Plutarch on Sparta

Cultural identities and political models in the Plutarchan macrotext

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ABSTRACT

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Cultural identities and political models in the Plutarchan macrotext

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Can we consider Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* a historical work? Can we read them as a unitary series? Thse are the initial questions that this thesis poses and that are investigated in the Introduction, five main Chapters, and the Conclusion. In the Introduction, a preliminary *status quaestionis* about ancient biography is presented before clarifying the methodology adopted for reading the *Parallel Lives* as a unitary historical work and the reasons for choosing the Lives of *Lycurgus, Lysander,* and *Agesilaus* as the case studies to examine in detail. Chapter 1 discusses the historiographical principles that emerge from the *De sera numinis vindicta*: for Plutarch history is primarily the history of individuals and cities, based on the interpretation of historical events. Chapter 2 tries to verify the hypothesis that the *Parallel Lives* correspond to the historical project delineated in the *De sera numinis vindicta*. This Chapter, moreover, reassesses the literary form of the *Parallel Lives* by employing the concepts of 'open macrotext' and 'cross-complementarity' between the Lives. Chapter 3 analyses the *Life of Lycurgus*, focusing on the formation of the cultural identity and the political model of Sparta. In the *Life of Lycurgus*, Plutarch indicates already the intrinsic weaknesses of Sparta and the probable causes of Spartan decline in the fourth century BC. Chapter 4 is devoted to the *Life of Lysander*, where Plutarch narrates how after the Peloponnesian War Sparta established its hegemony over the Greeks and, simultaneously, began its rapid moral and political decline into decadence. Plutarch also seems to suggest that in this historical period of extraordinary changes not only Sparta and Lysander but all the Greeks were guilty of distorting moral values. Chapter 5 concentrates on Agesilaus, who could have led Sparta and the Greeks to great success against the Persians, but, instead, had to save Sparta from complete destruction after the Battle of Leuctra. The Conclusion recapitulates the main points of the thesis and proposes possible arguments for future research on Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*.

To Simona,
friend, lover, spouse,
and much more...

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EDITIONS, ABBREVIATIONS, AND OTHER CONVENTIONS

The Teubner editions of Plutarch's works have been used for citations and references: for the *Parallel Lives* the three volumes of C. Lindskog, K. Ziegler, and H. Gärtner (1973-2000), *Plutarchi Vitae Parallelae*, Stuttgart-Munich-Leipzig; for the *Moralia* the five volumes of W. R. Paton, M. Pohlenz, C. Hubert, *et al.* (1929-1993), *Plutarchi Moralia*, Munich-Leipzig. Other editions, commentaries, and translations of Plutarch's works, mentioned in this thesis, are listed in the bibliography. For other ancient authors I have consulted and used the more recent Teubner editions as well.

Translations of ancient texts, unless otherwise stated, are my adaptations of those provided by the various volumes of the Loeb Classical Library. In particular, for Plutarch I refer to the eleven volumes of B. Perrin (1914-1926), *Plutarch: Lives*, Cambridge, Mass.-London: Harvard University Press, and to the sixteen volumes of F. C. Babbitt *et al.* (1927-2004), *Plutarch: Moralia*, Cambridge, Mass.-London: Harvard University Press.

In general, for the names of ancient authors and their works, and for their abbreviations, I have observed the conventions of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (2003[3]), the *Liddle-Scott-Jones* (1940[9]; *Revised Supplement* 1996), and the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (2012[2]). For these reasons, I have used Latinised or Anglicised forms of Greek names. Throughout this thesis, moreover, I refer to ancient works through their Latin names even when English titles are more commonly used (at least, in the English-speaking world): thus, Plato's *Respublica* rather than *Republic*, or Xenophon's *Respublica Lacedaemoniorum* instead of *Constitution of the Spartans*. The only exceptions are represented by Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* (*Life of Lycurgus*, *Life of Lysander*, and so forth) and by Xenophon's *Agesilaos*, for which I have retained the Greek ending so as to avoid confusion with Plutarch's *Life of Agesilaus*. I hope that my sin of pedantry will be forgiven for the good intention behind it: to maintain consistency. For the same reason, I have adopted the abbreviations of Plutarch's works suggested by ZIEGLER (1951=1965), 391-2. Journal abbreviations are cited after *L'Année Philologique*.

When articles or chapters in proceedings volumes are republished, or when books are translated, I usually refer to their most recent versions, although in the footnotes I indicate the years of the first and the last editions. The only exception is MOMIGLIANO (1971), from which I have cited some verbatim quotations in English, while I have also mentioned the Italian edition as MOMIGLIANO (1971=1974).

Finally, I have used the uncapitalised form 'chapter' with reference to chapters of ancient authors' works, and the capitalised form 'Chapter' to indicate a particular chapter of this thesis. The same goes for 'introduction', which refers to of each Chapter' introduction, and 'Introduction', which indicates the general Introduction of this thesis. Similarly, the capitalised forms 'Life' and 'Lives' refer to Plutarch's biographies, while the uncapitalised 'life' or 'lives' are synonyms for 'existence'.

INTRODUCTION

Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* are one of the most original and innovative works of ancient Greek and Roman literatures, and one which continues to fascinate students, researchers, or simply enthusiasts of the ancient world. The flow of academic publications, translations, commentaries, and doctoral theses produced every year seems to be constantly increasing, just as the number of international conferences organised on various aspects of Plutarch's oeuvre. Indeed, the *Parallel Lives* strike modern readers as biographies that narrate the lives of extremely interesting and complex characters.

The *Parallel Lives*, however, can be read assuming very different perspectives. According to one of the most common approaches followed by modern scholarship, by comparing outstanding Greek and Roman historical figures, and by discussing an extraordinary variety of topics (philosophical, literary, historical, scientific, theological, and so forth), Plutarch presents his readers with models of virtue and vice, inviting the audience to pursue moral improvement. Beginning from this premise, this thesis seeks to explore the possibility of reading the *Parallel Lives* as a unitary work rather than as a series of separate pairs of paralleled biographies. Furthermore, as is clarified later in this Introduction, considerable emphasis is laid on the hypothesis that the *Parallel Lives* constitute a peculiar type of historical work.

Nonetheless, before proceeding with a discussion of the scope and the methodology of this study, it may be useful to present the *status quaestionis* of ancient biography in order to see how these preliminary questions – the *Parallel Lives* as a unitary work and the *Parallel Lives* as a historical work – have been examined in the past. This will help to clarify where and how this research hopes to make its contribution to Plutarchan studies.

1 – *Status quaestionis* of ancient biography

In the past, if one were to ask whether the Parallel Lives or any other biographical text could be considered history, the probable answer would have been negative on the basis that biography and historiography, despite their similarities, are different literary genres and treat different arguments. Indeed, for a long time modern scholarship has devoted great attention to proposing an accurate definition of biography as a literary genre, highlighting its distinctive aspects in comparison with other genres and subgenres such as annalistic history, historical monograph, encomium, and so forth. Yet such an interest in finding and applying precise categorisations is a modern one and does not reflect the views of ancient authors.

This approach, however, has been adopted since the first pioneering works at the beginning of the twentieth century. Sometimes, the differences between biography and history have been stressed in order to underline the inferiority of the former to the latter.[1] Yet scholars who had a positive view of biography also tended to see this genre as separate from historiography. Indeed, this can be explained by the influence of Leo's theory about the origin of biography from the Peripatetic school and its later development in the Alexandrian age. Leo famously drew a sharp distinction between the Peripatetic or 'Plutarchan' biography (the ethical-political biography arranged chronologically in order to narrate the lives of generals and politicians) and the Alexandrian or 'Suetonian' biography (a type of biography characterised by erudite and antiquarian interests, and organised in

[1] One can mention, in this regard, the negative judgements expressed by COLLINGWOOD (1946=1993[2]) 304 ("Of everything other than thought, there can be no history. Thus a biography, for example, however much history it contains, is constructed on principles that are not only non-historical but anti-historical") and MEYER (1910) 66 ("aber eine eigentlich historische Taetigkeit ist sie [Biographie]"). These quotations were discussed by MOMIGLIANO (1971=1974) 4-5.

sections or rubrics). Leo's formal analysis was based on the premise that biography should not be regarded as historiography.[2]

Despite its success, Leo's theory was criticised by other scholars, who did not accept its rigid schematisation. Among the critics of Leo that one can mention (very selectively), Uxkull-Gyllenband considered biography a product of the more individualistic culture of the post-classical age, and the works of Stoic biographers (Panaetius and Posidonius) the archetypes for Plutarch's Lives.[3] In addition to him, both Weizsäcker, who suggested that Plutarch does not always organise his biographies chronologically but also *per species*, and Steidle, who reassessed Suetonius' *Vitae Caesarum* as a literary work on its own merits, also rejected Leo's categorisation of biographies.[4] Furthermore, one cannot but recall Dihle, who identified Socrates as the great personality that might have inspired the Socratics to the invention of biography.[5] Finally, Homeyer viewed Herodotus as the real pioneer of biography because of the biographical information often inserted into the *Historiae*.[6] Their research, however, did not question the assumption that biography is radically different from historiography – that is, despite having different purposes and reaching diverse conclusions about the beginning and the nature of biography, modern scholars continued to consider biography and history two markedly different genres.

In this regard, particularly interesting is the case of Stuart, whose study described formal biography as a "separate history in prose of the whole life of a man", and connected its origin with the 'commemorative instinct' of the Greeks, that is, the desire to celebrate the past, saving it from oblivion. While encomiastic works of the classical age (especially Xenophon's *Agesilaos* and *Memorabilia*, and Isocrates' *Evagoras*) would constitute the real

[2] Cf. LEO (1901) 1-2, where he underlined the differences between Suetonius' biographies and Tacitus' historiographical works, and 147-9, where he remarked upon the differences between Plutarch's βίοι and political ἱστορία in terms of content (πράξεις would be the main object of historiographical investigations, ἦθος that of biographies).
[3] UXKULL-GYLLENBAND (1927) especially 99-119.
[4] WEIZSÄCKER (1931), STEIDLE (1951).
[5] DIHLE (1956).
[6] HOMEYER (1962).

models for later biographies, historical works may also represent important antecedents, but only inasmuch as they contain biographical résumés, as in the case of the first two books of Xenophon's *Anabasis*.[7]

For decades, therefore, the prevailing opinion remained that ancient historians – as much as writers of other literary genres – variously influenced the *invention* of biography, but later the biographical genre became something other than history. Indeed, this scholarly trend deserves credit for treating ancient biographies as literary works rather than merely as unreliable historical sources, and for highlighting their complexity. In the second half of the twentieth century, nonetheless, the separation between biography and history started to be rethought and re-discussed by placing emphasis on the absence of a clear definition of biography in antiquity and on the contiguity between ancient texts that, by contrast, modern categorisations tend to classify into different literary genres.

Thus, on the one hand, Momigliano conducted his thorough analysis of the origin and the development of biography from the perspective that biography was "an account of the life of a man from birth to death", and "history remained what the first historians made it: a study of political and military actions. There was no desire to probe deeply into its foundations, to re-examine the role of individuals in it".[8] By assuming the distinction between history and biography as his starting point, Momigliano examined how in the fifth century BC there seems to have been already a genuine interest in exceptional individuals and their lives, and how this interest developed in the fourth century BC.[9] Furthermore, he

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[7] STUART (1928) especially 31-8. The importance of the characterisation of great individuals by Greek and Roman historians was already noted by BRUNS (1896) 1-144 and (1898), who distinguished between indirect characterisation (especially in Thucyidides and Livy) and direct characterisation (Xenophon and Polybius). Similarly, MISCH (1907) examined systematically biographical and autobiographical references in Greek literature.

[8] MOMIGLIANO (1971) 11 and 41. This strong distinction between biography and history is reaffirmed throughout the volume; cf. MOMIGLIANO (1971=1974) 14, 42, and 117. On Momigliano's book, see the review by GALLO (1974).

[9] In particular, MOMIGLIANO (1971=1974) 25-43 considered the scant, yet significant information about the biographies of poets such as Homer, Archilochus, Alcaeus, and Sappho, which seem to have circulated in the classical age. The flourishing of biography in the fourth century BC was explained by the new socio-political

rejected not only Leo's idea that political biography preceded literary biography, but also the theory of the two different types of biography. For from the Hellenistic age onwards, biography assumed a great variety of forms, which cannot be simply reduced to the Plutarchan and the Suetonian models. Indeed, Momigliano showed how multifaceted biography is, so that its beginning cannot be merely described as the 'invention' of an author or a philosophical school, as Leo tried to demonstrate by reference to the Peripatetics.[10]

Other critics, on the other hand, pursued a different research path. Gentili and Cerri, for instance, criticised Momigliano's restrictive definition of biography and showed that biographical elements can be found in a great variety of texts, which include, apart from historical works, also poems, public orations, rhetorical discourses, medical treatises, philosophical confessions, and so forth. Biography, then, should be interpreted with flexibility, since the biographical discourse can vary depending on the specific functions assumed in different historical contexts and in different literary systems.[11]

From a different perspective, Geiger too was critical of previous scholarship on ancient biography and rejected the earlier definitions of biography tout court as different from history. Rather, he proposed to distinguish between biographical elements appearing in various literary forms and a literary form devoted to biography. Furthermore, instead of examining the biographical genre in general, Geiger concentrated his attention on political biography, a specific sub-genre that he tried to define against *encomium* and political monograph, and that did not always coincide with the term βίος. In Geiger's view,

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climate, in which rulers and statesmen pursued personal political objectives, emerging as prominent personalities rather than as members of their communities. In Momigliano's view, this can be noticed not only in literary genres centred on individuals (encomium, apology, biographical novel, epistolography, and so forth) but also in historiography (e.g. Xenophon's *Anabasis* and *Cyropedia*, Theopompus' *Philippica*) and oratory (for instance, Isocrates' *De biga* or Demosthenes' *De corona*) (pp. 46-66).

[10] Other studies that continued relying on the division between history and biography, and between different biographical subgenres include: COX (1983), GOSSAGE (1967) 47-8, JENKINSON (1967) 2-8, MCQUEEN (1967) 17-21, TOWNEND (1967) 80-7.

[11] GENTILI-CERRI (1983).

nonetheless, the subject matter of political biography and that of ancient history were closely related, so that there was the real danger of transcending the limits of the literary genre.[12] An analogous position has been expressed by Burridge, who has convincingly applied to the relationship between biography and its *genera proxima* (history included) the concept of 'flexible generic boundaries'.[13] According to Burridge, ancient biography can relate to a number of *genera proxima* at the same time and borrowing or sharing of generic features should be consider normal. More recently, Swain has adopted an approach similar to that of Geiger, although less systematic. He has highlighted the difference between 'the biographic' or 'biographic individualisation', defined as a biographical focus on individuals, which is concerned with the setting of individual portraits in social, political, and religious contexts, and biography, which aims to gather detailed information about individuals and to offer detailed accounts of their lives.[14]

From this brief survey of modern scholarship on ancient biography one can understand that the rigid distinction between history and biography, which in the past was often taken for granted, is no longer accepted. In this regard, the further distinctions between literary biography and political biography and between biography and biographical individualisation in literary texts are particularly useful. Nonetheless, to some extent, even in its attempt to define political biography, modern scholarship appears to have overlooked a fundamental characteristic of the main biographical texts that are available today: seriality. Ancient political biographies were often written as series. How this element characterises political biography in contrast with literary biography or other genres is still a theme to explore. This thesis would like to make a contribution in this regard. As will be discussed in Chapter 2, in the case of Plutarch the fact that the Lives were written as a series makes the boundaries between biography and history disappear. Writing the lives of political and

[12] GEIGER (1985).
[13] BURRIDGE (1992).
[14] SWAIN (1997).

military leaders, who lived in the same city at the same time or in different generations, or who were involved in the same historical events on opposite sides, is equivalent to writing history. Indeed, it is a different type of history, which needs to be examined from a theoretical perspective as much as in its concrete literary form.

2 – Methodology and the choice of Sparta

In the present study, I investigate first whether Plutarch offers some concrete indication that can support the hypothesis that the *Parallel Lives* may have represented a historical work. In this regard, the dialogue *De sera numinis vindicta* has been recognised as a very useful starting point, where one can identify some important theoretical principles that Plutarch seems to apply to the *Parallel Lives*. In Chapter 1, therefore, I examine Plutarch's idea of history as it emerges from this philosophical work. In particular, Plutarch appears to suggest that history centres on the lives of individuals, on their past and future family generations, and on the lives of their cities. Plutarch's assumption is that, just as the identity of individuals remains the same throughout the various life stages, so too the identity of the body politic, consisting of the constitution, political institutions, social customs, cultural habits, and religious traditions of the city, endures regardless of the changes that occur in the course of history. Thus, as one can infer, these are the main thematic aspects on which a historical project should concentrate.

Subsequently, on the basis of this preliminary analysis of Plutarch's idea of history, in Chapter 2 I try to reassess the main purpose and the literary form of the *Parallel Lives*. In particular, I formulate the hypothesis that they can be regarded as a complex historical work, in which Plutarch scrutinises not only the lives of Greek and Roman heroes but also the political models and the cultural identities of some of the main Greek cities. Equally important are the relationships between the historical protagonists and their civic

communities, and the main historical events in which the heroes and their cities are involved.

On the other hand, in order to describe the *Parallel Lives* as a literary work, I propose to employ the concept of 'open macrotext'. That is to say, I consider the *Parallel Lives* a macrotext, a complex semiotic unit formed by different texts (the pairs and the Lives), which maintain their autonomy, but, simultaneously, are in close interrelationship with one another, constituting the sections and the subsections of the macrotext. The overall meanings – historical, philosophical, theological, and so forth – conveyed by the macrotext are deeper and richer than those expressed by each section alone, not only because one can simply accumulate the themes and the messages present in each text, but also because the author (Plutarch) recalls, develops, modifies, expands, and enhances them throughout the macrotext (the *Parallel Lives*). I finally suggest that the cohesiveness of the *Parallel Lives* as a macrotext is strengthened by recurrent stylistic and thematic features, which one can call 'autotextual modules'. They form an 'autotextual framework' that creates close interconnections within the macrotext and allows the readers to decode the messages (historical analyses, moral questions, theological interpretations, and so forth) conveyed by the author.

In the last three Chapters of the thesis, I examine in detail the specific case study represented by the *Life of Lycurgus* (Chapter 3), the *Life of Lysander* (Chapter 4), and the *Life of Agesilaus* (Chapter 5), which I analyse in close connection to one another, highlighting their thematic and narrative links. Throughout these Lives, by focusing on the facts concerning the three protagonists, on their characters and actions, and on their interrelation with the Spartan body politic, Plutarch discusses and evaluates the history of Sparta, adopting as a primary viewpoint the dramatic crisis that the city suffered in the fourth century BC, not too long after establishing its hegemony over the Greeks. In

particular, the sudden defeat at Leuctra (371 BC) appears to be the crucial historical event that throws light on the true nature of Sparta, on the numerous contradictions of its leaders, and on its emblematic role in Greek history.

Regretfully, for mere reasons of space, I am forced to leave out of my investigation the *Lives of Agis and Cleomenes*, which seem to end Plutarch's analysis of Sparta in the *Parallel Lives*. This choice, however, despite being motivated by practical reasons, might be accepted (at least partially) considering that in these biographies of late Hellenistic Spartan kings Plutarch offers a retrospective analysis of Sparta in order to demonstrate that the glorious time of the city had long ended. Furthermore, the *Lives of Agis and Cleomenes* confirm that the Battle of Leuctra in the fourth century BC constituted a caesura in Spartan history, after which Sparta had a marginal role in Greece. It was indeed a different Sparta, which neither Agis nor Cleomenes were able to revive.

CHAPTER 1

THE IDEA OF HISTORY IN THE *DE SERA NUMINIS VINDICTA*

The *De sera numinis vindicta* is a dialogue set in Delphi, in which Plutarch and some of his friends, all followers of Platonic philosophy, discuss the delays in divine punishment and, in general, divine providence in polemic against the Epicureans.[1] The Epicureans oppose such concepts, as they reject the view that the gods have the faculty or the will to intervene benevolently in history, and to worry and care about humans. Rather, the Epicurean tradition finds a sufficient explanation for all events occurring in the physical world in atomistic materialism. Accident (ταὐτόματον) and chance (τύχη) alone are responsible for the combination of atoms without the presence of a superior rational causality, which other philosophical schools identify with the will of the gods.[2] The conception of the sensible world elaborated by Platonic philosophy, conversely, combines free will and divine providence.[3]

Plutarch also appears to take a position consistent with the Platonic tradition. In this regard, as Jan Opsomer has thoughtfully remarked, in Plutarch's oeuvre a particularly

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[1] JONES (1966=1995) 118 considered AD 107 to be the *terminus ante quem* and established AD 81 as the possible *terminus post quem*; cf. also KLAERR-VERNIÈRE (1974) 93-6.

[2] On the Epicureans' materialism and theology, see GIANNANTONI (1996), HANKINSON (1999a) 498-512 and (1999b) especially 522-6, LONG (2006) 157-60, LONG-SEDLEY (1987) 102-12 and 139-49, MASI (2005), O'KEEFE (2005) 123-52 and (2010) 73-80 and 155-62, OBBINK (1989) especially 194-202, and (2002), RIST (1972) 141-56, SEDLEY (1983), SHARPLES (1996) 34-43 and 56-8. On Plutarch's rejection of the Epicurean theory of the gods' indifference towards humans, see e.g. *De superst.* 168 A, *De Pyth. or.* 398 B-F and 399 D-E, *Col.* 1119 D-F and 1125 E; cf. BABUT (1969) 476.

[3] On Plato's discussion of the relationship between the demiurge, the Ideas, and causality see BENITEZ (1995) 122-37, DELACY (1939) 99-115, DIHLE (1982) 39-40 and 48-54, D. FREDE (2002) 88-95, M. FREDE (2011) 19-22, HANKINSON (1998) 84-124, HERRMANN (2005), LONG (2010) 41-7 and 49-52, MCPHERRAN (2006a) especially 88-90, NIGHTINGALE (1999) 303-25, SEDLEY (1998), TAYLOR (1969). On Aristotle's analysis of causality, chance, and divine agency, see DONINI (1989=2010), M. R. JOHNSON (2005), LEUNISSEN (2010), QUARANTOTTO (2005), and SORABJI (1980) especially 3-59 and 185-298; cf. also BOSTOCK (2006) 55-75, BROADIE (2007) 18-49, CHARLES (1991), CÔTÉ (2005), DONINI (2011), FERGUSON (1985), FILIPPI (2005), D. FREDE (1985) and (1992), FREELAND (1991), GERSON (2005) 117-30 and 200-4, GOTTHELF (1987), HANKINSON (1998) 125-200, JUDSON (1991a) and (2005), KHAN (1985), LENNOX (1984), MORAVCSIK (1991), SHIELDS (2007) 68-90, SEDLEY (2010), and ZUCCA (2005). On the middle-Platonists' idea of divine intervention, causality, and teleology, see BOBZIEN (1998) 137-43 and 146-75, J. DILLON (1977) 84-8, 155-8, 166-8, 294-7, 320-6, and 360, M. FREDE (2011) 49-57 and 89-101, HANKINSON (1998) 323-45 and 350-63, SHARPLES (2007).

important text is *Quaest. conv.* 9.5.2 (740 C-D), where Plutarch makes reference to Plato's *Respublica* (10.620b) and presents the theory of the three causes (αἴτιαι) as derived from Plato. Chance (τὸ κατὰ τύχην), destiny or fate (τὸ καθ᾽ εἱμαρμένην), and free will (τὸ ἐφ᾽ ἡμῖν), interacting with one another, exert their influence upon our affairs.[4] In addition to these three principles, Plutarch expresses his belief in the providential intervention of the divinity both in the universe (κόσμος), where it preserves the world and its matter from disintegration (Opsomer defines this as "aspect ontologique"), and in history, where it favours nations and individuals ("aspect historique").[5]

This idea of providence (πρόνοια), which is rigorously examined by Plutarch in several other works (for instance, in the *De Stoicorum repugnantiis*, in the *Adversum Coloten*, or in the *Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum*), where he fiercely criticises Stoic determinism and Epicurean materialism, should be considered the premise upon which the discussion in the *De sera numinis vindicta* is centred.[6] Indeed, Plutarchan scholarship has focused on this aspect of the dialogue, exploring the consistency of Plutarch's argument with the Platonic tradition, especially in comparison with other middle-Platonists.[7] Much attention has also been devoted to whether Plutarch's line of reasoning is cogently developed or whether, on the contrary, the philosophical and the religious themes remain juxtaposed, without

[4] Plutarch also distinguishes their spheres of influence. The choice between virtue and vice, that is, our way of living, depends on free will. The consequences of our way of living are connected to the necessity of fate ("those who have made correct choices live well and, contrarily, those who have made ill choices live badly"; τὸ δ᾽ εὖ βιοῦν τοὺς ὀρθῶς ἑλομένους καὶ τἀναντία τοὺς κακῶς εἱμαρμένης ἀνάγκη συνάπτων). Fortune, finally, predetermines many of our experiences as they are directly related to the forms of education and the government under which we happen to live. See CIMADORI (2008) 259-60.

