense the “bad” were equalled with the helots, who had to give way to every Spartiate they met or otherwise be beaten. Rising from the seat for younger men in turn signifies a denial, in case of the *tresantes*, of the outward signs of respect due to seniors⁵⁰.

“He must support his spinster relatives at home and must explain to them why they are old maids” (*Lak. Pol. IX, 5*)⁵¹. Apparently in the case of cowards Spartans applied the principle of *collective responsibility*. Already rejected by the community and carrying the burden of dishonour, a “bad” man burdened also his own family. This to a certain extent explains the strange reactions of women after the battles of Lechaion and Leuctra⁵². The daughter of a “bad” man took part in his dishonour, which probably not only served as an added incentive to Spartan fathers to show valour on the battlefield, but

⁵⁰ See the interesting comparisons of the Spartan customs connected with the *tresantes* with the children’s system of values – A. Powell, *Athens and Sparta: Constructing Greek Social and Political History from 478*, London 1988, p. 234. See J. Ducat’s remarks, *Spartan ‘tremblers’*, p. 21.

⁵¹ See J. Ducat’s remarks, *Spartan ‘tremblers’*, pp. 21-22.

⁵² I do not think, however, that it is possible to infer from this, as Anton Powell does, that “model Spartans did not love their families: they loved the State” (A. Powell, *Dining Groups, Marriage, Homosexuality* (in:) *Sparta*, (ed.) Michael Whitby, Edinburgh 2002, p. 93 (= *Athens and Sparta: Constructing Greek Social and Political History from 478*, London 1998)).

was also connected with the Spartan views on eugenics: it was believed that only valiant parents – both parents – can beget equally valiant offspring.

For both those reasons the “bad” man forfeited in practice (if not formally) the right to start a family: “he must endure having no wife at the heart of his home and at the same time pay⁵³ for this” (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* IX, 5). In this case a “bad” man probably was obliged to pay the fines obligatory for those who remained among the unmarried (*agamia*) (Plut. *Lys.* 30, 7). Bachelors were penalised with *atimia*, with which went the loss of a part of rights due to full citizens. They were forbidden to watch the Gymnopaidiai in summer and in winter they had to run naked round the agora, singing that their suffering is a just punishment for disobeying the laws (Plut. *Lyk.* 15). We can ask rhetorically what happened when a man was already married. In Ducat’s opinion, “it is eminently possible that, in this situation, the marriage would have been dissolved”⁵⁴.

All in all, a “bad” man is denied the right to any respect. “He may not stroll about anointed with oil, nor behave like the blameless, or else he has to submit to a beating from braver men” (*Lak. Pol.* IX, 5)⁵⁵. Xenophon expresses himself rather generally here, and in effect is (to us) quite enigmatic, but it is clear that the essence of things is the deprivation of a man’s *time*. Moreover, it is possible that Xenophon does not enumerate all the measures applied in such cases, as shown by the

⁵³ Lipka translates, wrongly in my opinion, “at the same time pay a fine for this” (op. cit., p. 83, 179), rejecting Stephen Hodkinson’s correct observation (*Wealth and Property*) that in this case *zemia* signifies “punishment in general”.

⁵⁴ J. Ducat, *Spartan ‘tremblers’*, p. 22.

⁵⁵ See J. Ducat’s remarks, *Spartan ‘tremblers’*, pp. 22-23.

passage from Plutarch concerning the *tresantes*, in which, apart from the penalties already known to us, new ones can be found⁵⁶: “For such men are not only debarred from every office, but intermarriage with any of them is a disgrace, and any one who meets them may strike them if he pleases. Moreover, they are obliged to go about unkempt and squalid, wearing cloaks that are patched with dyed stuffs, half of their beards shaven, and half left to grow” (Plut. *Ages.* 30, 3-4). The desire to display outwardly the status of the “bad men” is a characteristic element of Spartan mentality. In the case of the “bad” ones, the injunction to shave half of the facial hair was a dishonour, a permanently visible one. Similar in character were the demands as to the clothes. Citizens in Sparta dressed differently from helots, and the “bad men” wore different clothing again.

Both in case of the *tresantes* and helots we deal with a ritualised behaviour of the community. Jean Ducat stresses the similarities in the treatment of the *tresantes* and the helots, visible especially in the way of dressing. The fundamental difference, however, is that the *tresantes* still remained members of the society, while the helots were totally excluded from it⁵⁷. In this sense, to quote Ducat, a *tresas* was not “a radical outcast, like the helot”⁵⁸.

Jean Ducat maintains nevertheless that the exclusion for the army was in the case of the tremblers “the most fundamental form of exclusion”. According to the French scholar, the *tresantes*

⁵⁶ Let us, however, note that Xenophont uses a wider term, the *kakoi*, while Plutarch clearly speaks of the *tresantes*.