[5] OPSOMER (1997) 346-7; cf. also BABUT (1969) 308. In the *De defectu oraculorum*, Plutarch remarks upon the idea of a double causality: a material causality (necessity) and a divine causality (πρόνοια) (436 D); cf. *De def. orac.* 425 A-B and 430 D. Cf. also Plu. *De aud. poet.* 34 A-B, *De adulat.* 63 E, *De Is. et Os.* 369 A-B, *De E ap. Delph.* 393 E, *De fac. lun.* 926 F, *De an. procr.* 1015 A-C and 1016 F-1017 A, *Suav. viv. Epic.* 1102 D-E. See BRENK (1977) 39-40, DONINI (1992) 100-3, HERSHBELL (1982) 141-2.

[6] In general, on Plutarch's idea of divine providence, see BABUT (1969) 307-17 and 474-83, J. DILLON (1977) 208-11, VALGIGLIO (1988) 35-7.

[7] That is the case, for instance, with BALDASSARRI (1994), DEL CERRO CALDERÓN (1994), OPSOMER (1997), and SOURY (1945).

blending with one another.[8] The style and the language of the dialogue have been examined in detail too.[9]

The *De sera numinis vindicta*, however, can be analysed from a different perspective. For the dialogue, in which the critical discussion of many historical examples plays an extremely important role, does not merely constitute an apologia for divine providence and a theodicy: it also implicitly presents the method that should be adopted in order to read history correctly. In Plutarch's view, the timeliness and the untimeliness of divine providence in human life as much as in history – the main topic of the *De sera numinis vindicta* – are related to the idea that the god acts on a broader scale and in view of a greater good than what can be observed by focusing on individual facts. The meaning of historical events, therefore, needs to be evaluated or, sometimes, reassessed by inscribing them into a providential plan that is slowly unfolded through various generations, often without being immediately intelligible.

As Plutarch seems to suggest in several passages, a correct historiography cannot but take into account divine πρόνοια when studying and interpreting history. Furthermore, as we shall see in this Chapter, this crucial aspect of historiography – as much as of theology – determines the choice of the literary form in which history is to be written. A mere chronological narration of facts does not seem sufficient to understand the impact of providence in history. Rather, historians should focus their attention on the protagonists of historical events and on the role played by πρόνοια in their lives, punishing their faults and supporting their good decisions. Even more importantly, historiography should point out

[8] For instance, FRAZIER (2010b) has remarked upon the internal unity of the *De sera numinis vindicta*, whose various parts successfully reconcile philosophy and religion, transcendence and relations between men and the god. In this regard, conversely, less convincing appears to be HELMIG (2005)'s description of the *De sera numinis vindicta* as a "jumble of disordered remarks", that is, a work in which many themes are simply accumulated without a coherent structure. SAUNDERS (1993) has severely criticised the *De sera numinis vindicta* for its inconsistent and unconvincing penological arguments. Simply put, however, human penology was not Plutarch's primary concern. His theses aimed precisely to demonstrate that divine punishment does not follow human penological criteria, which is the exact opposite of Saunders' line of reasoning; cf. FRAZIER (2010c) ix n. 2.

[9] See TORRACA (1991).

the direction given by divine providence to the course of history and how men's actions, as much as chance and fate, favoured or posed obstacles to it. Preference, therefore, seems to be given to a peculiar form of universal history that examines the trajectories of individuals and cities. This approach different is different, for instance, from the grand-scale continuous narrations of Polybius and Diodorus Siculus, where the material is arranged in a year-by-year scheme. The complex of arguments in the *De sera numinis vindicta*, as we will see, implicitly represents a theoretical justification for the project of the *Parallel Lives*.

1.1 – Setting the questions: an idea of history

The *De sera numinis vindicta* begins *in medias res*: after expressing some criticism and, presumably, negative comments about Platonism, an anonymous Epicurean left the company of Plutarch and his friends without waiting for a reply.[10] The words of the Epicurean, which are not reported in the text, seem to have created a sense of surprise and bewilderment. First the group remains in silence and everyone looks at one another (ἐπιστάντες σιωπῇ καὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλους διαβλέψαντες); then, overcoming their astonishment at the absurdity (ἀτοπία) of the Epicurean, Plutarch and his friends continue walking and start to debate (548 B).

Such a strange arrangement of the *incipit* of the dialogue seems to lay emphasis on the radical opposition between Epicureanism and Platonism, whose philosophical differences are irreconcilable, so that no constructive dialogue between them is possible. This first impression is confirmed by the words of Timon, one of Plutarch's friends, who explicitly defines the Epicurean's speech as absurd and false (ἄτοπον and ψευδῆ). On the other

[10] The dialogue is narrated in the third person by an unnamed external narrator, who is also the primary character of the conversation. He can be safely identified with Plutarch, since he addresses the narrative to Quietus (Κυῆτε, which is a correction for the incomprehensible Κύνιε of the manuscripts), probably the same Avidius Quietus who is also the dedicatee of the *De fraterno amore* together with his brother C. Auidius Nigrinus; cf. FRAZIER (2010c) 2 n. 1, PUECH (1992) 4840-2, ZIEGLER (1951=1965) 71-2. On the *incipit* of the *De sera numinis vindicta*, which cannot be considered corrupt, and on the *lectio* ἐπικούρειος, Fabricius' emendation, instead of Ἐπίκουρος, transmitted by the manuscripts, see AMENDOLA (2011) 149 n. 1 and n. 2.

hand, the first scene also shows how the *De sera numinis vindicta* does not follow a linear sequence of events. After the conversation comes to an abrupt end with the untimely departure of the Epicurean, Plutarch and his friends formulate and discuss their answers *in absentia colloquentis*. Some of the assertions of the Epicurean against divine providence, however, are presented by the various characters only later in the dialogue, when, as in a sort of flashback, Plutarch and his interlocutors merely recall the points that require an answer. Untimeliness, delay, and reorganisation of the order of events, therefore, mark the *De sera numinis vindicta* from its beginning, creating an implicit correspondence between the narrative and the topic under scrutiny.

The temptation for Plutarch and his friends is to consider the Epicurean's discourse a merely disruptive intrusion, after which they can restore the previous order. In this regard, their resumption of the same positions in which they were walking before (ἀνεστρέφομεν πάλιν ὥσπερ ἐτυγχάνομεν περιπατοῦντες) is emblematic. Timon's suggestion is to reject *in toto* the words of the Epicurean "before his opinion gets a grip on us" (πρὶν ἅψασθαι τὴν δόξαν). Plutarch, conversely, appears to take the Epicurean more seriously, as the latter criticised the concept of divine providence (πρόνοια), one of the cornerstones of Platonic philosophy: this, he believes, deserves a thorough investigation (548 C). Thus the introductory section ends and the debate begins.

In the first short speech, Patrocleas (another companion of Plutarch whom we encounter in the dialogue) explicitly mentions the slowness (βραδυτής) of and the delay (μέλλησις) in divine punishment for the wicked as one of the main arguments deployed by the Epicurean against πρόνοια. Patrocleas notes the contradiction between the need for the god to punish crimes and wrongdoings promptly in order to deter the offenders from repeating their outrages and to bring some comfort to the victims (548 E), and, on the other hand, the reality that is often appallingly different, since punishment comes too late.

Such a delay creates injustice, because oppressors can enjoy the fruit of their crimes (549 B). Olympichus, another member of Plutarch's group of friends, continues along the same line of thought. In his view, the god's procrastinations (διατριβαί) and delays also produce a more detrimental effect. They destroy the trust (πίστις) in providence, because any belated calamity that eventually befalls the wicked on account of their wrongdoing is not even considered retribution (τιμωρία), but rather misfortune (συμφορά). The delay does no service, inasmuch as criminals do not repent of their actions: correction and change of behaviour become impossible (549 B-C).

These first two speeches serve to introduce the main theme of the dialogue. Patrocleas' discourse, nonetheless, also seems to clarify the area of interest chosen by Plutarch in his analysis. Plutarch focuses on the effects of delayed divine punishment not only on individuals but also on history. Patrocleas makes reference to three emblematic examples. The first one is Aristocrates' betrayal of the Messenians at the end of the Second Messenian War (669 BC), a misdeed that remained undetected for twenty years (548 F).[11] The second episode concerns the Orchomenians, who lost their children, their friends, and their relatives, because they were betrayed by Lyciscus, who died from a terrible disease after a long time (548 F).[12] Finally, Patrocleas mentions the famous episode of Cylon's conspiracy, the failed coup d'état in Athens, which is variously dated to 636 or 632 BC. The conspirators, who had tried to find refuge at the altar of Athena, were killed on the archon Megacles' orders. The Athenians later expiated this sacrilegious act by sending the Alcmaeonids (Megacles' family) away from Attica: the living were forced into exile and the

[11] As noted by ALONI-GUIDORIZZI (1982), Plutarch's reference to Aristocrates and the Second Messenian War is possibly inaccurate about the place of the battle, for Aristocrates seems to have fought the battle of the Great Trench (not the battle of Taphrus) as one can read at Paus. 4.17.2-9 and Polyb. 4.33.2-6. On the Second Messenian War, see CARTLEDGE (2002²) 107-11, LURAGHI (2003) especially 121-33, and (2008) 79-80, 85-8, and 100-6, V. PARKER (1991).

[12] This event is obscure, as it is not clear when it happened, under what circumstances, and who Lyciscus was. KLAERR-VERNIÈRE (1974) 196 formulate the hypothesis that Plutarch may be referring to the destruction of Orchomenos by the Thebans in 364 BC, but nothing is added about Lyciscus; see also ALONI-GUIDORIZZI (1982) 203. On the destruction of Orchomenos and its importance for understanding Epaminondas' complex relationship with the other Theban dignitaries, see Diod. Sic. 15. 57.1 and 15.79.3-6; cf. BERTOLI (2005).

bones of the dead were exhumed and cast forth (549 A). Once again, the terrible fate faced by the Alcmaeonids is regarded as a delayed punishment for Megacles' decision.[13]

Through the three cases presented by Patrocleas, Plutarch implicitly introduces some methodological criteria for reading history, which are examined in greater detail in the course of the dialogue. To begin with, history should be interpreted not as a confusing conglomerate of facts unrelated to one another, but as a meaningful stream of events, between which one can discover (more or less) clear or strong interconnections and can establish relationships of cause and effect. Secondly, history can be judged by adopting a moralistic approach. Concepts and terms such as πονηρός, ἀδικία/δίκη, θρασύτης, τόλμα, τιμωρία, and so forth relate to the moral sphere and presuppose that moral categories such as right and wrong or just and unjust apply to history. In Patrocleas' speech, Plutarch does not elucidate whether all history can be viewed through the lens of ethics or whether a moralistic perspective can be adopted only for some episodes, in which divine intervention is more evident. Plutarch simply seems to suggest that some examples show how human actions in history, which are the result of one's free will, are punished or, conversely, rewarded on the basis of moral principles.

These topics constitute the theoretical premises for the idea of divine providence. If historical events obey a principle of causality, regulated by moral principles that stand 'above' history, the source of these moral principles cannot be anything other than the god or the gods. Such a superhuman authority judges history and human actions, and

[13] Herodotus (5.71.1) discussed Cylon's conspiracy in the context of the power struggle between Isagoras, supported by the Spartan Cleomenes, and the Alcmeonid Cleisthenes, without explicitly mentioning Megacles. Thucydides, conversely, introduced the conspiracy on the eve of the Spartan invasion of Attica (431 BC) (1.126-7): by sending ambassadors to Athens and by reminding the Athenians about the sacrilege, they tried to put Pericles in a difficult situation, as he was a descendant of Megacles. In both cases, the Spartans play a major role, and the political reasons have a greater importance than the moral or religious implications; cf. HORNBLOWER (1991) 202-11. For a thorough analysis of the differences between these two accounts, see now ROOD (2013). Plutarch also makes implicit reference to Cylon's conspiracy at *De ser. num. vind.* 553 B: "In Athens, Pericles, too, came from a family under a curse" (γέγονε δὲ καὶ Περικλῆς Ἀθήνησιν ἐναγοῦς οἰκίας). See also Plu. *Sol.* 12.1-4, where there is no mention of the claims regarding Pericles in later epochs.

intervenes by sanctioning and correcting moral faults, or – though this remains implicit in this part of Plutarch's text – by granting favour for virtuous behaviour. By implication, as we shall see in Plutarch's reply to Patrocleas and Olympichus, moral causality ordered by the god is a matter for historians too, since they are called to reconstruct its effects in history.

1.2 – Plutarch's response: how to read history

In his speech, Plutarch begins to respond to these preliminary questions by emphasising a crucial aspect of Platonic philosophy: reverence (εὐλάβεια) for the god (549 E). Subsequently, he reminds his friends that, by acknowledging the god's superiority, one cannot but also acknowledge the limits of human understanding of justice and providence. Indeed, mortals should adopt a more cautious approach (549 E-550 A):[14]

> πλέον γάρ ἐστι τοῦ περὶ μουσικῶν ἀμούσους καὶ πολεμικῶν ἀστρατεύτους διαλέγεσθαι τὸ τὰ θεῖα καὶ τὰ δαιμόνια πράγματα διασκοπεῖν ἀνθρώπους ὄντας, οἷον ἀτέχνους τεχνιτῶν διάνοιαν ἀπὸ δόξης καὶ ὑπονοίας κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς μετιόντας. οὐ γὰρ ἰατροῦ μὲν ἰδιώτην ὄντα συμβαλεῖν λογισμόν, ὡς πρότερον οὐκ ἔτεμεν ἀλλ᾽ ὕστερον οὐδ᾽ ἐχθὲς ἔκαυσεν ἀλλὰ σήμερον, ἔργον ἐστί, περὶ θεῶν δὲ θνητὸν ῥᾴδιον ἢ βέβαιον εἰπεῖν ἄλλο πλὴν ὅτι τὸν καιρὸν εἰδὼς ἄριστα τῆς περὶ τὴν κακίαν ἰατρείας ὡς φάρμακον ἑκάστῳ προσφέρει τὴν κόλασιν, οὔτε μεγέθους μέτρον κοινὸν οὔτε χρόνον ἕνα καὶ τὸν αὐτὸν ἐπὶ πάντων ἔχουσαν.
>
> For human beings exploring questions concerning the gods and the daimones – just as unskilled people seeking to follow the thought of experts by adhering to a criterion of probability derived from mere conjecture and speculation – is more improper than people without musical taste talking about music and people without any experience of military service discussing war. In fact, on the one hand, it is not the place for the layman to infer the way of reasoning of the surgeon (why he cut not before but later, or why he cauterized not yesterday but today) while, on the other hand, about the gods it is easy or safe for mortals to affirm nothing, except that, as he knows perfectly well the convenient time for the cure of vice, the god brings to everyone some form of retribution as a medicament, which neither is

[14] Plutarch's caution in presenting his conclusions through inferences based on a criterion of probability is exemplified by the use of ἔοικα/εἰκός, which occurs 39 times in the *De sera numinis vindicta*. Most of the time it is employed by Plutarch/character (549 F, 551 B-C, 551 E, 553 E, 555 C, 555 E, 556 A, 556 F, 557 F, 558 D, 559 B, 560 A, 560 E-F, 561 B-C, 563 D, 564 B, 565 A, 566 D). See FRAZIER (2010c) xx-xxi, GÖRGEMANNS (2003) 331-2. On medical imagery in the *De sera numinis vindicta*, see HIRSCH-LUIPOLD (2002) 234-81.

> of the same order of magnitude nor happens at the one and same time on all occasions.

Plutarch changes the focus of the question. While strongly confirming that justice is administered by divine providence, he emphasises the limited capability of mortals to understand the criteria followed by the god: when (πότε), how (πῶς), and to what extent (μέχρι πόσου) criminals are punished (550 A). Plutarch has no doubt about the existence of πρόνοια; thus his friends as well as the readers should not have hesitations. Rather, the main difficulty lies in recognising πρόνοια in action, as it may take different forms in different contexts and at different times. As one may infer, in order to understand πρόνοια, one needs to conduct a rigorous programme of research, using the same skills that historians employ in their work. In this regard, one can notice how similar to Plutarch's words is Polybius' presentation of his research in the *Histories*, which begins with the first naval expedition of the Romans at the start of the First Punic War (264-261 BC): "Thus we must first state how [πῶς] and when [πότε] the Romans established their position in Italy, and which pretexts prompted them afterwards to cross to Sicily".[15]

Very interestingly, just as in the case of Patrocleas, Plutarch also tries to strengthen his deductions by inserting into his discourse some historical *exempla*. The first one concerns Sparta. In Sparta, when taking office, the ephors order that no one should let his moustache grow, and that everyone should promise obedience to the laws.[16] The second example is in reference to the Romans and their odd customs of manumission (the manumitted slaves are hit with a stick) and last wills (to some heirs the Romans simply leave the inheritance, to others they sell their estates).[17] The last case concerns a law of

[15] Polyb. 1.5.2: διὸ καὶ ῥητέον ἂν εἴη πῶς καὶ πότε συστησάμενοι τὰ κατὰ τὴν Ἰταλίαν καὶ τίσιν ἀφορμαῖς μετὰ ταῦτα χρησάμενοι διαβαίνειν ὥρμησαν εἰς Σικελίαν. See WALBANK (1957) 46.
[16] On the Spartan custom of keeping long beard and hair, cf. Plu. *Lyc.* 22.2 and *Apophth. Lac.* 228 F. See Chapter 4.1.
[17] On manumission in Rome, see DAUBE (1946), FABRE (1981) 5-36, GARDNER (1993) 8-14, WIEDEMANN (1985). The strange custom concerning last wills refers to the practice of disinheriting fictitiously the

Solon, which branded with infamy those citizens who did not choose one side or the other in civil strife, inflicting the loss of civil and political rights upon them. The three main cities of Greco-Roman antiquity (Sparta, Rome, and Athens), therefore, are all mentioned symbolically by Plutarch.

Through these examples Plutarch argues that, when neither the reason (λόγος) of the lawgiver nor the cause (αἰτία) of laws are revealed, laws may appear absurd and their rationale becomes difficult to understand (550 B-C). This reinforces the view that it is even more complicated to explore the reasons and the ultimate goals of divine πρόνοια. Yet these historical *exempla* chosen by Plutarch also seem to imply that, although men are liable to mistakes and misinterpretations, they should still attempt to grasp how laws regulate justice and punishment in different historical, social, and political contexts.

In this respect, Plutarch himself represents an emblematic example of this effort indirectly. The order of the Spartan ephors is fully explained in the *Life of Cleomenes* as a measure that seeks to teach the young to become accustomed to obedience even in the smallest matters (*Cleom.* 30(9).3). Similarly, Plutarch attempts to clarify the sense of Solon's law in the *Life of Solon*. He hypothesises that Solon tried to force all the citizens to get involved in the political life of Athens, defending the public interest and supporting the faction that was acting more justly, without waiting opportunistically for the conclusion of internal conflicts (*Sol.* 20.1). The *Parallel Lives*, therefore, implicitly prove what Plutarch suggests in the *De sera numinis vindicta*, that is, by adopting a correct research method one can reach positive results, discovering the various faces of justice, even those that may

legitimate heirs, and then naming another heir, who had the duty to transfer property back to the original heirs. This transfer of property, which was usually established by the testator through a *fideicommissum*, was a stratagem employed to make the legitimate heirs avoid paying the testator's debts; cf. Gai. *Inst.* 2.102. See JOHNSTON (1999) 44-9.

appear incomprehensible at first sight. At the very least, one can formulate plausible hypotheses with reasonable approximation.[18]

Analogously, despite the apparent gnoseologic pessimism and the limitations mentioned earlier, Plutarch invites his friends – and indirectly the readers too – to explore the λόγος behind the god's intervention in history and continues the conversation. Furthermore, just as in the historical examples mentioned above, in the case of divine πρόνοια too, Plutarch appears to propose an anthropomorphised motivation to make sense of the god's mode of intervention in history, which is otherwise bewildering. To this end, Plutarch lists a series of reasons that can justify the delay of divine punishment. First, in the desire to make humans conform to divine virtue, the god delays punishment in order to spare them the temptation of seeking revenge and of using violence against the wicked, a likely risk when one is in the grip of anger. Justice, conversely, requires mildness (πραότης), order (τάξις), and harmony (ἐμμέλεια) (550 D-551 C). Second, rather than merely aiming for retaliation, the god carefully considers whether the souls that are not completely corrupted by evil may repent, especially if their corruption derives from ignorance of good. By procrastinating, the god offers them the opportunity to redeem themselves (551 C-553 C).

Plutarch presents several cases of famous politicians who radically changed their characters, so that later in their lives they were able to do glorious deeds, which were of great benefit not only to their cities but also, in some cases, to all of Greece.[19] The god's

[18] In this regard, the case of Solon's law is particularly interesting. MANFREDINI-PICCIRILLI (1977) 221-4 hypothesise Plutarch's use of sources favourable to Solon, a supposition that has some plausibility both if one postulates that Plutarch's knowledge of Solon derives from reading Aristotle's *Athenaion Politeia* directly or if one rather thinks of some other intermediate source such as Androtion's *Atthis* or Didymus; cf. also LEÃO (2003-2004) and RHODES (2006). Either way, Plutarch appears to have conducted thorough research on some controversial Solonian measures. On the meaning of the law, which Plutarch also mentions at *Praec. ger. reip.* 823 F and at *De soll. anim.* 965 D, see MANVILLE (1980) and PICCIRILLI (1976).

[19] The brief analysis of character change at *De ser. num. vind.* 551 D-E is very similar to that at *De virt. mor.* 443 C, where Plutarch also places emphasis on habituation (ἔθος) as a key factor in moulding the character (ἦθος); see DUFF (1999) 73-5. On the relationship between nature and character in the human soul, to which both the passages of the *De sera numinis vindicta* and the *De virtute morali* make reference, see BERGEN (1962)

plans, that is, look further than single episodes in life and cover more than one life season or one generation. Cecrops, Gelo, Hiero, Lydiadas, Pisistratus, Miltiades, or Themistocles could all have been punished by the god either because they gained power by wickedness (πονηρία) and transgression (παρανόμως) or because of their immoral conduct when they were young. Most importantly, they could have been stopped while (or even before) rising to power (551 F-552 B).