⁵⁷ J. Ducat, *Les hilotes*, BCH suppl. XX, Athenes-Paris 1990, pp. 125-126. See also E. Levy, *Sparte. Histoire politique et sociale jusqu'à la conquete romaine*, Paris 2003, pp. 48-49.

⁵⁸ J. Ducat, *Spartan 'tremblers'*, p. 27.

“were removed from the army for the duration of their punishment”⁵⁹. In order to accept this thesis, we have to accept that the case of Aristodemus was totally exceptional (which is not impossible at all). Also the “amnesty” for the Leuctra “*tresantes*” seems to weigh in the favour of Ducat’s thesis. In my opinion, however, the *tresantes* still remained in military service (on what basis, is not known), which gave them a chance of redemption and at least partial rehabilitation. The fact that after Plataeae Aristodemus was denied the recognition for valour demonstrates that a full rehabilitation was impossible. Those who like the Sphacteris prisoners of war went against the holy Spartan code could perhaps regain the full (formal) rights; but in Sparta, a man’s moment of weakness was never totally forgotten. In other words, an “amnesty” was possible, but in the social sphere it was always without an abrogation.

How can this extraordinary severity of Spartans towards their *tresantes* be explained? The long list of punitive measures attests to the importance of both valour and cowardice in Sparta⁶⁰. To a great extent these measures were a part of the policy of deterrence. At the end of the description of the penalties facing the *kakoi* Xenophon adds: “Speaking for myself, I am not in the least surprised that, since such dishonour (*atimia*) is laid on the bad (*kakoi*), death is preferred there to such a dishonourable and shameful life” (*Lak. Pol.* IX, 6)⁶¹. Clearly visible is the ideological aspect of the Spartan policy towards the *tresantes*, whose conduct remained at variance with the code of the *par excellence* hoplite society.

⁵⁹ J. Ducat, *Spartan 'tremblers'*, p. 30.

⁶⁰ M. Clauss, *Sparta*, München 1983, p. 157.

⁶¹ Cf. J. Ducat, *Spartan 'tremblers'*, p. 26.

A separate issue here is whether the attitude towards the *tresantes* was regulated by the laws, or rather by custom. The Spartan propaganda (and, after it, the legend of Sparta) usually presented the "beautiful death" as a demand of the *nomos*. Spartan ideals expressed in the words of Cyrus in Xenophon's "Cyropedia" (III, 3, 52-53) may indeed suggest an existence in Sparta of a body of regulations regarding the ennobling death, but in reality it is open to discussion whether we are dealing with laws, or only customs⁶². Men who fell at Thermopylae were honoured with the famous epigram:

*Go tell the Spartans, thou that passest by,
That here obedient to their words we lie
(tois keinon rhemasi peithomenoi)*

(Hdt. VII, 28)⁶³.

Various forms of social exclusion were more likely regulated by custom. It can be guessed that the society spontaneously reacted to the breaking of "the military code of honour"⁶⁴. This reaction was connected with the public debate, on which it depended, at least partially, whether the further legal measures would be taken. The ban on holding office, in turn, or on buying and selling seems to be the result of a decision taken by the authorities (perhaps the ephors) individually in each case. In Ducat's opinion, the Assembly decided on the type of punishment to be meted⁶⁵. We also notice that with regard to the

⁶² N. Loraux, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

⁶³ See Diod. XI, 11, 6. As to the *enkomion* by Simonides see A. Podlecki, Simonides: 480, *Historia* 17, 1968, p. 257-75; M.L. West, Simonides Redivivus, *ZPE* 98, 1993, p. 1-14

⁶⁴ J. Ducat, *Spartan 'tremblers'*, p. 34.

⁶⁵ J. Ducat, *Spartan 'tremblers'*, p. 46.

tresantes not always the same measures were decreed. According to Ehrenberg,⁶⁶ the attitude towards the *tresantes* changed with time. But it is also possible⁶⁷ that a uniform attitude never actually existed. I agree with Ducat that the Spartan *atimia* should be viewed as “a sanction with a highly variable geometry”⁶⁸. I am convinced that there was no single penalty for cowardice, which was also not a well-defined term⁶⁹. “It was not a penalty fixed once for all, but an ‘arsenal’ of measures from among which the city (personified by the citizens’ assembly) chose on each occasion”⁷⁰.

It is interesting that in some cases, in which it appears to us that cowardice is ruled out, who is punished in the end are the *tresantes*, while in other cases, in which it appears cowardice might have indeed been involved, the issue is not even mentioned. In the Battle of Mantinea ca. Lacedaemonians fell (Thuc. V, 66-74), but in this case the literary sources mention neither rewards for the most brave, nor the sanctions against the “cowards”; which does not actually mean there were no exceptionally brave men, or no cowards, in the battle. This is attested to by the inscription of Eualkes, who fell at Mantinea and merited the honour of having his name inscribed on a stele (IG V.1, 1124)⁷¹. In the Battle of Tegyra in 375 the 300 men of the Sacred Band of Thebes under the command of Pelopidas routed two Spartan moras commanded by polemarchs Gorgoleon and Theopompus (Plut. *Pelop.* 16, 1-17,5; *Ages.* 27, 3; Diod.