Yet, as Plutarch puts it, by postponing or 'cancelling' their fall, divine πρόνοια gave them time to change for a benefit that is superior to immediate justice: the good of their countries. Alcibiades, conversely, who was condemned on the eve of the Sicilian expedition, is probably the most famous example of ill-timed punishment, which led to catastrophic consequences for Athens (552 B). Subsequently, Plutarch adds a very interesting comment (552 C-D):

> οὕτως ἄτοπα πολλὰ καὶ φαῦλα προεξανθοῦσιν αἱ μεγάλαι φύσεις, ὧν ἡμεῖς μὲν εὐθὺς τὸ τραχὺ καὶ νύττον οὐ φέροντες ἀποκόπτειν οἰόμεθα δεῖν καὶ κολούειν, ὁ δὲ βελτίων κριτὴς καὶ ἀπὸ τούτων τὸ χρηστὸν ἐνορῶν καὶ γενναῖον περιμένει λόγου καὶ ἀρετῆς συνεργὸν ἡλικίαν καὶ ὥραν, ἣ τὸν οἰκεῖον ἡ φύσις καρπὸν ἀποδίδωσι.
>
> Equally, great natures put forth at first many absurd and vile deeds, whose rough and thorny quality at once we do not suffer and believe that we ought to eradicate and cut short, whereas the better judge, who discerns even in this their good and noble character, waits for both the age that supports reason and virtue, and the season, when nature yields the proper fruit.

This consideration, which makes it clear once again how the god does not apply the same criteria of timeliness or slowness to the punishment of crimes as mortals would, can also provide useful indications as to how to interpret history. Rather than judging historical facts too summarily, historians need to evaluate the long-term implications of actions and their ultimate results. This implies the preference for a diachronic analysis of history, which

62-94, BRENK (1977) 171-81, DIHLE (1956) 63-4 and 84-7, DUFF (2008) 1-3, FRAZIER (1996) 78-80, C. GILL (1983) 473-4 and 478-81, PELLING (1988a=2002) 283-8, RUSSELL (1966) 144-7, SWAIN (1989b), WARDMAN (1974) 132-7. This topic is discussed in greater extent later in the dialogue. See also Chapter 2.1.

should cover one generation or more and should take a broad view of individuals, their trajectories in life, and their interactions with the state. Historical events alone may not be adequately explained without taking into account the role played in history by great individuals as much as the role played in their lives by divine providence.

From this standpoint, even evil people such as tyrants, remembered for their excesses, cruelty, and vices, can still be used by the god for his providential plan (*De ser. num. vind.* 552 D-553 F). Among the instances that Plutarch discusses in the *De sera numinis vindicta*, the case of Dionysius I (the Elder) of Syracuse is particularly interesting (432-367 BC). Plutarch concentrates his attention on Dionysius' fight against the Carthaginians (396 BC): "Consider, if at the beginning of his tyranny Dionysius had been punished, no one of the Greeks would be living in Sicily, which would have been laid waste by the Carthaginians".[20] Without Dionysius' rule over Syracuse, the history of the Greeks in Sicily would have been radically different.

This does not change Plutarch's negative judgement of Dionysius, who remains a tyrant hated for his crimes, as one can read, for instance, in the Life of *Timoleon* (6.6-7). Indeed, he would have deserved to pay the price for his misdeeds immediately, but this did not happen.[21] Plutarch is able to consider Dionysius both in relation to his time and political context, and in a broader perspective, selecting the episode that reveals Dionysius' importance beyond his existence. Implicitly, this constitutes another good example of how one should interpret history as the history of lives and cities.[22]

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[20] Plu. *De ser. num. vind.* 552 E: σκόπει γάρ, εἰ Διονύσιος ἐν ἀρχῇ τῆς τυραννίδος ἔδωκε δίκην, ὡς οὐδεὶς ἂν Ἑλλήνων ᾤκει Σικελίαν ἀνάστατον ὑπὸ Καρχηδονίων γενομένην.

[21] In general, on Dionysius I one can refer to the monographs of CAVEN (1990), SANDERS (1987), and STROHEKER (1958).

[22] About tyrants and other problematic political leaders, Plutarch adds that, before making them fall, the god often uses them in order to punish other criminals or even cities that have committed injustice (*De ser. num. vind.* 552 F-553 C). On Plutarch's theory being influenced by Domitian's regime, see SCHOLTEN (2009) 107-11.

1.3 – History of lives

In the second part of his first speech, Plutarch takes a step forward in examining delays in divine πρόνοια. His criticism of those who lament the fact that the god postpones the punishment of criminals and wicked people becomes more radical and goes to the root of the problem. Plutarch argues that the idea of the god's procrastination does not correspond with how the god really exacts retribution (τιμωρία) for injustice. For punishment starts at the precise moment when one commits the wrong, since wickedness in itself generates grief and chastisement (553 F-554 A):

> 'ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μέν' ἔφην 'ἡμεῖς λέγομεν, ὥσπερ ἠξίωται, γίγνεσθαί τινα τῆς τιμωρίας ἀναβολὴν ὑποθέμενοι τοῖς πονηροῖς· τὰ λοιπὰ δ᾽ Ἡσιόδου χρὴ νομίζειν ἀκροᾶσθαι, λέγοντος οὐχ ἧ Πλάτων 'ἀκόλουθον εἶναι τιμωρίαν ἀδικίας πάθην' ἀλλ᾽ ἡλικιῶτιν ἐκ τῆς αὐτῆς ὁμόθεν χώρας καὶ ῥίζης συνυποφυομένην· 'ἡ γὰρ κακή' φησὶ
>
> 'βουλὴ τῷ βουλεύσαντι κακίστη·'
>
> καὶ
>
> 'ὃς δ᾽ ἄλλῳ κακὰ τεύχει, ἑῷ κακὸν ἥπατι τεύχει.'
>
> "But we say these things," I continued "as has been thought right, assuming that there is a delay in vengeance against the wicked; about the rest, it is necessary to become accustomed to listening to Hesiod, who does not say like Plato that 'punishment is a suffering that follows injustice', but that it is contemporaneous with it and grows from the same place and root: 'For', he says,
>
> 'the bad determination is most negative for the person who has taken it'
>
> and
>
> 'the person who does evil to someone else does evil to his own soul'."

Once again, Plutarch places emphasis on how human opinions can only come close to the truth about belated divine punishment, without fully understanding it. This reasoning through hypotheses, which are often wrong, is expressed by employing the verbs ἀξιόω (to deem right) and ὑποτίθεμαι (to suppose), both verbs of thinking, instead of λόγος, which was used previously to describe the rationale behind the god's intervention. Even more important to our analysis of the *De sera numinis vindicta* is Plutarch's quotation of two verses from Hesiod's *Opera et Dies* (vv. 266 and 265 respectively) to support his

interpretation of divine retribution. In Plutarch's view, Hesiod's position is more appropriate than Plato's theory, according to which punishment is the suffering that derives from and follows injustice.[23] One might consider this an expression of scepticism about the possibility even for Platonic philosophy to grasp the complexity of divine providence.

However, there may be another explanation. The deepest meaning of how the god dispenses justice, which is a matter of polemic between philosophical schools, has been understood and interpreted correctly by a source of wisdom much older than Plato and the other philosophers: Hesiod, who was the first Greek author to explore systematically the theme of divine retribution.[24] From Plutarch's perspective, moreover, the *Opera et Dies* – especially the section concerning the Myth of the Five Races (vv. 106-201) – may be considered the first universal history, in which the gods' intervention in human life throughout the various eras and the punishment of ancestral faults in later generations assume crucial importance.[25] By contrasting Hesiod and Plato without mentioning any other thinker, Plutarch implicitly affirms the priority of Platonic philosophy over the rival schools. For, Plato's conclusions, despite being different from Hesiod's, approximate what in Plutarch's view can be regarded as the theological truth, revealed in Hesiod's works.

Following Plutarch's logic, then, the concept of delay itself should be rejected. In this regard, Plutarch explicitly argues that any interval (διάστημα) of human life has no

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[23] The passage quoted by Plutarch is from Pl. *Leg.* 5.728c.

[24] On Plutarch's hermeneutic method as anti-sceptic, see GÖRGEMANNS (2003) 336-9. On Plutarch's view of Hesiod as the wise poet *par excellence*, cf. *Thes.* 3.2. On Plutarch and Hesiod, see LAMBERTON (1988), PÉREZ JIMÉNEZ (2004). On the reception and the interpretation of Hesiod as an icon of wisdom in antiquity, see BOYS-STONES (2010) 40-50, FORD (2010), GRAZIOSI (2010) especially 130-2, HUNTER (2008) 563-8, KONING (2010a) 92-110 and (2010b) especially 162-5 and 172-235, MOST (2010). On Hesiod's notion of divine justice, see ALLAN (2006) 27-8, CLAUS (1977), DICKIE (1978) especially 98-101, GAGARIN (1973) especially 87-94, NESCHKE (1996).

[25] A historiographical interpretation of Hesiod's Myth of the Five Races may have characterised Plutarch's commentary on the *Opera et Dies*, which is not extant in its original form (except Fr. 25-112 Sandbach). Ample parts of it are preserved in Proclus' philosophical commentary on the *Opera et Dies* (largely based on Plutarch's work) and in Hesiod scholia; see DICKEY (2007) 41. Cf. in particular, the scholia to Hes. *Op.* 283-5: see GAGNÉ (2010) 3-4, KLAERR-VERNIÈRE (1974) 106-9, WEST (1978) 63-75. The historiographical reading of the Myth of the Five Races is now discussed by CURRIE (2012) especially 38-51; cf. also ROSENMEYER (1957) 264-82, P. SMITH (1980) 149-53, STEWART (1970) 41-52.

significance, since the temporal dimension in which humankind lives is completely different from divine timeless eternity (554 D). He continues his discourse providing some examples that confirm the validity of his line of reasoning. In particular, he compares the condition of the wicked punished by the god to that of prisoners, whose penalty does not consist only of the execution – that is simply the conclusion of their sentence – but of their shame, suffering, fears, regrets, and tumults of the spirit (554 B).[26] Committing a crime only produces an ephemeral state of effrontery (ἰταμότης) and arrogance (τὸ θρασύ); this ends as soon as the force of the passion, which drives people to misbehave, diminishes, leaving the wicked in a state of sorrow and terror (555 A). As Plutarch concludes, the life of the criminal is completely ruined by evil (556 C-D *passim*):

> τὸ γὰρ σκληρὸν ἐν κακίᾳ καθάπερ ἐν φαύλῳ σιδήρῳ σαθρόν ἐστι καὶ τὸ ἀντίτυπον εὔθραυστον. ὅθεν ἐν χρόνῳ πολλῷ μᾶλλον ὡς ἔχουσιν αὑτοὺς καταμανθάνοντες ἄχθονται καὶ δυσκολαίνουσι καὶ προβάλλονται τὸν ἑαυτῶν βίον. […] ἐγὼ μὲν γάρ, εἰ θέμις ἐστὶν εἰπεῖν, οὔτε τινὸς θεῶν οὔτε ἀνθρώπων δεῖσθαι κολαστοῦ νομίζω τοὺς ἀνοσιουργοῦντας, ἀλλὰ τὸν βίον αὐτῶν ἐξαρκεῖν ὑπὸ τῆς κακίας διεφθαρμένον ὅλον καὶ συντεταραγμένον.
>
> For the harshness of evil is cracked and its rigidity is easily breakable just as with bad iron. Hence, over a long time, as they [the wicked] understand themselves better, they disdain, abhor, and repudiate their lives. […] If it is right to say so, I believe that those who act impiously have no need for a chastiser, either divine or human, but their lives are sufficient, being completely destroyed and thrown into confusion by their wickedness.

Paradoxically, therefore, an immediate punishment, ending the life of a criminal, would represent an act of benevolence (555 D). Conversely, the god intervenes in the life of the wicked by increasing their fears through dreams, visions, oracles, and thunderbolts (555 A). Once again, some historical examples support this theory (555 B-C). First is the case of Apollodorus, who dreamed that he was flayed and then boiled by the Scythians.

[26] At *De ser. num. vind.* 544 F, Plutarch employs almost the same terms to express the same concept. See HIRSCH-LUIPOLD (2002) 252-6. Cf. Plu. *Otho* 2.1-2: Tigellinus' fear of being punished for his crimes already constituted a harsh punishment.

Similarly, on another occasion, he saw his daughters run to him with their bodies in flames.[27] An analogous example concerns Hipparchus, Pisistratus' son, who had a dream about Aphrodite: the goddess flung blood in this face from a phial.[28] Subsequently, Plutarch narrates that the favourites of Ptolemy Ceraunus, while sleeping, saw Ptolemy summoned by Seleucus to appear before a jury of wolves and vultures.[29] Finally, in his dreams Pausanias, the regent of Sparta, was often visited by apparitions of Cleonice, a young girl whom he killed in Byzantium. The ghost of Cleonice repeatedly rebuked Pausanias for his arrogance (ὕβρις) and told him that he was coming close to being punished, until Pausanias finally invoked the girl at the shrine of Heraclea with propitiatory rites and libations, whereupon Cleonice announced that his troubles would finish once he had arrived in Sparta. Indeed, soon after reaching Sparta, Pausanias died.[30]

Just like the previous *exempla*, all these historical cases also confirm the importance of examining the whole trajectory of the lives of great individuals, whose plans and decisions had a decisive impact on the course of history. As mentioned earlier, in order to understand how divine providence intervened in these lives by supporting or opposing men's actions, historians should try to cover the entire existence of the historical protagonists in their works. Other very significant implications for historiography,

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[27] These dreams seem to refer to the coup d'état with which Apollodorus took control of Cassandreia in 279 BC. As Polyaenus writes in his *Stratagemata*, Apollodorus killed a boy and cut his body into pieces (6.7).

[28] The dream seems to anticipate Hipparchus' death, as he was killed by Harmodius and Aristogeiton, the two lovers who attempted to overthrow the Pisistratid tyranny in Athens (514 BC). Other references to Harmodius and Aristogeiton and their fight against the Pisistratids: *De adulat.* 68 A, *De garr.* 505 E, *Amat.* 760 B and 770 B, *X orat. vit.* 833 B, *De es. carn.* 995 D. On Hipparchus and his rule in Athens, see ALONI (1984), BERTI (2004) 30-64, JACOBY (1949) 152-68.

[29] Plutarch refers to Ptolemy's betrayal of Seleucus I Nicator (previously Ptolemy's protector), who was assassinated near Lysimachia in 281 BC. After only two years, Ptolemy Ceraunus was captured and killed by the Galatians, who invaded Macedon; cf. App. *Syr.* 62.2, Diod. Sic. 22.3, Just. *Epit.* 17.2.1-5 and 24.1-5, Memn. *FGrH* 434 F 1 (8), Paus. 1.16.2 and 10.19.7, Plu. *Phyrrh.* 22.2. See GRAINGER (1990) 190-1 and (2010) 69-70, 73, and 78-9, SPICKERMANN (2010), WILL (1984) 113-15. Vultures connected to omens and death: Plu. *Rom.* 9.5-7, *Mar.* 17.6, *De cap. ex inim. ut.* 87 C-D, *Aet. Rom.* 93 286 B-C. Wolves as a symbol of shrewdness and fierceness: Plu. *De Pyth. or.* 400 A, *Bruta anim.* 992 D. Cf. VALGIGLIO (1992) 156 n. 128.

[30] The same episode is narrated at Plu. *Cim.* 6.4-6; see CARENA-MANFEDINI-PICCIRILLI (1990) 220-1. Cf. also Aristodem. *FGrH* 104 F 1 (8.1) and Paus. 3.17.8-9, where, too, Pausanias' death is seen as retribution for the killing of Cleonice. On the story of Pausanias and Cleonice, its literary value, and the differences between the three sources, see AMENDOLA (2007) 235-42, OGDEN (2001) 23-34, 57-8, and 104-5, (2002) 116-19 and 126-7.

however, can be drawn from the examples of the second part of Plutarch's discourse. To begin with, since divine πρόνοια does not act in relation to the temporal dimension of men, one cannot attribute procrastination or promptness to the god. Consequently, a merely chronological approach is not sufficient to illustrate the intimate connection between episodes distant in time, yet directly related to one another because of providential moral causality. That is, a chronological exposition of facts alone is not enough to render history intelligible.

The history of lives, on the other hand, should unfold the events and re-mould the narration so as to show such causal links created by divine πρόνοια between historical occurrences. This entails employing narrative strategies that highlight this type of connection between events, something that contrariwise might remain hidden in a merely chronological account. Plutarch, for example, avoids narrating the violent political struggle against the ephors and the dramatic circumstances of Pausanias' death in order to highlight the relationship between Cleonice's murder and Pausanias' end. The *Parallel Lives* offer numerous instances of the typical techniques adopted by Plutarch in this regard: the alteration of the temporal sequence, the conflation of similar items, the compression of chronology, the expansion of minor details in order to (re-)create the context of historical events, and the imaginative (re-)elaboration of important episodes.[31]

These narrative strategies – some more useful in revealing providentiality in history than others – constitute the result of Plutarch's adaptation of the source material for rhetorical and artistic purposes, as well as for a stronger characterisation of the protagonists. At the same time, however, they also allow Plutarch to offer an intelligible interpretation of history and to make sense of the life of great individuals, inviting the

[31] These narrative techniques are illustrated by CARNEY (1960) 26-7, DUFF (1999) 312-14, FRAZIER (1996) 24-7, KONRAD (1994) xxxix-xli, PELLING (1980=2002) 91-6, (1997a) 115-22, and (2011) 56-7, RUSSELL (1963) 22-8, STADTER (1989) xlviiii-xlix. One can also add Duff's recent analysis of the internal structure of the *Parallel Lives* and their non-narrative sections, which are arranged thematically: DUFF (2010) 207-20, (2011) especially 224-59.

readers to continue their analysis in turn. There seems to be, therefore, a close correspondence between the artistic choices and the narrative strategies employed by Plutarch in the *Parallel Lives* and the theoretical premises of writing history, which can be inferred from the historical *exempla* of the *De sera numinis vindicta*.

Similarly, the *De sera numinis vindicta* gives some implicit indications about the content of the history of lives. As we saw earlier, events that may appear to have had only a marginal relevance significantly affected the life of important political figures, their choices, their successes or failures, and, ultimately, their end. The boundary between the private and the public spheres tends to blur, since the morally good or bad behaviour displayed in friendships, love affairs, or family matters had far-reaching consequences in public life, and determined the support or the punishment of divine providence in the military and political spheres. Thus private conduct as much as public activity is an important matter for historiography and should be narrated, just as the case of Hipparchus and that of Pausanias and Cleonice have shown. For the same reason, fears, hopes, disappointments, second thoughts, joy, anxiety, and all the other emotions of the historical characters are relevant too in understanding how historical events occurred and, consequently, cannot be omitted. To a certain extent, we are not very far from the famous programmatic statement in the opening section of the *Life of Alexander*, where Plutarch claims to write not histories but lives (οὔτε γὰρ ἱστορίας γράφομεν, ἀλλὰ βίους) and argues that often little matters, sayings, or jokes can reveal the virtue or the vice (ἀρετὴ ἢ κακία) of characters more than the most outstanding deeds (*Alex.* 1.1-2).[32]

Furthermore, all the occasions when divine providence manifested itself in history – through dreams, oracles, omens, obscure portents, apparitions, and so forth – need to be part of the historical narration. On the one hand, these supernatural signs triggered a

[32] This crucial passage is examined rigorously by DUFF (1999) 14-22. See also Chapter 2.1.

reaction from the protagonists, which led to further decisions and actions. On the other hand, they demonstrate which direction the god imposed on the course of history. These too are prominent thematic features of the *Parallel Lives*.[33] For, despite the fact that in the *Parallel Lives* Plutarch usually takes a cautious approach to supernatural events, for which he tends to offer more credible rational explanations and often shows himself to be sceptical about what he regards as manifestations of superstition, nonetheless, on numerous occasions he considers these phenomena proof of the god's direct intervention in history.[34]

In particular, as Swain has thoughtfully noticed, while divine providence appears to have neither furthered nor impeded overtly Athenian imperialism and its expansion into Sicily (for example, *Nic.* 13.5, and *Per.* 6.4-5 and 34.4), supernatural signs became more evident in the case of Greece's loss of freedom and subsequent subjugation to Macedon (for instance, *Dem.* 19, *Phoc.* 1-3) or in that of the liberation of Sicily (for example, *Dio* 4.3-4, 26-27, and 50.4, *Tim.* 14.2-3 and 16.1). In Swain's view, even clearer was divine support for the passage of the Hellenic world under the control of Rome, as one can infer from illuminating chapters such as *Phil.* 17.2 and *Flam.* 12.10, and for the rise of Rome as a superpower (for instance, *Caes.* 26.2, *Cam.* 6.3, *comp. Cim.-Luc.* (44)1.1, *Crass.* 26.6, *Marc.* 3.2, *Pomp.* 53.8-9 and 75.4-5, *Rom.* 8.9), which was stabilised even further by the establishment of the Principate after the civil wars (*Ant.* 56.6, *Brut.* 47). These were changes on a very large scale; by contrast, in the *Parallel Lives* divine agency does not seem to have been involved very much in ordinary changes. Nonetheless, just as we saw in the *De sera numinis vindicta*, in the *Parallel Lives* too, Plutarch recognises the influence of divine πρόνοια in the lives of individuals. It is through them – through their successes and defeats, uncertainties

[33] On prophetic dreams in the *Parallel Lives*, see BRENK (1975=1998) 106-11 and 115-17, (1977) 20-1, 215-24, and 227-32, (1987) 322-7, and PELLING (1997b) 199-201, (2010b) 317-29. On omens and portents in Plutarch, see BRENK (1977) especially 187-91, 201-2, and 206-10, (1987) 316-22, VALGIGLIO (1988) 39-41. On oracles as expressions of divine intervention in history and their (mis)use in the *Parallel Lives*, see BRENK (1977) 236-55, (1987) 330-6, STADTER (2005). On oracles, see also VALGIGLIO (1988) 41-8 and 63.

[34] On Plutarch's great caution with omens and supernatural phenomena, see BRENK (1977) 184-8; cf., for instance, Plu. *Cam.* 6.3.

and decisions, political and military acts, and so forth – that momentous events happened under divine guidance, even if it is not always easy to discern.[35]

Finally, Plutarch's historical *exempla* indirectly suggest that the vicissitudes of historical figures, who lived in different times and in different cultural contexts, can be viewed in parallel in order to find a synthesis between them, from which one can draw a deeper moral and philosophical lesson, whose scope and breadth are broader than those of each case study considered separately. That is to say, just as the other narrative techniques mentioned earlier, the accumulation of exemplary historical cases in order to demonstrate a philosophical thesis – a feature typical of Plutarch's style in both the *Moralia* and the *Parallel Lives* – does not merely represent a rhetorical procedure, but it seems to assume a more profound meaning. Despite their differences, the stories of Apollodorus, Hipparchus, Ptolemy Ceraunus, and Pausanias can be presented in succession because they share a common element: all the protagonists had dreams and visions after committing crimes. By highlighting this common aspect and by shaping the narration of the four short stories accordingly, Plutarch can formulate his argument about the god's punitive intervention in the life of the wicked as a philosophical and theological truth, whose validity is absolute and is not limited to the particular historical, cultural, social, or political circumstances of the supporting cases. Each example, conversely, if examined individually, cannot convey the same meaning as the four cases taken all together.

This methodology is explained more explicitly in the introduction of the *Mulierum Virtutes* (243 B-D *passim*):

> καὶ μὴν οὐκ ἔστιν ἀρετῆς γυναικείας καὶ ἀνδρείας ὁμοιότητα καὶ διαφορὰν ἄλλοθεν καταμαθεῖν μᾶλλον, ἢ βίους βίοις καὶ πράξεσι πράξεις ὥσπερ ἔργα μεγάλης τέχνης παρατιθέντας ἅμα καὶ σκοποῦντας, εἰ τὸν αὐτὸν ἔχει χαρακτῆρα καὶ τύπον ἡ Σεμιράμεως μεγαλοπραγμοσύνη τῇ Σεσώστριος […] κατὰ τὴν κυριωτάτην κοινότητα καὶ δύναμιν· ἐπειδὴ διαφοράς γέ τινας ἑτέρας, ὥσπερ χροιὰς ἰδίας, αἱ

[35] SWAIN (1989a) especially 279-92. See also BRENK (1977) 145-83, (1987) 305-16, PÉREZ JIMÉNEZ (2010), STADTER (2005). On divine retribution in the *Parallel Lives*, see BRENK (1977) 256-75, (1987) 327-30.

> ἀρεταὶ διὰ τὰς φύσεις λαμβάνουσι καὶ συνεξομοιοῦνται τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις ἔθεσι καὶ κράσεσι σωμάτων καὶ τροφαῖς καὶ διαίταις· ἄλλως γὰρ ἀνδρεῖος ὁ Ἀχιλλεὺς ἄλλως ὁ Αἴας· καὶ φρόνησις Ὀδυσσέως οὐχ ὁμοία τῇ Νέστορος […]. ἀλλὰ μὴ παρὰ τοῦτο πολλὰς καὶ διαφόρους ποιῶμεν ἀνδρείας καὶ φρονήσεις καὶ δικαιοσύνας, ἂν μόνον τοῦ λόγου τοῦ οἰκείου μηδεμίαν αἱ καθ᾽ ἕκαστον ἀνομοιότητες ἐκβιβάζωσι.
>
> Indeed, it is not possible to learn better the similarity and the difference between the virtue of women and that of men from any other source than by placing lives beside lives and deeds beside deeds just as great works of art, and by considering whether the magnificence of Semiramis has the same character and stamp as that of Sesostris […], according to their most important common element and quality. For the virtues, because of the natures, acquire certain other differences just as if these were peculiar colours, and they assimilate themselves to the customs, on which they are founded, and to the physical temperament, the education, and the way of living of the individual. For example, Achilles was brave in one way and Ajax in another; Odysseus' wisdom was not the same as that of Nestor […]. But on this account let us not postulate many different kinds of bravery, wisdom, and justice, provided only that the individual dissimilarities do not force any of these virtues out of its proper category.

As Stadter has perceptively noted, this is a fundamental principle that also underpins the *Parallel Lives* as a series of biographies written and designed to be read as pairs (and as more than pairs), a distinctive characteristic that Plutarchan scholarship has strongly emphasised in the last decades.[36] There is, therefore, a remarkable continuity between the *De sera numinis vindicta* and the *Parallel Lives* with regard to the possibility of learning moral lessons from history by examining the various historical contexts of individual historical figures, and by using them to find superior ethical values to apply to everyone's life. This also represents one of the key themes in Plutarch's second speech, where the main focus, however, shifts towards the question of cities, peoples, and families, and their role in history.

[36] STADTER (1965) 9-12. See also TATUM (2010) 4-6. The classic scholarly contributions on reading the *Parallel Lives* as pairs are BRENK (1992) 4375-80, DESIDERI (1992), DUFF (1999) 243-86, ERBSE (1956), LARMOUR (1992) 4154-74, PELLING (1986=2002), STADTER (1975). For further bibliography on this subject see DUFF (1999) 250 n. 25, HUMBLE (2010a) ix-xi. On reading the *Parallel Lives* as a series (a theme much less debated), see DUFF (2011) 259-62, PELLING (2010a) 218-30. Attempts to read groups of pairs together have been made by ALEXIOU (2010), BENEKER (2005), BUSZARD (2008), MARINCOLA (2010), MOSSMAN (1992), STADTER (2010). Parallelism and seriality of the *Parallel Lives* are discussed in detail in Chapter 2.2.

1.4 – Individuals and cities

Plutarch's first discourse leaves open the problem of hereditary punishment, which appears to constitute the most serious objection against his theory of divine providence and its intervention in history. Paradoxically, the argument is advanced by Timon, the same character who quickly dismissed the words of the Epicurean as absurd and false at the beginning of the dialogue, showing absolute faith in Platonic philosophy. He tried to express his doubts about the delay of divine punishment alongside Patrocleas and Olympichus, but Plutarch forced him to postpone his speech until the right moment (*De ser. num. vind.* 449 E). Thus this is the second moment of the dialogue where there is a strong correspondence between the narrative structure and the theme of delay.

First, Timon quotes a verse from Euripides, which alludes to the content of his criticism: "The faults of the fathers [are visited] upon the children".[37] He then clarifies his position. If the guilty have already paid the price for their crimes, there is no longer need to punish innocents and it is not fair to punish those responsible twice for the same wrongdoings. If, on the other hand, the cause of the gods' procrastination is laziness (ῥᾳθυμία) and if because of it the gods, after being careless about the wicked, exact vengeance on the guiltless only after a long time, this means that the gods can be criticised for compensating for their slowness only through injustice (556 E). Timon pinpoints exactly where Plutarch's idea of πρόνοια is difficult to accept: the punitive action of the gods does not always involve only one generation, but more generations, and it does not always penalize the criminals, but innocent people. Timon, therefore, appears to follow Plutarch's line of thought, since he does not claim that belated divine punishment allows wrongdoers to enjoy the fruit of their crimes – this was Patrocleas' main point – or that

[37] Eur. Fr. 580 Nauck²: τὰ τῶν τεκόντων σφάλματ' εἰς τοὺς ἐκγόνους. As one can notice, quotations from Euripides, who was traditionally considered the author who challenged the religious beliefs of the Athenians, appear in the discourses of all the three interlocutors of Plutarch; cf. *De ser. num. vind.* 548 D (Eur. *Or.* 420), 549 A (Fr. 979 Nauck²), and 549 D.

belated divine action can be confused with chance, as suggested by Olympichus. Rather, Timon accepts that the gods can exact a delayed revenge for the wrong committed and that this still constitutes a form of punishment. Yet, while adopting the same viewpoint as Plutarch, he argues against the justice of such retribution.

Just like the other characters of the *De sera numinis vindicta*, Timon too supports his thesis by presenting some *exempla*. First is the case of Aesop, who arrived in Delphi with a huge amount of gold from Croesus, with which he was to make sacrifices to Apollo. He was also supposed to distribute four minae to each citizen. Yet, having become involved in a quarrel with the Delphians, he was accused of sacrilege and was killed. Aesop's death caused the anger of Apollo, who brought a famine upon the land of Delphi and inflicted every sort of disease upon the inhabitants. The conclusion of this anecdote is that the Delphians were punished until the third generation from Aesop's time, when they finally managed to pay forfeiture to Idmon, a descendant of the Samians who had purchased Aesop as a slave in Samos: this eventually brought an end to Apollo's vengeance (556 F-557 A).[38] Timon mentions numerous other instances of delayed punishments, which were suffered by later generations (557 B-E): Alexander the Great's destruction of the city of the Branchidae in Asia and the mass murder of the entire population as vengeance for the surrender of the temple of Apollo in Didyma to the Persians;[39] Agathocles' devastations of Corcyra and Ithaca in retaliation for the Phaeacians' helping Odysseus and for Odysseus' killing of Polyphemus respectively;[40] the flood sent by Apollo to destroy the city of Pheneus, because Heracles had brought the prophetic tripod to the founder Pheneus;[41] the

[38] In this episode, which has a novelistic flavour, Plutarch seems to expand the briefer version narrated by Herodotus (2.134.3-4); cf. MURRAY-MORENO (2007) 337.
[39] On the Persians' destruction of the temple of Apollo in Didyma, cf. Hdt. 6.19-20, Str. 11.11.4, Curt. 7.5.28. On the massacre of the Branchidae, cf. Callisth. *FGrH* 124 F 14 (=Str. 17.1.43), Diod. Sic. 17 contents, Str. 14.1.5, Curt. 7.5.29-35. See HAMMOND (1998), PARKE (1985) 59-65.
[40] Cf. Plu. *Apophth.* 176 F. On Agathocles' conquest of Corcyra and, possibly, Ithaca (*c.* 300 BC), see Diod. Sic. 21.2-3, Plu. *Pyrrh.* 9.2.
[41] On the flood that destroyed Pheneus, see Paus. 8.14-15, Str. 8.8.4; cf. also Catul. 68.109-112, Plin. *Nat.* 31.54. See SULIMANI (2011) 255.

Sybarites, who lost their city three times because of Leucadian Hera's anger against them;[42] the virgins that the Locrians used to send annually to Troy to serve as maidens in the temple of Athena because of Ajax's licentious behaviour (ἀκολασία);[43] the Thracians, who still brand their women in revenge for their cruelty to Orpheus;[44] the barbarians, who live close to the river Po, still mourning Phaethon.[45]

Timon's fundamental question, then, appears to be very pertinent, as it addresses a crucial point of the dialogue: "Where are good reason and justice in these situations?".[46] Emblematically, Timon repeats the concept that delayed punishments are absurd by using terms such as ἄτοπος (absurd, unnatural) with regard to Apollo's destruction of Pheneus, or γέλοιος (ludicrous) and ἀβελτερία (silliness), both in reference to the custom of the barbarians by the river Po. Furthermore, moral judgement of the historical episodes discussed by Timon cannot be positive: Alexander the Great cannot be praised for the massacre of the Branchidae (τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον οὐδ' ἐπαινοῦσι); nor can the Thracians and the barbarians of the river Po be commended for their habits (Οὐδὲ γὰρ Θρᾷκας ἐπαινοῦμεν […] οὐδὲ τοὺς περὶ Ἠριδανὸν βαρβάρους). By applying Plutarch's historiographical method to his *exempla*, therefore, Timon shows that history and myths may be speciously used for political purposes in order to justify ethically wrong actions, as in the cases of Alexander the Great and Agathocles. Analogously, ancient history and

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42 Timon refers to the destruction of Sybaris at the end of the war against the Crotoniats (510/9 BC) and to the two subsequent failed attempts of the Sybarites to rebuild their city (in 446/5 BC and in 445 BC). Finally, the Sybarites were forced to migrate after the foundation of Thurii (445 BC) and the strife between them and the other colonies (444/3 BC). Cf. Diod. Sic. 11.90.3-4, 12.9-11 and 12.22.1, Hdt. 5.44 and 6.21.1, Str. 6.1.13. On the oracle about Hera's anger against the Sybarites, see Ath. 520a-b and 521a-522a, and, with a different account, Ael. *VH* 3.43. See GORMAN-GORMAN (2007) 47-54, GREEN (2006) 173 n. 373, 189 n. 43, 193 n. 54, 209 n. 92.

43 This tradition was established to make amends for Oilean Ajax's profanation of the temple of Athena during the sack of Troy: see Eur. *Tro.* 69-71, Hyg. *Fab.* 116, Lycoph. *Alex.* 1143-73, Verg. *Aen.* 2.403; cf. also Apollod. *Bibl.* 6.20, Polyb. 12.5.7-8, Str. 13.1.40. On the Locrian maidens, see M. DILLON (2002) 63-6, FONTENROSE (1978) 131-7, GRAF (2000), REDFIELD (2003) 85-150.

44 On the story of Orpheus' death at the hands of the Thracian Maenads, see Apollod. 1.3.2, Ov. *Met.* 11.1-43, Paus. 9.30.5, Verg. *G.* 520-7.

45 The river Po is where Phaethon fell down from the sky with Helios' chariot; cf. Ap. Rhod. *Argon* 4.598-626, Diod. Sic. 5.23.2, Eur. *Hipp.* 737-40, Hyg. *Fab.* 152 and 154, Lucian *Dial. D.* 25, Ov. *Met.* 1.747-79, Paus. 2.3.2, Philostr. Jun. *Im.* 1.11.

46 Plu. *De ser. num. vind.* 557 D: Ποῦ δὴ ταῦτα τὸ εὔλογον ἴσχει καὶ δίκαιον;

remote myths may constitute the only reasons for perpetuating traditions whose original sense has been lost, their ties to the past being so feeble that they appear irrational, just like the long-standing practices of the Thracians and the barbarians mentioned earlier. Most importantly, the divinity itself seems to act illogically, so that it becomes difficult to find a moral justification for the gods' angers (ὀργαί) that, "being brought upon others later, come to extreme calamities".[47]

After Timon's conclusion, for the first and only time in the *De sera numinis vindicta* Plutarch/the external narrator comments on the content of one of the characters' discourse: he defines Timon's views as absurd. In this case, too, the term employed is ἀτοπία, the same substantive that Plutarch/the external narrator used to refer to the Epicurean in the *incipit* of the *De sera numinis vindicta*. Furthermore, as we saw earlier, at the beginning of the dialogue Timon labelled the Epicurean's speech as ἄτοπος (548 C).[48] Subsequently, he applied the same adjective to Apollo for the calamities that he sent to Pheneus (557 C). As Plutarch seems to suggest, then, the fact that Timon levels at Apollo the same accusation of absurdity earlier brought against the Epicurean is itself absurd. That is to say, in the course of the dialogue Timon has paradoxically given ample proof that his initial fear about the negative influence of the Epicurean's opinions was in fact well founded. This elaborate set-up suggests that Timon's discourse is very important and, just like the Epicurean's speech, requires a detailed answer rather than a simple rejection.

At the beginning of his second speech, Plutarch challenges Timon's questionable use of historical and mythical *exempla*, based as they are on false premises, and addresses the complex problem of the instrumental use of religion, as it has emerged from Timon's case studies. First, Plutarch claims that many arguments advanced by Timon are false or, at least, most of them look like fictional stories (μῦθοι καὶ πλάσματα) (557 F). Subsequently,

[47] Plu. *De ser. num. vind.* 557 E: εἶθ᾽ ὕστερον ἐπ᾽ ἄλλους ἀναφερόμεναι πρὸς ἐσχάτας συμφορὰς τελευτῶσιν.
[48] Cf. FRAZIER (2010c) xxx-xxxi.

in order to defend the gods from Timon's unfair criticism, Plutarch points out some contradictions in Timon's discourse. In particular, Plutarch argues that, just as the descendants of evil and wicked ancestors are punished by the gods, so do the descendants of noble men receive honours and public recognition, even after many generations.

Several examples are cited in support of this thesis (558 A-B): in Delphi, Pindar's descendants are still highly honoured at the Theoxenia;[49] Sparta still cherishes the memory of the poet Terpander;[50] the descendants of Heracles still receive manifestations of gratitude for Heracles' being a great benefactor to the Greeks. One cannot complain about the misfortune of the descendants who are punished, while simultaneously rejoicing for those praised. If one accepts that a virtuous family (γένος) deserves gratitude, being favoured by the god, the same measure of judgement should be used in the opposite case: it is reasonable (εὐλόγως, a term almost identical to that used by Timon in his question) to think, then, that punishment represents the fair retribution for the iniquity committed (558 C). Plutarch comments harshly on this first element of contradiction (558 C-D):

> ὁ δὲ τοὺς ἀπὸ Κίμωνος ἡδέως ὁρῶν Ἀθήνησι τιμωμένους, τῶν δὲ Λαχάρους ἢ Ἀρίστωνος ἐκγόνων ἐλαυνομένων ἀχθόμενος καὶ ἀγανακτῶν ὑγρός ἐστι λίαν καὶ ῥᾴθυμος, μᾶλλον δὲ φιλαίτιος ὅλως καὶ δύσκολος πρὸς τὸ θεῖον, ἐγκαλῶν μέν, ἂν ἀνδρὸς ἀδίκου καὶ πονηροῦ παῖδες ἐκ παίδων εὐτυχεῖν δοκῶσιν, ἐγκαλῶν δὲ πάλιν, ἂν τὰ γένη κολούηται καὶ ἀφανίζηται τῶν φαύλων, αἰτιώμενός δὲ τὸν θεὸν ὁμοίως μέν, ἂν χρηστοῦ πατρὸς τέκνα πράττῃ κακῶς, ὁμοίως δέ, ἂν πονηροῦ.
>
> Whoever observes with pleasure the descendants of Cimon being held in high honour in Athens, but is grieved and irritated because the descendants of Lachares or Ariston are persecuted is excessively remiss and careless, or, rather, is too hypercritical and too discontented with the divinity, since he accuses it whenever the posterity of an unjust and wicked person seems to have good fortune, or since he accuses it again whenever the race of the wicked is torn to pieces and destroyed, thus blaming the god in any case, whenever the children of a just father or, conversely, those of a wicked father fall under affliction.

[49] On the annual rite of the Delphian Theoxenia, at which a banquet in honour of the gods was organised, and on Pindar's performances at Delphi on these occasions, see CURRIE (2005) 301-2, 322-5, and 331-43.
[50] On Terpander and Sparta, see QUATTROCELLI (2002) 12-20.

Very interestingly, Plutarch's considerations reaffirm the importance of historical traditions for civic communities. The memory of prominent figures of the past is part of the cultural identity of Delphi, Sparta, and Athens, and so are the customs, the rites, the cults, and so forth, which are variously connected to the lives of the protagonists of these cities' history. Plutarch, nonetheless, seems implicitly to claim that a serious historical investigation should distinguish between false reconstructions of traditions – founded on misinterpreted stories or myths or, even worse, such that are fabricated and used for political purposes – and habits, practices, or rituals that truly witness the action of divine providence in favour of or against cities as much as individuals. After one has established with reasonable certainty that the god's πρόνοια is operating, its delayed effects – whether punitive or beneficial – should all be accepted. Indeed, such a research process is very difficult and one needs to use great caution (558 D):

> ἀναλαβόντες δ᾽ αὖθις ὥσπερ ἀρχὴν κλωστῆρος ἐν σκοτεινῷ καὶ πολλοὺς ἑλιγμοὺς καὶ πλάνας ἔχοντι τῷ περὶ τοῦ θεοῦ λόγῳ, καθοδηγῶμεν αὐτοὺς μετ᾽ εὐλαβείας ἀτρέμα πρὸς τὸ εἰκὸς καὶ πιθανόν, ὡς τό γε σαφὲς καὶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν οὐδ᾽ ἐν οἷς αὐτοὶ πράττομεν ἀσφαλῶς εἰπεῖν ἔχομεν.
>
> Taking up again, as it were, an end of a thread in the obscure discourse about the god, which has many convolutions and wanderings, let us slowly direct ourselves with caution towards what is likely and plausible, since we cannot discern with certainty the plain truth, not even in the things that we do ourselves.

Plutarch's words recall very similar concepts already expressed in the *De sera numinis vindicta*.[51] Particularly interesting, in this regard, is the use of εὐλάβεια, the same substantive employed earlier in the dialogue with the meaning of cautious reverence towards the god, where Plutarch indicates the distinctive attitude of Platonic philosophers towards the divinity (*De ser. num. vind.* 549 E). With this key term, therefore, Plutarch reminds his interlocutors – and the readers too – of the prudent method that ought to characterise

[51] On the idea that humans can only use a criterion of probability (κατὰ τὸ εἰκός), cf. also Plu. *De ser. num. vind.* 549 F.

conversation on such difficult matters. He also reaffirms his role as leader of the dialogue in a very crucial moment of the debate.

In order to discuss and disprove some of Timon's examples, Plutarch uses a medical analogy (558 E-F), just as he already did in his first discourse, where the god's providential action is compared to the treatment provided by a doctor or a surgeon (549 F-550 A).[52] In the second speech, Plutarch draws a parallel between the contagion of diseases such as tuberculosis, oedema, and pestilence (like the one that, having begun in Ethiopia, contaminated Athens and killed Pericles), and the hereditary transmission of divine punishment from one generation to another, as happened to the Sybarites and the Delphians. The spread of diseases is caused by powers or forces (δυνάμεις), which have the capacity for contagion (ἀφή) and transmission (διάδοσις) of illness between bodies. Thanks to such δυνάμεις, a disease can be contracted soon or some time after its first onset, and in places at a short or long distance from that of its initial outbreak. Yet, Plutarch adds, "we are amazed at the intervals in time, not those in space" (ἡμεῖς τὰ κατὰ τοὺς χρόνους διαλείμματα θαυμάζομεν, οὐ τὰ κατὰ τόπους), despite the fact that it is more difficult to understand how plagues spread from one geographical area to another than to comprehend that their transmission takes time.

In Plutarch's view, the way in which divine punishment is delayed from one generation to those following is very similar to the propagation of diseases. For it is possible to trace the origin of chastisement through the correspondences (ἀναφοραί) and the points of contact (συνάψεις) with its later effects. That is, even if we do not recognise it immediately, the cause (αἰτία) for punishment silently reaches its proper completion. Through this medical analogy Plutarch shows his interlocutors how reason can be applied to understand the logic used by the god in inflicting late punishments. Indeed, due to our

[52] Similar metaphors and analogies about the cure of diseased souls or cities can be found at *De ser. num. vind.* 551 C-D, 552 F-553 A. See HIRSCH-LUIPOLD (2002) 262-6.

cognitive limits, we can only partially grasp how divine justice acts and how the god's decisions affect later generations. This, nonetheless, does not constitute a sufficient motivation for arbitrarily judging the god's providence as absurd.[53]

Both Timon's speech and the first part of Plutarch's reply have a significant element in common: all the historical examples discussed in them place emphasis on the interconnection between cities and individuals. The god's direct intervention to punish or to reward the deeds of individuals may also have had harmful or positive consequences on their cities, either immediately or in later times. Similarly, the god's disposition towards cities – his support or his anger – inevitably affected individuals in different generations.[54]

This adds another implication to the method of reading and writing of history that can be inferred from the *De sera numinis vindicta*. As we have repeatedly observed, historiography should focus on lives, considered in all their aspects, rather than on simple facts. Based on this premise, one can now argue that historiography should try to explore the complex relationship between cities and the great figures of the past, and the various forms in which it manifested itself. This implies that, on the one hand, the successes or the failures of the historical protagonists, which were also steered by divine πρόνοια, cannot be narrated without explaining the context, the circumstances, and the causes that led to them. In this regard, education systems and forms of government – which characterise the cities and, as we saw earlier, are also the key areas where divine providence exerts its influence by determining human experiences – assume a special relevance.[55]

On the other hand, historiography should also analyse what impact the political actions of eminent leaders made on the history of their cities, what long-term results they produced with regard to cultural, political, and religious institutions, what changes they

[53] Cf. GAGNÉ (2013) 42-3; however, in his conclusion Plutarch does not seem to be as confident as Gagné appears to imply.
[54] See GÖRGEMANNS (2003) 333-4.
[55] With different aim and emphasis, Polybius, too, remarks upon the close correlation between the history of individuals and that of cities (10.21.3).

induced in the habits of local communities, and what role was played by divine πρόνοια in these processes. In this sense, therefore, history is the history of lives and cities: it is the history of the dynamic and multifaceted relationship between individuals and their societies, and it is a type of history that examines both past causes and future effects. Plutarch's historiographical model, then, cannot but regard different temporal layers as inextricably linked to one another.