⁶⁶ V. Ehrenberg, *op.cit.*

⁶⁷ N. Loraux, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

⁶⁸ J. Ducat, *Spartan 'tremblers'*, p. 32.

⁶⁹ See J. Ducat, *Spartan 'tremblers'*, p. 10.

⁷⁰ J. Ducat, *Spartan 'tremblers'*, p. 45 (and 46).

⁷¹ Cf. P. Low, *Commemorating the Spartan War-Dead*, p. 88-89.

XV, 81, 2). Although we might expect the issue of the *tresantes* to surface in connection with this defeat, the sources do not mention them at all.

It is the example of Leuctra that best shows the pragmatism in sentencing the *tresantes* to a given penalty. The punishment usual in such cases was then not applied, since the country was under threat and it literally needed every soldier. Plutarch praises Agesilaus, who advised the Spartans not to punish the *tresantes* this time – the laws were allowed to sleep that day and come into force from the next day onward (Plut. *Ages.* 30, 2-6; *Mor.* 191 c; 215 b; *Comp. Ages. et Pomp.* 2; Polyainos II, 1, 13). A similar amnesty was declared after the battle of Megalopolis in 331 (Diod. XIX, 70, 5).

Clearly a Spartan not always returned from the wars “with the shield or upon it”. Moreover, it does not seem that the return “on the shield” was possible in the first place: it was rare for the body of a fallen soldier to be brought back home “*pour des raisons évidentes*”⁷². Secondly, bodies would not have been brought back on the shields, first of all because the shields were too small for a body to be carried on it. With the exception of kings, the fallen Spartans were buried where they fell or at least close to the battlefield, not transported back to Sparta⁷³. The motto is, then, clearly an attempt to find an expressive symbol, which would succinctly express the core of the Spartan ideals. It is also significant that only in one source, and a late one at that, do we find a mention of the return “with the shield or upon it”. The famous motto takes its beginning in the words of

⁷² J. Ducat, *La femme de Sparte at la guerre*, *Pallas* 51, 1999, p. 162.

⁷³ S. Hodkinson, *Property and Wealth*, p. 254; P. Low, *Commemorating the Spartan War-Dead*, p. 90.

a legendary Spartan mother who, handing the shield to her son, was supposed to say “either with this or upon this” (*e tan e epi tas*) (Plut. *Mor.* 241)⁷⁴. Spartans were not always victorious, and this fact did not cause any great perturbations within the community. What did cause them was great defeat and evident cowardice. The motto “either with the shield or upon it” may have no connection with the apogee of the military might of Sparta in the 6th-4th c. BC. It may rather be linked with the flourishing Spartan legend of the Hellenistic and Roman periods. It is even possible that the motto was coined during the lifetime of Plutarch (2nd c. AD), when in Sparta “la mode archaisante” ruled supreme and inhabitants of the small town on the bank of Eurotas tried hard to convince their foreign guests that they were still faithful to the traditions of Leonidas’ polis.

In the Classical period in all Greek poleis the attitude to valour and cowardice, to “the brave” and “the coward”, was defined by the hoplite ideology, which required a man to stand dauntlessly in the phalanx and repel the enemy attacks. In Sparta, however, the requirements of hoplite ideology were maximised and ritualised. The difference is not so much qualitative as quantitative: it is practically reduced to a larger amount of penalties and more harsh treatment of the *tresantes* that differentiate Sparta from the other poleis, as well as a more ostentatious honours accorded to the *agathoi*, which is clearly connected with the military character of the Spartan polis. The fact that few cases of Spartan cowardice are known I would attribute to the efficiency of the system rather than consider them an attestation that the sanctions against the *tresantes* of

⁷⁴ See J. Ducat, *La femme de Sparte*, p. 162.

which we are aware belong to the Spartans' "self-created image"⁷⁵. Not all Spartans – not even, as Felix Bourriot⁷⁶ maintains, the members of the Spartan elite (*kaloikagathoi*) existing, in his opinion, within the army – had to "win or die", with the exception of extraordinary circumstances, such as the defence of Thermopylae. Sparta did value its citizens' lives: from its men it expected courage and conduct worthy of a hoplite, and not suicidal actions. The words "win or die" describe a readiness to sacrifice one's life should the need arise; they constitute a moral guideline, and not an all-encompassing, ruthless requirement.



⁷⁵ Cf. D.R. Shipley, *A Commentary on Plutarch's Life of Agesilaos*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1997, pp. 331-332. See J. Ducat's remarks, *Spartan 'tremblers'*, p. 47.

⁷⁶ F. Bourriot, *Kaloi kagathoi, kalokagathia a Sparte aux epoques archaïque et classique*, *Historia* 1996, 45 (2), pp. 129-140.



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