1.5 – History of cities

In the second part of his reply to Timon's speech, after defending the logic of the god's intervention in history, Plutarch discusses the question of its justice. The main focus shifts again, turning to the collective responsibility of cities and families. Starting with cities, Plutarch bases his reasoning on the assumption that πόλεις can carry a collective guilt (*De ser. num. vind.* 558 F). The phrase employed by Plutarch – τὰ δημόσια τῶν πόλεων μηνίματα (the collective causes of guilt of the cities) – refers to the body politic, which should be considered a single entity. He clarifies this concept (559 A):

> ἓν γάρ τι πρᾶγμα καὶ συνεχὲς ἡ πόλις ὥσπερ ζῷον οὐκ ἐξιστάμενον αὑτοῦ ταῖς καθ᾽ ἡλικίαν μεταβολαῖς οὐδ᾽ ἕτερον ἐξ ἑτέρου τῷ χρόνῳ γιγνόμενον, ἀλλὰ συμπαθὲς ἀεὶ καὶ οἰκεῖον αὑτῷ, καὶ πᾶσαν ὧν πράττει κατὰ τὸ κοινὸν ἢ ἔπραξεν αἰτίαν καὶ χάριν ἀναδεχόμενον, μέχρι ἂν ἡ ποιοῦσα καὶ συνδέουσα ταῖς ἐπιπλοκαῖς κοινωνία τὴν ἑνότητα διαφυλάττῃ.
>
> For the city is a single and continuous entity which, just as a living organism, does not change its identity because of the alterations of age nor transforms itself from one thing to another in the process of time, but always shares a continuity of experience and is akin to itself, and takes upon itself the blame and the gratitude for whatever it does or has done as a collective whole, so long as the collectiveness, which creates the unity and binds it together through internal interconnections, also preserves it.

The identity of the πόλις endures in spite of the changes that may occur in the course of history, just as the identity of men and women remains the same regardless of the

alterations caused by age, so that anyone who grows up from childhood to youth and then from youth to adulthood does not become someone else. The identity of the city, then, makes the city and the different generations of citizens potentially responsible for the crimes committed by the city's ancestors, for the same reason for which the descendants inherit their ancestors' fame (δόξα) and power (δύναμις). This is the principle of justice that also applies to individuals (559 A-C).

Families or lineages (γένη) too are viewed by Plutarch from an analogous perspective. Like the πόλις, the family is a single and continuous entity, since it is attached to one single origin (ἀρχή).[56] Such an origin brings to the family a certain power (δύναμις) and an inborn collectiveness (κοινωνία διαπεφυκυῖα). What is begotten is never completely separated from its originator and carries in itself some of the originator's qualities, for which it is either punished or honoured (559 D). This concept explains why all the children of wicked parents (in this regard, Plutarch makes mention of Nisaeus and Apollocrates, sons of Dionysius II of Syracuse, and Antipater and Philip, sons of Cassander) have the principal part (μέρος) of their fathers implanted in themselves: thanks to it they live, are nourished, and exert their control and their mental faculties. It cannot be strange or illogical (οὐθὲν δεινὸν οὐδ' ἄτοπον), therefore, that children also share the same qualities as their fathers (559 E).

Since both cities and families are treated as living organisms, the administration of justice needs to be regarded as the cure of evil (τὸ θεραπεύειν τὴν κακίαν), a theory that echoes Plato's views on the same subject matter.[57] Just as elsewhere in the *De sera numinis vindicta*, in this part of his speech as well, Plutarch employs a complex and elaborate medical

[56] Plu. *De ser. num. vind.* 559 C: εἰ δ' ἔστι τι πόλις ἓν πρᾶγμα καὶ συνεχές, ἔστι δήπου καὶ γένος.

[57] Plato, however, focuses on the injustice and the punishment of individuals rather than on that of cities, and on human laws rather than on divine retribution; cf. Pl. *Prt.* 323c-324c, *Resp.* 3.409a, 4.444a-445b, and 9.590e-591d, *Grg.* 476a-477a, 478b-479e, 504a-505b, and 525b, *Leg.* 5.728c, 5.735b-736c, 9.857c-d, 9.865a-867d, 9.868a-869e, and 9.874d. See KÉLESSIDOU-GALANOU (1989-1990), MACKENZIE (1981) 179-206, SAUNDERS (1991) 139-211, STALLEY (1995a), (1995b) (1996). The theme of Plato's and Plutarch's use of medical metaphors and analogies in political contexts is discussed in Chapter 3.1.

analogy, in which the parallelism between medicine and theology of providence culminates.[58] Medicines or remedies for diseases are given to organs or parts of the body so as to heal the whole bodily system, and what is useful (χρήσιμον) is also just (δίκαιον). Similarly, punishment and corrective measures are imposed on some members of the city or of the family, so that, spreading from one member to another and from one soul to another, they can cure the entire city or the entire family (560 A).

Plutarch expands on this idea later in his speech after the digression on the persistence (ἐπιμονή) of the soul after death (560 B-F). After the body dies, the soul survives and receives from the gods rewards or retribution according to its merits. This, however, does not have any effect on the people who are still alive, since the consequences for the soul remain confined to the afterlife. Conversely, the forms of recompense or punishment of children and families become visible in our world and act as a deterrent to the wicked.[59] For, as Plutarch adds, "there is no chastisement more shameful and painful for anyone than watching his own descendants suffer through his own fault".[60]

The dichotomy between the cure of souls and the cure of families and bodies politic correlates strongly with the organization of the narrative from this part of the dialogue to the conclusion. For Plutarch inserts a reference to the myth of Thespesius, which centres on the theme of the destiny of the soul after death (561 B). The myth, however, is postponed to the last chapters of the *De sera numinis vindicta* (563 B-568 A), creating another case of anticipation and delay in the narrative. As Gagné has thoughtfully written, the reason may be that the two themes require two different forms of

[58] See HIRSCH-LUIPOLD (2002) 266-75.
[59] On the idea that punishment sets public examples for citizens, something that cannot be provided by the punishment of the soul in the afterlife, cf. Pl. *Leg.* 9.854d, 9.862d-e, and 9.880e-881b.
[60] Plu. *De sera num. vind.* 561 A: οὐκ ἔστιν αἰσχίων καὶ λυποῦσα μᾶλλον ἑτέρα κόλασις ἢ τοὺς ἐξ ἑαυτῶν κακὰ πάσχοντας δι᾽ αὑτοὺς ὁρᾶν

communication – myth for the cure of the soul and rational discourse for the cure of families and bodies politic – that do not go well together.[61]

This also offers Plutarch the possibility of continuing his analysis of the late punishment of cities and families through medical analogies. In particular, Plutarch concentrates his attention on the parallelism between diseased fathers, who transmit to their children a predisposition towards the same illness (υἱὸν ἐπιτηδείως ἔχοντα πρὸς τὴν αὐτὴν νόσον), and families already contaminated by wrongdoings and wickedness, in which the young have the same "inborn similarity of evil" as their ancestors (κακίας ὁμοιότητα συγγενικὴν ἐν νέῳ ἤθει). Plutarch places emphasis on the necessity to use every possible medicine or therapy to prevent evil from fully germinating, growing, and openly revealing itself later in life, just as one should treat hereditary diseases still at the embryonic stage. This confirms that the god's preventive and providential intervention in history should be regarded as healing and as a precaution (ἰατρεία καὶ φυλακή) rather than as punishment (τιμωρία). Certainly, it cannot be judged as absurd (ἄτοπος) or ludicrous (γέλοιος), as argued earlier by Timon (561 C-562 A).

The dynamics of hereditary and collective guilt, however, are not simple, since they do not follow a pattern that repeats itself mechanically. One should not forget, in this regard, that Plutarch always opposes the Stoic notion of determinism and defends the idea of free will. He recalls that, while the innate character (τὸ συγγενὲς ἦθος) of animals manifests itself already in the first years of life, the nature (φύσις) of men and women is influenced by habits (ἔθη), beliefs (δόγματα), and laws (νόμους) (562 B). The theory briefly summarised in the *De sera numinis vindicta* and the terminology employed on this occasion correspond exactly to the more extensive description of the soul provided in the *De virtute morali*, where Plutarch clarifies how the human character (ἦθος) is not the same as nature,

[61] See GAGNÉ (2013) 44. On the myth of Thespesius, which cannot be discussed in detail, see also ALESSE (2001), FRAZIER (2010d), TAUFER (1999) and (2010).

despite being related to φύσις. Rather, it is a quality of the irrational part of the soul and consists in the ability to exercise moral virtue, that is, the ability to influence and change irrationality through habit (ἔθος) (*De virt. mor.* 443 C). Through habit, that is, as much as through education (παιδεία) and law (νόμος), one can make the reason (λόγος) train and correct human passions, especially at a young age, making opposite emotions harmonise and reach their balanced mean (μετριοπάθεια) (*De virt. mor.* 451 B-452 D). This application of reason to passions is described by Plutarch not only as training (παιδαγωγία) but also as treatment or care (θεράπεια) (*De virt. mor.* 451 C), adopting the same medical terminology used so consistently throughout the *De sera numinis vindicta*.[62]

The concise reference to the theory of passions, therefore, explains how human character can change and innate natural qualities may be altered – mitigated or enhanced – in the course of life. Men can hide evil and can imitate good, so that they can completely cancel and escape from the stains of their inborn wickedness, or they can make the traces of evil remain unnoticed for a long time, until some crime is eventually committed. Yet, whereas men can be deceived, the god knows the natural disposition of each one of us from the beginning. The god does not need to wait until evil assumes the concrete form of evil acts to intervene, but he may decide at any moment to punish the wickedness present in human nature so as to cure it (*De ser. num. vind.* 562 B-D). Thus Plutarch returns to a concept already expressed in his first speech: whenever the god applies justice to a diseased soul (νοσοῦσα ψυχή), he evaluates the passions (πάθη), trying to understand whether they may be made to change. For he knows how great a part of virtue, derived from him at birth, souls have in themselves, and how their innate nobility may be spoiled, against nature, by evil, originating from their way of life (τροφή) and bad companionship (ὁμιλία) (551 C-D).

[62] Plutarch's theory of passions is also discussed in Chapter 2.1.

This constitutes a further proof that concepts such as delay and procrastination fail to describe the true sense of the god's actions – as we saw in Plutarch's first discourse (553 F-556 D) – and that humans cannot fully understand the causes for the god's decisions, which may vary from case to case (562 E):[63]

> νῦν δ᾽ ὅτι καὶ πρὶν ἀδικεῖν ἐνίους τὴν ἕξιν αὐτῶν κολούει καὶ τὴν διάθεσιν, ἐγκαλοῦμεν, ἀγνοοῦντες ὅτι τοῦ γενομένου πολλάκις τὸ μέλλον καὶ τὸ λανθάνον τοῦ προδήλου χεῖρόν ἐστι καὶ φοβερώτερον, οὐ δυνάμενοι δὲ συλλογίζεσθαι τὰς αἰτίας, δι᾽ ἃς ἐνίους μὲν καὶ ἀδικήσαντας ἐᾶν βέλτιόν ἐστιν ἐνίους δὲ καὶ διανοουμένους προκαταλαμβάνειν· ὥσπερ ἀμέλει καὶ φάρμακα ἐνίοις μὲν οὐχ ἁρμόζει νοσοῦσιν, ἐνίοις δὲ λυσιτελεῖ καὶ μὴ νοσοῦσιν ἐπισφαλέστερον ἐκείνων ἔχουσιν.
>
> Now we accuse [the god] because he cuts short the acquired state and the condition of some people before they commit crimes, failing to realise that often the future and the unknown are worse and more fearful than what happened in the past and what is evident, since we cannot infer the reasons why it is better to allow some people to commit injustice and to prevent others while they still have it in mind. Similarly, indeed some medicines are not suited to some people who are ill, while they are better for others who are in graver danger, even if they are not ill.

This explains why a virtuous man can be the offspring of a wicked father, so that he is exempted from the hereditary penalty (ποινή) of his family, being, as it were, alienated (ἐκποίητος) from evil. Conversely, a person who develops a disease from the likeness to a dishonest lineage justly receives the punishment for his wickedness as if it were the debts for an inheritance. Antigonus, for instance, did not pay the price for Demetrius' crimes, because he was a good man. In other cases, however, justice prosecuted the likeness (ὁμοιότης) of evil in those people whose nature embraced and accepted the family spirit. The conclusions drawn by Plutarch at the end of his second speech are that some characters and passions of the soul, which are hidden in the first generations of a family (and, implicitly, of a city too), can reappear later in the history of the γένος or of the πόλις (563 B).

[63] Cf. *De ser. num. vind.* 549 F-550 C and 551 D-E. See HIRSCH-LUIPOLD (2002) 275-7.

Once again, Plutarch's complex philosophical analysis of divine providence carries several implications for historiography. Indeed, γένη and πόλεις are continuous – though not constant nor even always consistent – elements in history, which cross the various generations and tie past, present, and future together. They allow us to understand history and the direction impressed on it by the god at a macro-level. The theory that they are unitary living organisms corroborates the view of history embedded in the *De sera numinis vindicta*. On the one hand, we can infer that the lives of individuals cannot be treated separately from family history, which should be presented in historical works as the background that can explain the remote origins of both good and evil, and the reasons for the god's punishment or help. On the other hand, the constitutions and the political institutions of cities, education systems, common beliefs and traditions, the internal dynamics of civic life, the collective reactions of bodies politic to historical events, collective faults and virtues, and so forth are all objects of interest for historians in order to reconstruct the identity of the πόλεις and their historical trajectories. Biographers, alert as they must be to historical context and the way it influences and is influenced by their subjects, need to adopt the same perspectives as well.

From this viewpoint, the city does not simply constitute the external and inert context in which the great figures of the past lived and operated. Rather, the city, on the one hand, and the political and military leaders, on the other, form two poles that are in constant tension with one another, resulting in the establishment of a complex and dynamic interrelation, in which divine πρόνοια intervenes at crucial historical moments. That is to say, cities are historical 'agents' as much as great individuals. Consequently, historians and biographers should explore which role individual πόλεις played in the course of history and in the providential plan designed by the god, and how and when divine

πρόνοια was involved in the history of each city, rewarding the virtues or inflicting punishment for the vices of the whole body politic.

In this regard, it is plausible to think that cities too, like individuals, can be paralleled in search of deeper moral and philosophical lessons, which transcend the contingent peculiarities of historically determined social and political organizations. Such a possibility can be inferred by analogy with the accumulation and the comparison of *exempla* concerning individual characters, which, as we saw earlier, constitutes a major aspect of Plutarch's compositional method. Furthermore, as for the lives of great historical individuals, historiography and biography should try to examine and illustrate the causal links within the histories of cities and families, unfolding and re-moulding opportunely the stream of events through anticipations, postponements, summaries, simple allusions, and all the other narrative techniques usually employed by Plutarch, which we saw earlier. Thus as we have repeatedly emphasised, rather than narrating history chronologically, historiography should try to pinpoint the most crucial periods and events in history, on which a moral evaluation of cities can be based.

1.6 – Conclusion

The analysis of the various parts of the *De sera numinis vindicta* has hopefully shown how Plutarch inextricably links the idea of divine providence to history. Indeed, the questions of πρόνοια and the delays in divine punishment are primarily theological and philosophical, but their corollaries unmistakably concern the way in which history can – and should – be interpreted and, therefore, written. A historiography that does not take into account the god's intervention in history and the interaction between divine and human spheres may simply offer a partial – if not misleading – description of facts. Conversely, by acknowledging that πρόνοια plays a central role in history, it becomes evident how history

should be judged according to the same moral values used by the god to decide whether to punish or reward individuals and cities. A correct historiography, therefore, is the expression of Platonic philosophy, and the good historian is a Platonic philosopher, who has a genuine belief in divine providence and takes the broader perspective that allows such providence to be traced. The adoption of Platonic moralism as the main interpretative criterion also allows us to unveil the ultimate causes of events and the hidden sense of history. We can determine through it how individuals influenced history with their actions and decisions, whose impact was experienced not only by the contemporaries but also by later generations, and how families and cities should be regarded as historical 'agents' with their specific cultural identities, something that lets us put historical causes and effects into a diachronic perspective.

Platonic moralism and divine providence are also key concepts that seem to give concrete form to the historiographical project implicitly sketched by Plutarch in the *De sera numinis vindicta*. In particular, this project assumes the contours of a peculiar form of universal or global history, centred on the trajectories of individuals, lineages, and cities. In the universal history of lives and cities, as we defined it, crucial historical circumstances and events – on both a personal and a collective level – should be regarded either as the backdrop against which the historical protagonists and the bodies politic displayed their virtues and vices, or as the results of individual and collective ἀρετή or κακία. In both cases, historical occurrences represent the stage on which the god makes his providential intervention in history.

Thus historical situations should be thoroughly examined not only for their factual importance but also for their emblematic moral and theological meaning, all aspects that are interwoven. The universal history of lives and cities cannot consist of a merely chronological and linear narration of facts, but should present the causal and moral

connections of events, as they emerge from the stream of history, being then appropriately unfolded, reorganised, and offered for the readers' evaluation. An essential feature, in this regard, is parallelism, that is, the arrangement of the lives of individuals and cities in parallel, so that one can draw moral lessons, which transcend the geographical and historical limits of the actual situations from which they originate.

Finally, considering the way in which πρόνοια and divine retribution become involved in the histories of cities and families, universal history cannot have a definite conclusion, since it is not possible for humans to establish exactly when the stream of events will cease 'flowing' and when the innate nature of a family will no longer have effect on its descendants. The project of a universal history, that is, should be inevitably flexible, recognising the provisional character and the limits of human knowledge. Indeed, further readjustments, second thoughts, or a recalibration of one's evaluation, when necessity arises, are integral parts of the interpretative process. In this respect, Plutarch's method of analysis in the *De sera numinis vindicta*, with the second speech progressively examining and clarifying problematic points of the first discourse, is emblematic on a micro-level of the general attitude that historians should assume in their works. This also implies that later interpretations of history have better possibilities of grasping the long-term effects and implications of human actions than historical works written close to the events.

All these features show how the type of universal history characterised by a continuous chronological narration and an internal year-by-year articulation – just as in Polybius' *Historiae* and Diodorus Siculus' *Bibliotheca Historica* – is not entirely adequate for giving due emphasis to the role of divine providence in the lives of individuals and cities, or for highlighting the role of individuals and cities in history. Indeed, providence as much as great individuals are present in the two historical works just mentioned, but they do not determine the general shape of these historical works, whose main aim ultimately remains

to provide a historical narration. Yet, as the *De sera numinis vindicta* suggests, Plutarch appears to be inclined to interpret major historical events through the vicissitudes of great characters and bodies politic, since it is through the interaction with them that the divinity operates in the world. The *Parallel Lives*, therefore, taken as a series of biographies to be read all together as an open macrotext rather than as separate lives or pairs, represent Plutarch's solution to the historiographical questions raised in the *De sera numinis vindicta*. In Chapter 2, we shall see some concrete issues and some practical choices contained in Plutarch's historiographical project.

Two aspects, nonetheless, can be already anticipated. The first one concerns the knowledge of history. Since the universal history of individuals and cities, as designed by Plutarch, interprets history, without producing a full chronological narrative of the treated events, it is taken for granted that the readers have some knowledge of the facts. Such knowledge constitutes the indispensable premise to the full comprehension of the historical interpretation offered by Plutarch, just as we saw earlier with the numerous historical *exempla* discussed in the course of the *De sera numinis vindicta*. They cannot be decoded correctly by a completely uninformed audience, since the readers are called to supplement the brief account of the text with further information and details, which Plutarch leaves out of his more concise historical summaries.

As we shall see in Chapter 2, this is also a fundamental feature of the *Parallel Lives*. Some biographies are certainly more informative than others, possibly as it is plausible that the readers may have a greater familiarity with better-known historical periods and events – for instance, the Persian wars, the Peloponnesian war, or the Roman civil wars and the end of the Republic – than with others. It may be realistic to imagine that Plutarch's allusions to Thucydides or Herodotus are easier to grasp than the references to Polybius, Ephorus, or some other more obscure historian. The readers are always invited to an active involvement

in the interpretative process of history, which forces them to test and call into question their own preconceptions, however profound and extensive or superficial and partial these may be, just as Plutarch's friends do in the *De sera numinis vindicta* while debating with him.

The second aspect regards the importance of the author. In the *De sera numinis vindicta*, writing history is implicitly presented as a very challenging task. It presupposes that the historian has a broad and profound knowledge of the historical events as well as the ability to scrutinise and interpret the facts by adopting a moralistic approach. Thanks to this research method, he can discover the causal connections forged by divine providence and can relate historical events, their remote origins, and their future implications for individuals, their families, and their cities. To sum up, the historian is called to judge history and its protagonists, distinguishing between the good and the bad. In many respects, this task has some affinity with the god's way of judging history and people. As we recalled earlier, the Platonic philosopher, adopting the correct approach to history indicated by Platonism, can assume this role. In this regard, it is interesting how Plutarch describes the god's methodology in the last part of his speech (562 A-B):

> ἐκεῖνο δ᾽ οὐκ ἔστι καθ᾽ Ἡσίοδον οὐδ᾽ ἀνθρωπίνης ἔργον σοφίας ἀλλὰ θεοῦ, τὸ διορᾶν καὶ διαισθάνεσθαι τὰς ὁμοιοπαθείας καὶ τὰς διαφοράς, πρὶν εἰς μεγάλα τοῖς πάθεσιν ἐμπεσούσας ἀδικήματα γενέσθαι καταφανεῖς.
>
> This does not happen in Hesiodean fashion nor is it the work of human wisdom, but of the god's wisdom: seeing through and distinguishing between the same passions and their differences, before they become evident by falling into great wrongdoings.

This formulation is not very distant from the programmatic statement of *Mul. virt.* 243 B-D and from the historiographical principle behind the *Parallel Lives*, and it clarifies how the god forms his judgement on the virtues and the vices of humans through similarities and differences, just as philosophers and historians do. The main difference lies in the fact that, while the god has an innate and perfect knowledge of the past and the

future, the historian proceeds through attempts and possible mistakes. Yet, despite these limits, the historian/philosopher is the best interpreter and writer of history. Thus his comments and judgements – that is, his direct interventions in the story narrated as the external narrator – as much as the interconnections, the comparisons, the anticipations or the delays, the accumulations of *exempla*, and so forth, which he creates within the narrative, are the basis for discussing history with the readers. This corresponds to Plutarch's narrative strategy and to the interlocutors' response in the *De sera numinis vindicta*, which we saw earlier. Once more, then, the techniques adopted by Plutarch in this dialogue are expressions of an idea of history and historiography that are also applied in his major historical work: the *Parallel Lives*.

CHAPTER 2

THE *PARALLEL LIVES* AS A MACROTEXT

In Chapter 1, we discussed some historiographical principles that can be inferred from Plutarch's *De sera numinis vindicta* and that seemingly underlie an idea of universal or global history centred on the lives of individuals and cities. We also showed how the *Parallel Lives*, incorporating these theoretical principles, probably represent the work that embodies best this idea of history. In this Chapter, we will examine whether this hypothesis can be further substantiated and verified by more solid evidence. In particular, we will scrutinise whether and how the *Parallel Lives* can be considered not only a series of biographies but also a unitary work. For this reason, we will analyse the literary form of the *Parallel Lives* as a composite, yet integrated whole. Furthermore, we will explore some characteristics of the *Parallel Lives* that may encourage readers – Plutarch's contemporary readership as well as modern readers – to follow historical threads throughout different pairs of Lives. In this regard, an important aspect of our analysis will consist of elucidating which narrative features help the readers to decode Plutarch's interpretations of historical events and to form in turn their own judgment on the facts presented in the Lives, drawing from them moral lessons.

2.1 – The *Parallel Lives* as a historical work

As anticipated, the first question that we need to address concerns the possibility of reading the *Parallel Lives* as a historical work, in which, by covering different generations, Plutarch explores the lives of exceptional individuals and the trajectories of their cities. According to this hypothesis, the *Parallel Lives* would be designed to be read all together as a unitary composition, structured into sections or units represented by the different Lives and pairs.

Consequently, the aim of the *Parallel Lives* would be to analyse the most important periods of human history, focusing on its protagonists and their cities. One may wonder, however, whether the premise of this theory is correct. That is to say, did Plutarch himself really conceive the *Parallel Lives* as so peculiar a type of historical work, in which he applied the historiographical principles established in the *De sera numinis vindicta*? Is this how Plutarch's contemporary readers may have thought about the twenty-two plus paralleled biographies?

In the *Parallel Lives*, Plutarch does not draw a clear-cut distinction between biography and history as different genres, nor does he offer a universally valid definition of biography. As Duff has thoughtfully commented, even the well-known prologue to the *Life of Alexander*, where Plutarch differentiates his βίοι (Lives) from other 'large-scale' historical accounts (ἱστορίαι), cannot be considered a formal manifesto for the whole series (*Alex.* 1.2). Rather, even if Plutarch highlights some features that also characterise many other Lives, his main purpose seems to be to emphasise the original aim, scope, and form of his work on Alexander and Caesar in contrast with other historiographical works on the same theme:[1] that is, Plutarch appears to refer to the two biographies of the pair that he is introducing rather than to biography in general.

In the Introduction, we saw how biography may be regarded as one of the several options for examining and discussing history from which ancient writers could choose. As Duff correctly puts it, one should not forget that "the boundaries between different forms of writing about the past, and the labels applied to them, remained fluid".[2] Indeed, in the *Parallel Lives* Plutarch refers to his work by employing not only the substantive βίος but also

[1] DUFF (1999) 13-22. Duff compares Plutarch's distinction between βίος and ἱστορία with that between history and encomium drawn by Polybius with regard to his biographical work on Philopoemen (10.21.5-8). Cf. Chapter 1.3.
[2] DUFF (1999) 22.

ἱστορία and the related verb ἱστορῶ:[3] that is, by using a variety of terms and expressions, Plutarch appears to consider the nature of the *Parallel Lives* flexible, emphasising their biographical content (in addition to *Alex.* 1.1-2, cf. *Aem.* 1.1-4, *Demetr.* 1.5.7, *Per.* 2.5, *Tim.* 15.11) as much as their historiographical value (*Aem.* 1.1, *comp. Aem.-Tim.* (40)1.1, *Cim.* 2.5, *Fab.* 1.1, *comp. Per.-Fab.* (28)1.1, *Nic.* 1.5) or the historical research behind them (cf. ἱστορία or ἱστορῶ at *Aem.* 1.5, *Flam.* 21.15, *Thes.* 1.4).[4]

Besides, in general, Plutarch attributes to historiography a broad meaning, which can include very diverse works and authors, without defining narrow limits in terms of literary genre.[5] A clear example of this approach can be found in the *Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum*, where Plutarch adopts the hendiadys 'enquiry and narration' (ἱστορία καὶ διήγησις) as the umbrella name for works that may appear to have very little in common (*Suav. viv. Epic.* 1093 B-C). He mentions Herodotus' τὰ Ἑλληνικά (the *Historiae*), Xenophon's τὰ Περσικά (that is, the *Cyropaedia*), the Homeric poems (ὅσσα θ᾽ Ὅμηρος ἐθέσπισε θέσκελα εἰδώς), Eudoxus' Περίοδοι (*Circumnavigations*), Aristotle's Κτίσεις (*Foundations*) and Πολιτεῖαι (*Constitutions of cities*), and Aristoxenus' Βίοι ἀνδρῶν (*Lives of Men*). In Plutarch's view, all these authors bring great and untainted enjoyment (τὸ εὐφραῖνον) to their readers by shaping with powerful and graceful language and style (λόγον ἔχοντα δύναμιν καὶ χάριν) the historical subject matter, constituted by glorious and great deeds (πράξεις καλαὶ καὶ μεγάλαι).

Thus one can infer that the *Parallel Lives* – and, more broadly speaking, the βίος genre in general – are history: that is, they constitute the format for writing history most

[3] In a few cases, Plutarch uses the full title of his work, παράλληλοι βίοι (*Parallel Lives*); see *Cim.* 2.2, *Dem.* 3.1, *Dio* 2.7, *Thes.* 1.2. Occasionally, Plutarch also refers to one or more pairs of Lives through the substantive συζυγία; cf. *Demetr.* 1.5.

[4] On the various meanings of ἱστορία, see DUFF (1999) 18-20, MAZZARINO (1966) 136-9, VALGIGLIO (1987) 50-62, (1991) 27-35.

[5] One can reasonably assume that the lost Πῶς κρίνομεν τὴν ἀληθῆ ἱστορίαν (*How to Judge True History*), Lamp. Cat. 124, might have provided greater insight into Plutarch's idea of history. Conversely, it is impossible to make conjectures about the relevance of the Πῶς κρίνομεν τὴν ἀλήθειαν (*How to Distinguish the Truth*), Lamp. Cat. 225, for Plutarch's historiography.

consistent with Plutarch's cultural, philosophical, and historical interests. In particular, the choice of this type of historiography allows Plutarch to concentrate his attention on individuals. Several programmatic statements in the *Parallel Lives* confirm how important this aspect is for Plutarch. Once again, the beginning of the *Life of Alexander* proves useful, since here Plutarch explicitly affirms that his main objective is to reveal the character (ἦθος) of the protagonist, penetrating the signs of his soul (τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς σημεῖα) (*Alex.* 1.2-3). Similarly, the prologue to the *Life of Nicias* confirms that the historical research conducted for and the narratives shaped in the *Parallel Lives* aim primarily to observe and understand the protagonist's nature and disposition of character (*Nic.* 1.5):

> ἃς γοῦν Θουκυδίδης ἐξήνεγκε πράξεις καὶ Φίλιστος ἐπεὶ παρελθεῖν οὐκ ἔστι, μάλιστά γε δὴ τὸν τρόπον καὶ τὴν διάθεσιν τοῦ ἀνδρὸς ὑπὸ πολλῶν καὶ μεγάλων παθῶν ἀποκαλυπτομένην περιεχούσας, ἐπιδραμὼν βραχέως καὶ διὰ τῶν ἀναγκαίων, ἵνα μὴ παντάπασιν ἀμελὴς δοκῶ καὶ ἀργὸς εἶναι, τὰ διαφεύγοντα τοὺς πολλούς, ὑφ᾽ ἑτέρων δ᾽ εἰρημένα σποράδην ἢ πρὸς ἀναθήμασιν ἢ ψηφίσμασιν εὑρημένα παλαιοῖς πεπείραμαι συναγαγεῖν, οὐ τὴν ἄχρηστον ἀθροίζων ἱστορίαν, ἀλλὰ τὴν πρὸς κατανόησιν ἤθους καὶ τρόπου παραδιδούς.
>
> At all events, in order not to appear utterly careless and lazy, I have run through briefly and without unnecessary detail the deeds that Thucydides and Philistus described, since one cannot pass them by, containing as they do the protagonist's temperament and disposition, which is revealed by many great sufferings, whereas I have tried to collect those aspects that escape most writers and that have been mentioned here and there by others, or have been found either on votive offerings or in ancient decrees, without gathering a useless historical narration, but offering one that contributes to understand character and temperament.

As in the proem of the *Life of Alexander*, in the passage quoted above Plutarch also lays great emphasis on the difference between pragmatic history and a history that focuses on the protagonists of historical events.[6]

[6] In his thought-provoking analysis of the prologue to the *Life of Nicias*, Duff noticed its strong similarity to the opening section of the *Life of Galba* (2.5) and to an important passage in the *Life of Artaxerxes* (8.1). In these two unparalleled biographies, Plutarch also remarks that the specific goal of his biographies is to uncover the character of the protagonists in contrast with other historical works, which focus primarily on great political and military exploits (πράξεις). See DUFF (1999) 23-30.

Indeed, we are very close to the idea of history that emerges from the *De sera numinis vindicta*. Some implications arising from Plutarch writing biographical historiography show further correspondences between this philosophical dialogue and the historical concepts and narrative strategies applied in the *Parallel Lives*. Plutarch's strong interest in the ἦθος of the heroes is closely related to the moral dimension of the Lives. Revealing the subjects' character constitutes for Plutarch the first step in improving the readers' character as much as his own (cf. *Aem.* 1.1-4). In this respect, the ethical function of the *Parallel Lives* requires the active involvement of its readers. This also implies that the existences of Greek and Roman historical figures are evaluated from a moral perspective.[7]

We can explore this concept further. Gill has illuminatingly argued that the *Parallel Lives* are written from a 'character-viewpoint', a feature shared by many other ancient works.[8] His premise is that character formation results from the combination of innate temperament and potential (φύσις and δυνάμεις), reason (λόγος), and habituation (ἔθος).[9] From this perspective, the protagonists of the Lives are seen as playing an active role in shaping their ἦθος from childhood to adult life. Whether they become morally good or bad depends on their thoughtful or superficial reflection and on their right or wrong choices (προαιρέσεις), which can make them either harmonise passions – reaching the optimal

[7] On moralism as the primary goal of the *Parallel Lives*, see DIHLE (1956) 81, DUFF (1999) 52-3, FRAZIER (1996) 9-11, PELLING (1995=2002) 237-9, RUSSELL (1966=1995) 76-81, (1973) 103-16, VALGIGLIO (1987) 53-7 and 64-6, (1992) 3992-6, WARDMAN (1974) 18-26, ZIEGLER (1951-1965) 317-18.

[8] See GILL (1983) especially 469-82, (1990) especially 1-9, (2006) 412-15.

[9] Gill is here referring to the *De virtute morali*. In this regard, Plutarch appears to have been influenced by Peripatetic philosophy: Nonetheless, the question of Plutarch's knowledge of Aristotle's ethics and, in general, his relationship with the Peripatetic school is debated. Some scholars are sceptical about the hypothesis that Plutarch may have read directly the *Ethica Nicomachea*: DIHLE (1956) 58, HERSHBELL (2004) 154-5, SANDBACH (1982) 217-9 and 221-2. Others, conversely, defend the idea of Plutarch's direct use of Aristotle's works (together with those of later middle-Platonists and middle-Aristotelians): BABUT (1996), DILLON (1977) 193-8, (1988) 363-4, GOTTSCHALK (1987) 1142. On Plutarch's ethical philosophy being typically (middle-)Platonic, despite the instrumental – and to certain extent creative – use of Peripatetic concepts in anti-Stoic polemics, see DILLON (1984), (1988), DONINI (1974) 63-98, (1986), (1999=2011), (2004), OPSOMER (2004). On the other hand, BECCHI (1975), (1978), (1981a), (1981b), (1990) 27-48, (1999), (2005), (2014) 79-95 interprets the *De virtute morali* and, in particular, the theory of μετριοπάθεια as markedly middle-Aristotelian.

condition of μετριοπάθεια – or lose control of their impulses.[10] Thus, since historical figures are accountable for their character traits and dispositions, and for how their ἦθος evolves throughout their existence, they can be assessed by employing moral standards of excellence such as 'virtue' or 'good character'. This first part of Gill's theory may be accepted without too much reservation. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter 1, the *De sera numinis vindicta* also appears to convey a similar idea: human behaviour in history can be evaluated through the lens of ethics.[11]

Gill, however, has also proposed a distinction between 'character-viewpoint' and 'personality viewpoint'. According to the latter, the person is relatively passive with regard to psychological phases and personality traits, so that s/he cannot be liable to moral praise or blame. In Gill's view, then, a 'personality viewpoint' – typical of modern writing – does not entail evaluation but rather empathetic understanding in an ethically neutral way.[12] Plutarch, so the argument goes, does not adopt this approach in the *Parallel Lives*, because his chief concern is constantly character. Furthermore, in addition to the initial formulation of his theory, Gill has also discussed the contrast between 'objective-participant' and 'subjective-individualist' conceptions of the person.[13] The 'subjective-individualist' approach, characteristic of post-Cartesian and post-Kantian modern philosophy, identifies the person with conscious mind (the 'self' or 'I' who asserts "*cogito, ergo sum*"). In modern thinking, this first-person viewpoint also shapes ethical judgement as much as reflexivity and self-consciousness. The 'objective-participant' criterion, conversely, places emphasis on the possibility of analysing human psychology "as the complex of psychological functions

[10] Plutarch's idea of character formation and moral improvement, using reason and virtuous practices, which can restrain passions, influences several philosophical works: the *De audiendis poetis* (28 D-E, 31 B-C), the *De adulatore et amico* (52 A-B, 52 F-53 A), the *De recta ratione audiendi* (37 D-E), the *De profectibus in virtute* (76 D-E, 77 D-78 E, 80 E-81 F, 82 B-C, 83 E-84 B), the *De amicorum multitudine* (97 A), the *De E apud Delphos* (392 B-E), the *De cohibenda ira* (453 A-454 B, 455 B-E, 459 B-460 C), the *De tranquillitate animi* (467 B), the *De genio Socratis* (584 E). Cf. also the spurious *De liberis educandis* (2 A-B).
[11] See Chapter 1.1.
[12] See GILL (1983) 470-1. Cf. also the similar distinction made by DIHLE (1956) 76-81 from a rather different perspective.
[13] GILL (1996) 1-18, (2006) 328-44.

or the set of beliefs and desires that best explains human behaviour to an observer".[14] According to this approach, ethical choices are embedded in the code of society, with which individuals are not in a relationship of independence. Once again, as Gill argues, Plutarch only displays the 'objective-participant' view of character, while the latter concept frames modern literature, centred on the vision of self as a unifying consciousness asserting its autonomous will.

Gill's theory has been (gently) criticised by Pelling, who has argued that these categorisations may not entirely correspond to Plutarch's different ways of characterising the protagonists of the *Parallel Lives*.[15] Apart from a few characters that are closer to types than to individual personalities (e.g. Brutus and Flamininus), very often Plutarch's protagonists are clearly individuated and their vicissitudes encourage empathy and understanding more than rigorous moral evaluation.[16]

On the other hand, with regard to the difference between the 'subjective-individualist' and 'objective-participant' approaches, Gill appears to have enlightened an important aspect of the relationship between the heroes of the *Parallel Lives* and their societies. Indeed, as Pelling has thoughtfully remarked, the 'subjective-individualist' strand is not absent from the *Parallel Lives*. In fact, in very many cases Plutarch concentrates his attention on the description of 'grandes scènes', to use an expression coined by Frazier, in which the protagonists are called to take life-changing decisions and their individual personalities emerge very distinctly.[17] Yet the heroes of the Lives are embedded in their society and often embody the code of conduct of their city: the personality of the protagonist is shaped by the city's education system; his main virtues and vices usually

[14] GILL (2006) 338.
[15] PELLING (1990a=2002) 321-2.
[16] In this regard, Pelling's distinction between 'protreptic' and 'descriptive' moralism is still extremely useful; see PELLING (1995=2002).
[17] See FRAZIER (1992). PELLING (1990a=2002) remarks upon the evident difference between these life-defining moments in the *Parallel Lives* and those in other literary genres such as tragedy and epic, where the 'self-in-dialogue' is caught in agonising moments, a modality absent from Plutarch's biographies.

correspond with or explicitly oppose the virtues and the vices of the city; the political circumstances in which the hero is involved can explain his character and can condition the moral evaluation of his actions.

Thus Gill's theory of the 'objective-participant' approach implicitly confirms that in the *Parallel Lives* Plutarch shows a strong interest in cities as much as in individuals, a feature that we have discussed in relation to the *De sera numinis vindicta*. In this regard too, then, the *Parallel Lives* represent a type of history, in which just as the character of the protagonists is progressively revealed in course of the narration, so the 'character' of society and the body politic – national virtues and vices, political dynamics between social forces, strength and weakness of the political system, and so forth – is also gradually exposed and problematised.[18]

2.2 – An open macrotext

Having clarified that the *Parallel Lives* can be considered a historical work that focuses on individuals and their cities, we can now try to investigate some aspects of their literary form. A recent trend in Plutarchan scholarship has stressed the importance of reading each pair (συζυγία) of the *Parallel Lives* as a discrete unit: that is, the *Parallel Lives* are formed by a series of twenty-two plus books, each one presenting internal subdivisions such as a proemial section, the first Life, the second Life, and the final formal comparison. The linkage between these parts of each book is strengthened by the comparative strategy employed by Plutarch, who seems to have planned, prepared, and written each Life having already in mind the counterpart.[19]

[18] On Plutarch's interest in society in the *Parallel Lives*, see Pelling (1988a=2002), (1990a=2002).
[19] On this complex topic, see DUFF (1999) 249-86, (2011), LARMOUR (1992) 4163-74, PELLING (1979=2002), (1980=2002) especially 91-5, (1988b) 31-6, (2011) 36-42 and 56-8, STADTER (1965) 125-40, (1975), (1989) xxxviii-lii, SWAIN (1988), (1989), (1990).

Conversely, there has been less interest in studying the Lives as a series. Indeed, since Pelling's pioneering work modern scholarship has accepted that Plutarch prepared more Lives simultaneously.[20] Moreover, there have been successful attempts to examine in parallel multiple Lives concerning the same historical period, as in the case of the Persian Wars or the Hellenistic kings who ruled after Alexander the Great.[21] Conversely, all the attempts to consider the Parallel Lives a universal or global history have been frustrated by the anomaly of the parallel structure and the lack of equivalent examples in Greek or Roman literature. As already anticipated in the Introduction, usually seriality has not been considered a decisive factor.

In order to re-evaluate this aspect of the *Parallel Lives* as a crucial element that can make us view Plutarch's Lives as a historical work, I propose to apply the model of the open macrotext. As explained in the Introduction, a macrotext can be thought as a complex semiotic unit formed by different texts, which maintain their autonomy, but, simultaneously, are in close interrelationship with one another. The overall meaning of the macrotext is deeper, wider, and more nuanced than those expressed by each text alone. The macrotext, then, cannot be regarded as the mere addition of various texts. In fact, its meaning may alter or correct the partial meanings of its sections. In this regard, in the *Parallel Lives* acknowledging the meaning of the macrotext may not be very different from acknowledging that each pair as a whole does not simply correspond to two biographies, but has a greater complexity.

In order to define the macrotext, we need to describe its cohesiveness. The *Parallel Lives* as a macrotext should be strengthened by recurrent stylistic and thematic features. In brief, they should display the presence of 'autotextual modules'. They form the 'autotextual framework' that creates close interconnections within the macrotext and allows the readers

[20] PELLING (1979=2002).
[21] See in particular the various papers in HUMBLE (2010b).

to decode the messages (historical analyses, moral questions, theological interpretations, and so forth) conveyed by the author. In the three Lives examined, we will explore in particular the complementarity of Lives that concern the same historical period and in which the protagonist of other Lives play an apparently marginal role. Such presences encourage the readers to read each life in light of the others, integrating the information contained in each biography and adapting it to different contexts.

CHAPTER 3

THE *LIFE OF LYCURGUS*

After discussing some of the main features of Plutarch's historical project, in this Chapter we start the analysis of our case study: the history of Sparta as Plutarch narrates it in the Lives specifically devoted to Spartan characters. The *Life of Lycurgus* – the first Life of the Spartan series – is an anomalous biography for two main reasons.[1] The first one concerns the fact that with Lycurgus and Numa Plutarch approaches the limits of what can still be considered history, beyond which the slippery territory of myth begins. As Plutarch explains in the opening section of the *Life of Theseus*, the *Lives of Lycurgus and Numa* constitute the farthest point that can be reached by probable reasoning (εἰκότι λόγῳ) and historical research dealing with facts (ἱστορίᾳ πραγμάτων ἐχομένῃ) (*Thes.* 1.2-4). This means that the basis for reconstructing Lycurgus' existence is certainly less firm than for other characters. Thus, while being inevitably forced to speculate on many uncertain or unknown aspects of the protagonist's life, Plutarch concentrates his attention predominantly on the most important and historically most 'certain' event regarding Lycurgus: the Spartan constitution.

The second anomaly derives from the first. The purely biographical information about Lycurgus is concentrated in a few chapters of the Life. Much greater space is devoted to the thorough examination of Spartan education, political and military institutions, social customs, and religious traditions. In many respects, the *Life of Lycurgus* is the biography of the birth of Sparta as a distinctly different city from the other Greek πόλεις. Plutarch, nonetheless, also inserts into the narration some comments about the crisis of Sparta in the

[1] According to JONES (1966=1995) 106-12, the *Lives of Lycurgus and Numa* must have been part of the first group of Lives published by Plutarch, and probably came out as the sixth pair of the series. The probable *terminus post quem* is AD 96.

fourth century BC. Lycurgus' reorganisation of Sparta, then, seems to be viewed in light of Spartan decline, that is, in this biography Plutarch appears to choose the precariousness of the Spartan political system as a key to understanding and narrating the history of Sparta. The readers, moreover, are already invited to follow the later development of Spartan decay. Implicitly, the *Life of Lycurgus* paves the way for the *Life of Lysander* and the *Life of Agesilau*s, where some topics treated in this first Spartan biography are further discussed.

In this regard, since it is impossible to scrutinise all the questions that relate to the Spartan constitution, we will focus on four major themes, which not only emerge from the *Life of Lycurgus* but also run through the other Spartan Lives. The first two are closely interconnected and concern the rule of the state: Lycurgus' relationship with the divinity and his role as 'doctor' of the city. On the one hand, as Plutarch emphasises, for his most important political decisions Lycurgus sought and received the approval of the god. This appears to have conferred sacrality not only on Lycurgus but also on the Spartan constitution. On the other hand, Lycurgus is portrayed as the physician of Sparta, who tried to find the most effective treatment for the city's ills and the best regimen to preserve its integrity. These two qualities – devotion to the god and care for Sparta – made Lycurgus a virtuous lawgiver and a paradigmatic Spartan king, a model for future Spartan rulers to imitate.

The third theme, which we will analyse in detail, is the education in φιλοτιμία (love of honour, ambition) and φιλονικία (love of victory or spirit of emulation).[2] Plutarch, following other authors who also conduct comprehensive surveys of the Spartan socio-

[2] PELLING (2000=2002) 347 n. 24, SHIPLEY (1997) 71-2, STADTER (2011) 238-41 have convincingly argued that φιλονικία and its cognates derive from the root φιλο-νικ-, associated with νίκη (victory). Conversely, the alternative spelling *φιλονεικ- simply represents the result of Hellenistic itacism. Thus the supposed derivation from νεῖκος (strife) and the meaning 'love of strife' or 'contentiousness' are to be rejected as they are not supported by sufficient etymological evidence. Throughout this thesis, then, I have preferred to use φιλονικία/φιλόνικος and to generalise (wherever possible) the translations 'love of victory' and 'fond of victory', bearing in mind that these terms were ambivalent. Indeed, an excessive or untimely love of victory was felt as dangerous and risky, as we will see in the cases of Lysander and Agesilaus. Finally, following Pelling, I too believe that an element of emulation and rivalry was an intrinsic aspect of φιλονικία.

political system, associates these concepts with the traditional training of the Spartans: φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία, that is, constitute crucial moral values, which the young Spartans had to learn and to which they had to adhere in adult life. As we shall see, however, there are remarkable differences between the literary sources that date to the fourth century BC (Xenophon's *Respublica Lacedaemoniorum*, Plato's *Respublica* and *Leges*, *Alcibiades I*, Aristotle's *Politica*) and to the Hellenistic and early Imperial age (especially Polybius' *Historiae*, in addition to Plutarch's *Life of Lycurgus*), and earlier authors of the archaic and classical age, who do not mention φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία in reference to Sparta. Ambition, rivalry, and spirit of emulation, therefore, seem to reflect the Spartan society of the fourth century BC and are projected onto the past – that is, onto the Lycurgan tradition – in order to explain the crisis and the decline of Sparta.

Finally, we will examine Lycurgus' ban on money. Just as for φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία, in this case too, Plutarch anticipates how so important a measure for Spartan social life evolved in later epochs, becoming the decisive factor in the downfall of Sparta. Thus Plutarch considers again the Spartan disregard for wealth in light of the crisis that occurred in Lysander's time. In this case, the link with future events is explicit: Plutarch attributes to Lysander responsibility for sending money to Sparta, something that had the ultimate effect of subverting the entire Lycurgan political and social system. Furthermore, this comment on the future of Sparta implicitly encourages the readers to continue exploring the causes of Spartan decay by reading the later Spartan Lives.

3.1 – Lycurgus, lawgiver and king

At the beginning of the *Life of Lycurgus*, considering the great uncertainty surrounding the protagonist, Plutarch decides to address some methodological questions in order to explain how he has attempted to reconstruct biographical details about Lycurgus from the scant

and contradictory information available. He informs the readers that he has chosen to follow a criterion of probability, selecting and gathering the material that presents fewer inconsistencies and is recorded by the most notable authors (*Lyc.* 1.7).[3]

After clarifying his approach, Plutarch begins the narration by discussing Lycurgus' lineage (*Lyc.* 1.8).[4] Subsequently, by treating briefly the events concerning King Sous, one of Lycurgus' ancestors, Plutarch sketches out the climate of archaic Sparta, characterised by territorial tensions after the Spartan enslavement of the helots and the annexation of part of Arcadia (*Lyc.* 2.1). In this context, the moral superiority of Sous emerged in contrast with the Spartans' lack of endurance (*Lyc.* 2.3). King Eurypon, conversely, tried to relax the excessive absolutism of the monarchy so as to obtain the sympathy of the multitude (δημαγωγῶν καὶ χαριζόμενος τοῖς πολλοῖς) (*Lyc.* 2.4). As a result, Plutarch notes, in the following generations the kings who sought to restrain the boastfulness of the people were hated, while others, who courted the favour of the multitude – thus revealing their weakness – had to accept a decrease in their power and humiliation. The consequence was a long period of lawlessness and disorder (ἀνομία καὶ ἀταξία) at Sparta (*Lyc.* 2.5).

Plutarch's analysis of the conditions of Sparta shows primarily the lack of balance in Spartan politics, which was polarised between the kings and the multitude, between violence (τῷ βιάζεσθαι τοὺς πολλούς) and impotent feebleness (ἀσθένεια). Implicitly, Plutarch seems to suggest that Sparta needed to find the right measure between these extremes, a topic that assumes a crucial importance not only in this Life but also in all the other Spartan biographies.

A few generations later, then, Lycurgus rose as a virtuous and powerful ruler while Sparta was still imbued with this atmosphere of constant turmoil. As Plutarch informs us, his beginning was not easy. After abdicating as king of Sparta in favour of his newborn

[3] On Plutarch's method of analysis based on probable reconstructions, see LOMBARDI (1996).
[4] On Plutarch's reconstruction of Lycurgus' lineage, see MANFREDINI-PICCIRILLI (1980) 219-21.

nephew Charilaus, the legitimate successor to the dead king Polydectes, Lycurgus' older brother, Lycurgus decided to leave Sparta. Despite being admired by the majority of the citizens for his lofty spirit (φρόνημα), justice (δικαιοσύνη), and virtue (ἀρετή), he also aroused envy especially in his relatives, who accused him of plotting secretly against Charilaus' mother. Thus we went into voluntary exile and started to travel abroad (*Lyc.* 3).

Plutarch concentrates his attention on these journeys as a decisive phase of Lycurgus' life, when Lycurgus met illustrious personalities and studied different political systems (*Lyc.* 3.1). In the various places that he visited (Crete, Ionia, and possibly Egypt), he acted as a doctor in search of the right cure for his diseased patient. As Plutarch comments, during his stay in Crete, Lycurgus "admired and adopted some of the laws with the intention of transferring and using them at home, while there were others that he despised."[5] In particular, he convinced the poet Thales to go to Sparta, so that his poems could encourage obedience (εὐπείθεια) and unanimity (ὁμόνοια) through their orderly and soothing music and rhythms (διὰ μελῶν ἅμα καὶ ῥυθμῶν πολὺ τὸ κόσμιον ἐχόντων καὶ καταστατικόν). Lycurgus' intention was to make the Spartans soften their characters and get used to appreciating noble qualities (*Lyc.* 4.1-3). When he moved to Asia, conversely, he contrasted the austere customs of the Cretans with the Ionians' extravagance and luxury (πολυτελεῖαι καὶ τρυφαί), "just as a physician compares unsound and sickly bodies with healthy ones".[6] His objective was to observe the differences between their modes of life and forms of government (βίοι καὶ πολιτεῖαι). Finally, in Egypt he was amazed by the separation of the warriors from the other castes, a circumstance that he later copied in the Spartan constitution by excluding artisans and craftsmen from citizenship.

The first part of Plutarch's biographical account of Lycurgus continues with Lycurgus' return to Sparta, where he was called back by the Spartans, who realised that

[5] Plu. *Lyc.* 4.1: τὰ μὲν ἐζήλωσε καὶ παρέλαβε τῶν νόμων, ὡς οἰκαδε μετοίσων καὶ χρησόμενος, ἔστι δ᾽ ὧν κατεφρόνησεν.
[6] Plu. *Lyc.* 4.4: ὥσπερ ἰατρὸς σώμασιν ὑγιεινοῖς ὕπουλα καὶ νοσώδη παραβαλὼν.

their kings were not better than 'the many' and did not have the same natural disposition to command (φύσις ἡγεμονική) nor the same capacity for leadership (δύναμις ἀγωγός) as Lycurgus (*Lyc.* 5.1). In this case too Plutarch employs a medical analogy similar to that already used with reference to Lycurgus' research into the right cure for Sparta. Plutarch narrates that Lycurgus started immediately to transform the organisation of the state. Since he believed that a partial modification of the laws would not be effective nor useful, he planned to begin a completely new regimen (δίαιτα), "just as one would do with a body debilitated and full of all sorts of diseases, after dissolving and altering its temperament by means of drugs and purges."[7] The plan was put in motion gradually: first, Lycurgus secretly informed and involved in his project a few of his friends, later he included more citizens in the action and he asked them to go to the agora to overcome the resistance of his opponents (*Lyc.* 5.6). The Lycurgan constitution, then, was born out of this political tumult (ταραχή), with Lycurgus subsequently instituting the Gerousia as his first official act in order to give more stability and balance to the entire Spartan political system (*Lyc.* 5.7-11).

As we have already mentioned, in his account Plutarch repeatedly employs medical analogies to describe Lycurgus' method as a law reformer. Indeed, these images recall the analogy between the city and the body examined in Chapter 1 with regard to the *De sera numinis vindicta*.[8] So strong a connection between medicine, moral philosophy, and politics is based on the idea that the soul and the body are contiguous, since they are the two constituent parts of the human being, and their regulating principles cannot but be the

[7] Plu. *Lyc.* 5.3: ὥσπερ σώματι πονηρῷ καὶ γέμοντι παντοδαπῶν νοσημάτων τὴν ὑπάρχουσαν ἐκτήξας καὶ μεταβαλὼν κρᾶσιν ὑπὸ φαρμάκων καὶ καθαρμῶν.

[8] Plutarch's deep interest in medical science emerges from several works in the *Moralia*: for instance, the *Animine an corporis affectiones sint peiores*, the *De esu carnium*, and the *De tuenda sanitate praecepta*. Numerous medical questions are also examined in antiquarian and miscellaneous works such as the *Aetia Graeca*, the *Aetia Romana*, and the *Quaestiones convivales*: see *Aet. Gr.* 23.296 F, *Aet. Rom.* 1.263 E, 95.286 E, 109.289 F, 110.290 A, 111.290 B-D, 112.290 E-291 B, *Quaest. conv.* 1.6 623 E-625 A, 1.7 625 A-C, 1.8 625 C-626 E, 2.2 635 A-D, 3.4 650 F-651 E, 3.7 655 E-656 B, 3.8 656 C-657 A, 3.10 657 F-659 D, 4.1 660 D-664 A, 5.4 677 C-678 B, 5.7 680 C-683 A, 6.1 686 E-687 B, 6.2 687 C-689 A, 6.2 689 B-690 A, 6.8 693 F-695 E, 7.1 697 F-700 B, 8.9 731 A-734 C. On Plutarch's knowledge of medicine, see AGUILAR (1996), (2005) BOULOGNE (1996), CORVISIER (1994), GRIMAUDO (2004) especially 417-19, LÓPEZ FÉREZ (1990), RODRÍGUEZ ALFAGEME (2005), SENZASONO (1992) 11-36.

same, a theme explored extensively by Platonic philosophy.[9] In this respect, it is plausible to think that Plutarch may have been influenced in particular by the *Respublica*, where Plato famously connects the idea of health, interpreted as symmetry or harmony, with the good government of the state. Plato also adopts the analogy between the healthy and just soul, whose three parts fulfill their specific duties under the guidance of reason, and the just city, where all the citizens, led by the philosopher rulers, cooperate and carry out their tasks.[10] The philosopher rulers, moreover, are portrayed as doctors of the city, since they are responsible for finding the right cure for the diseases of the body politic.[11]

Plato's example proves the significance of medical analogies and metaphors to elucidate the ideal organisation of the state, which reflects the hierarchical subdivision of the soul. Furthermore, his considerations mark an important turning point in the association of medicine with politics and philosophy. As Brock has convincingly argued, Plato writes about medicine from a moral perspective, identifying the moral good of the civic community with health. Most importantly, he gives prominence to the treatment of the sickness of the body politic and to the role of philosophers/rulers/doctors in that, whereas earlier authors – for instance, Solon, Theognis, Aeschylus, or Thucydides – focus

[9] In this regard, in the *Timaeus* Plato makes a seminal contribution to the debate on medicine, describing how each part of the soul has a specific place in the body, where they have been joined to the various organs by the gods. Together with the unity of body and soul, Plato also affirms the superiority of reason, which is located in the brain (*Ti.* 44a-46c). Furthermore, since the body and the soul are interdependent, one should preserve their symmetry (συμμετρία), that is, their harmonious and balanced relationship in order to keep both of them healthy (*Ti.* 87c-88b). On Plato's idea of medicine in the *Timaeus*, see BURGESS (2000) 46-55, CORNFORD (1997) 332-55, FRONTEROTTA (2006), C. GILL (2000) especially 59-65, JOHANSEN (2004) 142-59, L. KING (1954) 41-3, LISI (2006) 168-73, MILLER (1957), NUTTON (2004) 115-18, PIGEAUD (1981) 48-59, STALLEY (1996) 365-8, STEEL (2001) 106-13. In general, on Plato's concept of medicine, see CASERTANO (1997) 195-209, COHEN (1969) especially 137-40, CRAIK (2001), JORI (1993), L. KING (1954), MCPHERRAN (2006b), PEPONI (2002), STALLEY (1996), THIVEL (2004), VEGETTI (1995) and (1996).

[10] See, in particular, Pl. *Resp.* 4.435b-c, 441c-442d, 443e-445b, 8.544d-545c. On the analogy between the city and the soul in Plato's *Respublica*, see G. FERRARI (2003) especially 37-84, (2009) 407-13, NEU (1971) 238-44, NUTTON (2004) 117, SANTAS (2010) 77-103, N. SMITH (2001) 121-30, WILLIAMS (1973=2001).

[11] See Pl. *Resp.* 3.389b and 6.489b-c; cf. BROCK (2000) 27-8. In Pl. *Resp.* 2.372e, 3.399e, 5.459c, 8.556e, the metaphors that connect the body politic to healthy or diseased bodies are probably influenced by the medical writer Alcmeon; cf. G. FERRARI (2003), 59-65. See also Pl. *Grg.* 521e-522a.

more on the patient/body politic and on the perception of disease as a dysfunction of an organic whole.[12]

After Plato, Aristotle too makes extensive use of medical references in his works.[13] For instance, in the *Ethica Nicomachea* he suggests that, just as the ophthalmologist should have some general knowledge of the body in addition to being an expert in his specific field, so too the politician should gain knowledge of the human soul. This allows him to investigate human virtue and to seek true happiness (εὐδαιμονία), which is not limited to the body (1.1102a5-26). A similar concept is discussed in book 10, where Aristotle suggests that, in order to promote moral improvement in other people, one should learn the science of legislation so as to exert a positive effect on the character of the citizens. Thus politics, just like medicine and all the other sciences, concerns the universal (τὸ κοινόν). A general theoretical competence, then, is an indispensable requirement for lawgivers (10.1180b8-28).[14]

Aristotle also employs medical analogies to explain moral virtue (φρόνησις, that is, practical wisdom) as being the mean (μεσότης) between two extremes. Prudence (σωφροσύνη), courage (ἀνδρεία), and all the other ethical virtues are identified with moderation that lies between excess (πλείω or ὑπερβολή) and deficiency (τὸ ἔλάττον or ἔλλειψις), just as health and strength result from eating the right amount of food and from doing physical activity in the right measure. Similarly, punishment is equivalent to a cure or a dietary regime, which seeks to re-establish the balance between opposite poles when this is altered by vices.[15]

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12 BROCK (2000) 27-33.

13 On Aristotle's knowledge of medicine, see R. KING (2001), OSER-GROTE (2004), VAN DER EIJK (2000), (2005) 14-18 with further bibliography.

14 On the ethical nature of politics as described by Aristotle in *Ethica Nicomachea X*, see SCHOFIELD (2006) especially 305-11.

15 See Arist. *EN* 2.1104a-b, 2.1105b19-1107a, 6.1141b8-1142a30, and 6.1143b17-1145a11. On Aristotle's use of medicine as a model for his theory of ethics, see JAEGER (1957), GERICKE (1999), LLOYD (1968). On the complex problem of the body-soul relationship in Aristotle, see VAN DER EIJK (2000) with further bibliography.

Plutarch's portrayal of Lycurgus as the doctor of Sparta, then, appears to follow this long-established tradition. In particular, the fact that Lycurgus tried to bring harmony and unanimity to the Spartan body politic reminds us of the Platonic and Aristotelian concepts mentioned above. To a certain extent, one may argue that all the legislative reforms introduced by Lycurgus aimed at creating and maintaining a harmonious and virtuous balance between the different political forces inside Sparta.[16] To the episode of Thales or the creation of the Gerousia, which we discussed earlier in this Chapter, one can add the education of the young as an emblematic example of Lycurgus' objective. While, on the one hand, young Spartiates were forced to obey the orders of the leaders of the herds (ἀγέλαι), on the other hand they were constantly provoked into fights and rivalries by the elders (*Lyc.* 16.8-9). Similarly, the punishments inflicted by the eirens were scrutinised so as to verify whether they acted too severely or too weakly (ἀτόνως) (*Lyc.* 18.7).[17] Thus from these brief instances one can infer that Plutarch presents the Sparta reorganised by Lycurgus as a harmonious political system. Consequently, according to the Platonic – and, indeed, Plutarchan – criteria Lycurgus seems to represent not only an ideal lawgiver but also a virtuous ruler, who was able to bring unanimity in his city.

Plutarch, nonetheless, adds another important trait to the figure of Lycurgus, which does not have immediate correspondence with the Platonic tradition: the close relationship with the god. As we commented in Chapter 1, in the *De sera numinis vindicta* the parallelism between the city and the body, divine punishment and medical care aims to demonstrate the superior knowledge of the god, who can judge historical events from a perspective superior to that of men. Interestingly, Lycurgus' qualities are not very different. As we saw

[16] Cf. *comp. Lyc.-Num.* 24(2).4. The importance of maintaining harmony and unanimity in civic politics constitutes an extremely important aspect of Plutarch's political analysis in the *Praecepta gerendae reipublicae*: e.g. 809 E (where Plutarch compares political stability with musical harmony), 824 C-D (unanimity is mentioned among the greatest goods that the state can enjoy). On harmony and unanimity as primary political objectives, see also *Pel.* 19.1-2, *Per.* 15.1, *Phoc.* 2.9, *Arat.* 2.1. On Plutarch's idea of harmony and unanimity in politics, see FRAZIER (1996) 239-42, MOSCONI (2009), WARDMAN (1974) 57-63. See also Chapter 5.1.
[17] On Spartan education, see 74 n. 23.

earlier, by travelling Lycurgus gained a wide knowledge of βίοι and πολιτείαι, so that he could understand better the needs of his city from a broader perspective. He also judged facts and took decisions with wisdom and foresight (σοφία καὶ πρόνοια), as Plutarch remarks when comparing Lycurgus' mixed system, which moderated the excesses of Spartan monarchy, with the political regimes of the Messenians and the Argives, which collapsed because of the arrogance of the kings and the anarchy of the masses (*Lyc.* 7.4-5). Most importantly, Lycurgus' laws are presented as inspired by the god. Before beginning his reforms, he went to Delphi to consult the oracle and was addressed by the Pythia as "beloved of the gods" (θεοφιλής) and "god rather than man" (θεὸς μᾶλλον ἢ ἄνθρωπος). The Pythia, moreover, reassured Lycurgus that the god was granting him his support and was promising that he would have the best constitution of all (*Lyc.* 5.4).[18] This special relationship with the god is confirmed at the end of the Life, when Lycurgus again consulted the oracle, asking whether his laws were good and sufficient to promote prosperity and virtue in Sparta (ἠρώτησεν εἰ καλῶς οἱ νόμοι καὶ ἱκανῶς πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν καὶ ἀρετὴν <τῆς> πόλεως κείμενοι τυγχάνουσιν). Again he received a positive answer and was reassured that Sparta would remain most glorious as long as the Spartans maintained his constitution. Thus, having made the Spartans pledge that they would not change any law before his return from Delphi, he decided to starve himself to death, so that the Spartans could not break their oath (*Lyc.* 29.5-8). Finally, after Lycurgus' death, in recognition of his virtue and great achievements, the Spartans built a temple and started to pay him divine honours (*Lyc.* 31.4).[19]

Such an idealised description of Lycurgus, then, would make one believe that Plutarch simply judges the Lycurgan constitution in extremely positive terms. Plutarch, however, also inserts into his analysis of Sparta a problematic element: the Lycurgan

[18] Lycurgus' reforms, moreover, are defined "a divine blessing" (θεῖον εὐτύχημα) (7.5).
[19] Cf. Hdt. 1.65-66.

political system could not protect the Spartans from external contaminations. In this way, Plutarch explains why Lycurgus prohibited the Spartans from travelling abroad: contacts with foreign cultures could make the Spartans acquire foreign habits (ξενικὰ ἤθη) and imitate modes of life of people untrained and living under different forms of government (μιμήματα βίων ἀπαιδεύτων καὶ πολιτευμάτων διαφόρων) (*Lyc.* 27.6).[20] Paradoxically, then, the lawgiver who had travelled around the world and had imitated or copied several aspects of different political systems wanted to isolate the Spartans. This suggests that the Spartan harmony was very fragile and the Lycurgan political system did not have the requisite 'antibodies' to protect the city against malicious customs coming from the outside.

Yet, such values as φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία, which the majority of the literary sources regard as characteristic features of Spartan cultural identity, and in general the constant urge to maintain a high level of antagonism in various strata of society appear to contradict the need to protect the harmony of Sparta from external influences. According to many authors, love of honour and love of victory naturally caused the Spartans to establish their superiority over other states. Contamination, then, was unavoidable.

Indeed, as we will see later in this Chapter, this interpretation of Sparta is probably the result of a reconstruction of the past in light of later events. In this regard, Plutarch – just as other historians, philosophers, or orators – considers Sparta from a historical perspective, taking into account how the city, after centuries of peace and prosperity, experienced a serious crisis. This can explain the search for causes that might have determined the downfall of Sparta. Nonetheless, the internal incongruity of the Lycurgan political system must have appeared evident. Readers with some historical knowledge would not miss it either.

[20] On this, see MANFREDINI-PICCIRILLI (1980) 277-8.

3.2 – Φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία in the Spartan political system

As anticipated earlier in this Chapter, in the *Life of Lycurgus* Plutarch attributes a great relevance to φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία as values promoted by the Lycurgan constitution, to which all the Spartans were called to conform.[21] Indeed, in this regard Plutarch finds inspiration in earlier authors. In particular, considering the numerous Platonic echoes and references contained in this biography, it is plausible to think that Plutarch's view of ambition, rivalry, competition, and spirit of emulation as distinctive traits of the Spartan national character is influenced by Plato's view of Sparta.[22] An equally significant antecedent is also Xenophon, who stresses the importance of these moral virtues for the ἀγωγή of the young.[23] Nonetheless, as we will see, apart from Plutarch's main sources, several other authors also discuss φιλονικία and φιλοτιμία as typical Spartan values. This seems to prove that Plutarch's interpretation of these important aspects of Spartan lifestyle has a remarkable consistency with a well-established tradition.

Let us begin with Plutarch. The first mention of φιλοτιμία in the *Life of Lycurgus* concerns the education of the Spartans. Plutarch writes that during some religious feasts young Spartan girls (κόραι) used to make fun of the boys (νέοι) because of their mistakes; on the same occasions, however, they would praise the boys' merits by singing encomia in verses so as to inspire in them great love of honour (φιλοτιμία) and spirit of emulation (ζῆλος) (*Lyc.* 14.4-6). On the other hand, by dancing and performing naked, women were also habituated to simplicity (ἀφέλεια) and the emulation of physical vigour (ζῆλος

[21] In general, on competitiveness in Sparta, see DUCAT (2006) 171-5, FINLEY (1968) 147 and 151-3.
[22] On Platonic echoes in the *Life of Lycurgus*, see DE BLOIS (2005a) 93-102, (2005b), DE BLOIS-BONS (1995) 101-6, FUTTER (2012) 35-50, LIEBERT (2009) 255-71, SCHNEEWEISS (1979), STADTER (1999) 476-9, TIGERSTEDT (1974) 235-6. On Plutarch's idea of φιλονικία and φιλοτιμία, see NIKOLAIDIS (2012), PELLING (1995=2002) 244-7, (1988a=2002) 292-5 (with specific reference to Lysander and Agesilaus), (1986=2002) 350-3, (2012), STADTER (2011).
[23] For an overview of the Spartan education system, see CARTLEDGE (1987) 25-8, (2001) 79-90, DUCAT (1999), (2006) especially 69-247, HODKINSON (1983) 244-51, KENNELL (1995) especially 5-69, POWELL (1988) 231-6.

εὐεξίας), taking part in men's virtue and love of honour (ἀρετή καὶ φιλοτιμία) (*Lyc.* 14.7).[24] In this regard, Plutarch appears to follow Xenophon and expands on his positive view about women's education at Sparta (cf. Xen. *Lac.* 1.4), while, conversely, Plato and Aristotle claim that Lycurgus concentrated his attention on the boys' training, but neglected the girls.[25] This passage of the *Life of Lycurgus*, then, confirms that ambition and love of honour played a crucial role in Spartan society.

Φιλονικία is not considered differently. In a passage that may remind us of the section of Xenophon's *Respublica Lacedaemoniorum* devoted to the education of children (*Lac.* 2.2), Plutarch argues that Lycurgus did not allow any form of private education (*Lyc.* 16.7). Rather, from the age of seven the young Spartans were divided into herds (ἀγέλαι) and lived together under the leadership of commanders, chosen from those boys who distinguished themselves in prudence and high spirit in fighting (*Lyc.* 16.8).[26] Furthermore, as we saw earlier, the elders used to provoke battles and rivalries (μάχαι καὶ φιλονικίαι) between the young. These contests aimed to make the young become used to fighting bravely, without being afraid of taking action (*Lyc.* 16.9). Plutarch comments incisively: "Thus they learned to read and write only as far as it was strictly necessary; all the rest of their training aimed to make them obey commands well, endure while suffering hardships, and win when fighting battles".[27]

According to Plutarch, ambition and spirit of rivalry were at the centre of the Spartans' social life even after the young had become adults, since "education extended as far as the prime of manhood" (ἡ δὲ παιδεία μέχρι τῶν ἐνηλίκων διέτεινεν) (*Lyc.* 24.1). The Lycurgan constitution had the primary goal of cementing the unity and the cultural identity

[24] On female nudity in Sparta, see DAVID (2010) 147-9, POMEROY (2002) 14-16 and 25-7.
[25] See, for instance, Arist. *Pol.* 2.1269b19-1270a14, Pl. *Leg.* 7. 6.781a-c, 806a-c. In general, on the education of Spartan women, see CARTLEDGE (1987) 27, DUCAT (1999) 57-9, (2006) 223-45, POMEROY (2002) 3-32, POWELL (1988) 247-8.
[26] Plu. *Lyc.* 16.8: ἄρχοντα δ' αὐτοῖς παρίσταντο τῆς ἀγέλης τὸν τῷ φρονεῖν διαφέροντα καὶ θυμοειδέστατον ἐν τῷ μάχεσθαι. Cf. also Arist. *Pol.* 8.1337a31-2. See p. 71.
[27] Plu. *Lyc.* 16.10: γράμματα μὲν οὖν ἕνεκα τῆς χρείας ἐμάνθανον· ἡ δ' ἄλλη πᾶσα παιδεία πρὸς τὸ ἄρχεσθαι καλῶς ἐγίνετο καὶ καρτερεῖν πονοῦντα καὶ νικᾶν μαχόμενον.

of Sparta, making the Spartans reject any form of individualism, in order to concentrate only on the public good. As Plutarch writes, both φιλονικία and φιλοτιμία were part of this lifelong educational programme (*Lyc.* 25.5):

> τὸ δὲ ὅλον εἴθιζε τοὺς πολίτας μὴ βούλεσθαι μηδὲ ἐπίστασθαι κατ᾽ ἰδίαν ζῆν, ἀλλ᾽ ὥσπερ τᾶς μελίττας τῷ κοινῷ συμφυεῖς ὄντας ἀεὶ καὶ μετ᾽ ἀλλήλων εἱλουμένους περὶ τὸν ἄρχοντα, μικροῦ δεῖν ἐξεστῶτας ἑαυτῶν ὑπ᾽ ἐνθουσιασμοῦ καὶ φιλοτιμίας, ὅλους εἶναι τῆς πατρίδος.
>
> Overall, he made the citizens become accustomed neither to wish nor to be able to live individually, but to belong wholly to their country, just as bees that are always organic parts of the whole community and cluster round about their leader, almost being beside themselves with enthusiasm and ambition.

Plutarch, therefore, appears to embrace the idea that rivalry, competition, emulation, and ambition were essential aspects of being Spartan. Xenophon's *Respublica Lacedaemoniorum* conveys a very similar image of the Spartan national character as well. In this treatise, φιλονικία is considered to be at the heart of the contention (ἔρις) between the young (ἡβῶντες), who had to fight against one another in order to become cavalrymen (ἱππεῖς) (*Lac.* 4.1-6). This contest, which Xenophon defines as dearest to the gods (θεοφιλεστάτη) and most political (πολιτικωτάτη), was meant to promote virtue (ἀρετή) and manly bravery (ἀνδραγαθία) (*Lac.* 4.2).[28] Analogously, rivalry and competition are depicted by Xenophon as essential features of the procedure for selecting the elders for the Gerousia, a process which is presented again as a contest (ὁ περὶ τῆς γεροντίας ἀγών) (*Lac.* 10.3).[29] By putting the elders in charge of the "contest concerning life" (once more, indicated as a περὶ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀγών) – that is, the judgment of capital crimes – Lycurgus rendered old age more honoured (ἐντιμότερος) than the vigour of men in full bloom. Thus

[28] The passage of Xen. *Lac.* 4.1-6 is thoroughly examined by BIRGALIAS (1997); cf. also DUCAT (2006) 17-19, LIPKA (2002) 142-6, PROIETTI (1987) 50-2. On the Spartan ἱππεῖς and their selection, see DUCAT (2007) 328-36, FIGUEIRA (2006) especially 62-7, HODKINSON (1983) 247-9.

[29] With reference to the selection for the Gerousia, phrases analogous to that of Xenophon are employed by Aristotle (ἆθλον ἡ ἀρχὴ αὕτη τῆς ἀρετῆς ἐστι) (*Pol.* 1270b24-25) and Plutarch (μέγιστος ἐδόκει τῶν ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἀγώνων οὗτος εἶναι καὶ περιμαχητότατος) (*Lyc.* 26.2).

the constitution urged the old Spartiates to persevere in virtue and prevented them from abandoning the noble principles of their city (*Lac.* 10.1-2).[30]

Plato too attributes a great importance to competitiveness in Sparta.[31] In the *Respublica*, he famously associates both φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία with the Spartan constitution: "After this, should we not go through the inferior [types of men], that is, the fond of victory and ambitious, corresponding to the Laconian constitution, the oligarchic, the democratic, and the tyrannical?"[32] Contrary to Xenophon's idealised view, Plato's observations are inserted in the context of the negative judgment about the various forms of government compared with aristocracy.[33] According to Plato, timocracy or timarchy – the form of government equivalent to that of the Spartans – represents the degeneration of aristocracy and is an intermediate between this political regime and oligarchy (*Resp.* 8.545c-d and 547c).

To a great extent, timocracy is ambivalent, since it imitates some elements of aristocracy and some of oligarchy, while also having some qualities peculiar to itself. On the one hand, the care for physical training and military exercise (γυμναστικῆς τε καὶ τῆς τοῦ πολέμου ἀγωνίας ἐπιμελεῖσθαι) is derived from aristocracy (*Resp.* 8.547c). On the other hand, the tendency to produce high-spirited and simple-minded men, more suited to war than to peace (τοὺς πρὸς πόλεμον μᾶλλον πεφυκότας ἢ πρὸς εἰρήνην), and the fact that war is the men's major occupation are typical aspects of timocracy (*Resp.* 8.547e-548a).

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[30] Cf. HUMBLE (1997) 206-10, LIPKA (2002) 182-8. On the Spartan Gerousia, see DAVID (1991) 15-36, NAFISSI (2007) 332-5, with further bibliographical references.

[31] On Plato's view of Sparta, see now DE BRASI (2013). In general, Plato seems to attribute φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία a negative connotation as they contrast – if not impede – true desire of knowledge (φιλοσοφία) and virtue (ἀρετή): on negative φιλονικία, cf. *Grg.* 457c-458c, 505e, and 515b, *Leg.* 677b, 938b-c, 957c-d, *Phd.* 91a, *Phlb.* 14b and 50b, *Prt.* 360e, *Ti.* 90b-c; on negative φιλοτιμία, cf. *Leg.* 632c-d, *Phd.* 82b-c, *Phdr.* 257b-c. Cf. DE BRASI (2013) 145-53.

[32] Pl. *Resp.* 8.545a: ἆρ᾽ οὖν τὸ μετὰ τοῦτο διιτέον τοὺς χείρους, τὸν φιλόνικόν τε καὶ φιλότιμον, κατὰ τὴν Λακωνικὴν ἑστῶτα πολιτείαν. Plato adds later: "Now we should examine first the constitution based on love of honour" (καὶ νῦν οὕτω πρῶτον μὲν τὴν φιλότιμον σκεπτέον πολιτείαν) (8.545b).

[33] On Plato's analysis of the Spartan political regime in the *Respublica*, see ANDERSON (1971) 155-66, DE BRASI (2013) 121-53, LÉVY (2005) 218-24, PAPPAS (1995) 158-61. For a more general critical discussion of Plato's presentation of the various political systems in the *Respublica*, see ANNAS (1981) 294-305, HITZ (2010) 103-7 and 109-24.

Thus timocracy is a mixture of good and evil (μεμειγμένην πολιτείαν ἐκ κακοῦ τε καὶ ἀγαθοῦ) and its most conspicuous features are φιλονικίαι and φιλοτιμίαι (*Resp.* 8.548c). Similarly, while describing the qualities of the type of man corresponding to timocracy, Plato highlights rivalry and ambition (*Resp.* 8.549a):

> φίλαρχος δὲ καὶ φιλότιμος, οὐκ ἀπὸ τοῦ λέγειν ἀξιῶν ἄρχειν οὐδ᾽ ἀπὸ τοιούτου οὐδενός, ἀλλ᾽ ἀπὸ ἔργων τῶν τε πολεμικῶν καὶ τῶν περὶ τὰ πολεμικά, φιλογυμναστής τέ τις ὢν καὶ φιλόθηρος.
>
> Lover of power and honor, expecting to rule neither for his ability to speak nor for anything of that sort, but for his military deeds and for the preparation for war, being a lover of gymnastics and hunting.

The same concepts are repeated at the end of the long section devoted to timocracy, where Plato examines the origin of the timocratic man (*Resp.* 8.550a-b):

> τότε δὴ ὁ νέος πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα ἀκούων τε καὶ ὁρῶν, καὶ αὖ τοὺς τοῦ πατρὸς λόγους ἀκούων τε καὶ ὁρῶν τὰ ἐπιτηδεύματα αὐτοῦ ἐγγύθεν παρὰ τὰ τῶν ἄλλων, ἑλκόμενος ὑπ᾽ ἀμφοτέρων τούτων, τοῦ μὲν πατρὸς αὐτοῦ τὸ λογιστικὸν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ ἄρδοντός τε καὶ αὔξοντος, τῶν δὲ ἄλλων τό τε ἐπιθυμητικὸν καὶ τὸ θυμοειδές, διὰ τὸ μὴ κακοῦ ἀνδρὸς εἶναι τὴν φύσιν, ὁμιλίαις δὲ ταῖς τῶν ἄλλων κακαῖς κεχρῆσθαι, εἰς τὸ μέσον ἑλκόμενος ὑπ᾽ ἀμφοτέρων τούτων ἦλθε, καὶ τὴν ἐν ἑαυτῷ ἀρχὴν παρέδωκε τῷ μέσῳ τε καὶ φιλονίκῳ καὶ θυμοειδεῖ, καὶ ἐγένετο ὑψηλόφρων τε καὶ φιλότιμος ἀνήρ.
>
> The young man constantly hears and sees such things, but he also listens to his father's discourses and observes his father's customs close to those of other men. He is attracted by both, his father watering the rational element in the soul and making it grow, the other men doing the same with the appetitive and spirited elements. Since he does not have the nature of a bad man, but is under the influence of bad company, being dragged by both these two forces, he finishes up in the middle. He hands the rule inside himself over to the intermediate element of love of victory and high spirit and becomes a man high-minded and fond of honor.[34]

While Xenophon associates φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία with the social dynamics of Sparta and with some specific political institutions, placing a great emphasis on their educational aspects, in Plato's view not only are these values at the centre of the whole

[34] Translation by G. FERRARI-GRIFFITH (2000) 259-60 with minor adaptations.

Spartan political system, but they also constitute the quintessence of the timocratic man's nature. From a modern perspective, one may claim that in Plato more explicitly than in other authors politics and anthropology are intrinsically connected to one another. In the *Respublica*, the historical circumstances of Sparta are not discussed: despite the fact that the idea of timocracy is largely inspired by the Spartan constitution, it represents an ideal model rather than a realistic image of the concrete political situation in fourth century BC Sparta. Similarly, Plato seems to be describing a type of man – the timocrat – rather than the Spartans in their historically determined reality, even if Spartan society of the classical age provides the basis for his analysis.[35] Yet, despite the differences between Xenophon and Plato that have been observed, it remains evident that φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία are regarded as typical Spartan values.[36]

As anticipated at the beginning of this Chapter, in different ways Xenophon and Plato seem to have inspired Plutarch with reference to love of honour, love of victory, ambition. Indeed, Plutarch appears to develop his own reconstruction of specific Spartan institutions, demonstrating a certain autonomy from his sources. Yet in Xenophon and Plato, he must have found corroboration for his analysis of the essential principles of the Spartan way of life. Nonetheless, other texts also seem to support Plutarch's evaluation of the importance of love of honour and love of victory in Sparta. In *Alcibiades I*, for instance, both φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία are listed among the positive values of the Spartans that Socrates brings to Alcibiades' attention (122c).

More emblematically, in the second book of the *Politica*, while conducting a critical assessment of the Spartan constitution and while implicitly trying to correct some

[35] In this regard, G. FERRARI (2003) 59-82 pointed out that Plato establishes a proportional and symmetrical correspondence between the types of constitution and the types of soul, but he does not imply a relationship of cause and effect. Cf. also HITZ (2010) 103-13 and 122-4.

[36] Very interestingly, this aspect is not treated by Plato in the various passages of the *Leges*, where he provides in positive terms a more historically accurate description of several Spartan political institutions; cf. Pl. *Leg.* 1.630d-633c, 1.634d-635d, 1.636e-637b, 3.682e-686c, 4.712d-e, 6.776c-d, 6.778d, 6.780e-781a, 7.805e-806c. On the Platonic view of Sparta in the *Leges*, see DE BRASI (2013) 155-89, POWELL (1994) especially 274-92 and 302-12.

assumptions about Sparta contained in Plato's *Respublica*, Aristotle presents φιλοτιμία again as a crucial element of the Spartan political system.[37] In his negative review of Spartan institutions, he focuses his attention on the process for electing the elders to the Gerousia. He disapproves of the fact that Lycurgus' procedure was based on the candidates' desire to put themselves forward for the role, an aspect already praised by Xenophon, as we saw earlier. Aristotle labels this method childish (παιδαριώδης), since in his view the worthiest man for the office should be appointed regardless of his will.[38] Aristotle's judgment, nonetheless, remarks upon the coherence between the specific criteria for choosing the Gerontes and the general spirit of the constitution, whose aim was to render the citizens ambitious (φιλοτίμους κατασκευάζων τοὺς πολίτας) (*Pol.* 2.1271a8-18). Indeed, the tone of these comments is radically different from Xenophon's eulogy of Sparta; yet Aristotle recognises that ambition was a fundamental value in Sparta.[39]

In all the texts examined so far, the ἀγωγή and the Spartan constitution are presented as aiming to instil in the young φιλονικία and φιλοτιμία, moral values that permeated Spartan society at various levels and which drove individuals to distinguish themselves and stand out among their peers as leaders of the young, ἱππεῖς, Gerontes, and so forth. As far as one can understand from the literary sources, then, ambition, spirit of competition, and rivalry characterised the social dynamics and the political life at Sparta. It is also interesting that the numerous references to φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία lay emphasis on how these passions regulated the public conduct of the Spartans among themselves rather than towards foreigners or external enemies.

One might think, however, that to some extent this interpretation of φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία is contradicted by Polybius' comparison of the Spartan, Cretan, and Roman

[37] On Aristotle's criticism of Plato's *Respublica*, see STALLEY (1991). In general, on Aristotle and the Spartan constitution, see BERTELLI (2004), DAVID (1982-1983), DE LAIX (1974), LÉVY (2001), SCHÜTRUMPF (1994).
[38] Cf. p. 76 n. 29.
[39] Cf. PHILLIPS SIMPSON (1998) 118-19.

constitutions in the sixth book of his *Historiae*.[40] In particular, Polybius highlights the dichotomy between Lycurgus' success in preserving the internal harmony (ὁμόνοια) of Sparta and the lack of legislation on military conquests. On the one hand, by establishing equality (ἰσότης) of private possessions among the Spartans, by making money be esteemed of no value, and by promulgating laws that promoted a simple lifestyle, Lycurgus rendered the Spartans temperate (σώφρονες). He eradicated from Sparta material greed (πλεονεξία) and, consequently, all the disagreements and seditions (πᾶσα φιαφορὰ καὶ στάσις) deriving from it, granting the Spartans a lengthy and stable freedom (6.45.3-4, 6.46.6-8, 6.48.2-5).[41]

On the other hand, nonetheless, Lycurgus did not adopt any legislative measure to govern the Spartans' desire for hegemony and annexation of neighbouring territories (6.48.6). Polybius remarks upon the striking contrast between the Spartans' complete lack of ambition (they are defined ἀφιλοτιμότατοι) with respect to their private lives and the city's customs, and their great ambition (φιλοτιμότατοι) and greed for power and money, which made them take a belligerent attitude towards other Greeks (6.48.8). The war against the Messenians, the Persian War, the Peloponnesian War, the expeditions in Asia, and the peace of Antalcidas (387 BC) are the historical episodes mentioned by Polybius to support his claim about the Spartans' φιλονικία and φιλαρχία (6.49.1-6).

This might suggest that in Polybius' view φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία were not values embodied in the Lycurgan constitution or embedded in Spartan society. In fact, one should consider that in book six Polybius' primary intent is not to discuss in detail the internal dynamics, the education system, or the various political institutions of Sparta as in the works of Xenophon, Plato, Aristotle, and Plutarch. Rather, as mentioned earlier, through a

[40] On Polybius and Sparta, see HODKINSON (2000) 50-2, LÉVY (1987), WALBANK (1966). On Polybius' problematic reference to Ephorus at 6.45, see HODKINSON (2000) 29-30.
[41] On property and wealth in Sparta, cf. *Alc. I* 122d-123b, Arist. *Pol.* 2.1269b21-32, 2.1270a11-29, 2.1271a3-5, 2.1271b10-17, Pl. *Leg.* 3.696a-b, *Resp.* 8.547b-d, 8.548a-b, 8.549c-d, 8.550d-551b, Plu. *Lyc.* 8-10, Xen. *Lac.* 7. So complex a question is magisterially examined by HODKINSON (2000), where one can find further bibliographical references.

comparative analysis he tries to explore the reasons that made the Romans become the greatest superpower in history, in that they were able to establish a universal empire (6.1.1-3). Thus in the case of Sparta – as much as in those of Crete and Carthage – Polybius concentrates his attention only on the elements relevant to understanding Spartan hegemony so as to compare it with Roman imperialism (6.50).

In this regard, he refers to the lack of funds, which forced the Spartans to seek support from the Persians, betraying the Greek cities of Asia Minor, and to the defeat by the Thebans, which almost cost the Spartans their freedom. For this reason, according to Polybius, the Roman successes were greater and more enduring. The different scope of Polybius' survey, therefore, can explain the differences from the other authors who analyse Sparta. Furthermore, the fact that Lycurgus managed to eliminate φιλοτιμία (rivalry) for money does not necessarily entail that other forms of φιλοτιμία were not accepted or encouraged at Sparta. One of these types of ambition, which Lycurgus implicitly admitted, can be considered φιλοτιμία deriving from physical training, which generated courage (ἀνδρεία) and φιλονικία in war.

Polybius, then, devotes a considerable part of the sixth book of the *Historiae* to Spartan foreign affairs, focusing on the consequences of φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία. In this respect, his account is similar to the interpretations of this particular aspect of the Spartan socio-political system offered by Plutarch, Xenophon, Plato, and Aristotle, who underline the complementarity between love of honour, ambition, rivalry, and the physical training that the Spartans had to undergo until old age. The intense and constant pressure to be and act as φιλότιμοι and φιλόνικοι, together with the acquisition of fighting skills, was regarded as the Spartans' preferred means to maintain military supremacy.[42] Just as in the other

[42] On the importance of physical training in Sparta and on the Spartan orientation towards war, cf. Arist. *Pol.* 2.1271b1-6, 7.1324b7-9, 7.1333b5-35, 7.1334a40-34b4, 8.1338b25-39, Pl. *Leg.* 1.625c-626b, 1.633a, 2.666e-667a, Plu. *Lyc.* 14.3, 16.2-3, 16.9-14, 17.7-8, 22.1-3, Xen. *Lac.* 2.3-4, 2.7, 4.5-7, 5.8-9, 5.11-12. See also Critias

literary sources, however, in Polybius too neither φιλοτιμία nor φιλονικία is exactly equivalent to manly courage (ἀνδρεία or ἀνδραγαθία), which the Spartans had to display in battle. Rather, love of honour and love of victory are perceived as the premises for acquiring military virtue, but their sphere of influence is certainly wider than war. From this perspective, Polybius confirms the central role attributed to φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία in Spartan society. Despite the different approach, then, Polybius' remarks integrate with the information provided by other authors.

We can conclude that in all the authors mentioned above φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία concern various aspects of Spartan public life: soldierly actions as much as political activities, public offices, or personal wealth. Indeed, love of honour and spirit of competition are moral values that define Spartan cultural identity, something on which the literary sources tend to agree, although in each work special emphasis is laid on different aspects of Spartan life where the effects of φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία are thought to be stronger and more evident. Plutarch's analysis in the *Life of Lycurgus*, then, can be safely placed within this long-standing tradition about Sparta.

As repeatedly argued, Plato and Xenophon can be considered Plutarch's main sources on this topic. Xenophon's examination of the Spartan constitution may have encouraged Plutarch to reflect on the close connection between education, political institutions, and rivalry in Sparta, whereas Plato's theory of the five types of regimes, corresponding to analogous types of men, may have suggested employing a similar approach to focus on the ambitious and competitive nature of the Spartans. Yet, as we will clarify later in this Chapter, the main aspect of Plutarch's analysis concerns the historical development of the Spartan constitution. Thus Polybius' discussion of the Spartan political system from a historical perspective, in which he points out the dichotomy between the

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Fr. 32 and Isoc. 6.58-59, 7.7, 8.96-103, 11.18, 12.225-226. The question of Sparta's military orientation has been reassessed by HODKINSON (2006), with further bibliographical references.

Spartans' behaviour in domestic affairs and their hegemonic attitude towards the other Greeks, is also an extremely important antecedent of Plutarch's treatment of Sparta in the *Parallel Lives*. Nonetheless, before moving to discuss this theme, we need to see if φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία are also attributed to the Spartans by authors who wrote before the fourth century BC.

3.3 – Absence of φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία in archaic and classical age

In order to examine φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία in Sparta, one cannot but compare the information supplied by authors of the classical age – especially those already discussed in this Chapter – and that contained in earlier literary sources. In this respect, the first author to analyse is the poet Tyrtaeus, who writes his elegies some time in the second half of the seventh century BC during the Second Messenian War. In his poems, Tyrtaeus never employs the terms φιλοτιμία or φιλονικία or their cognates. The themes of ambition, spirit of competition, and love of victory, moreover, are never explicitly mentioned. Tyrtaeus, conversely, often concentrates his attention on military valour and courage (especially in Tyrt. 10, 11, and 12 W^2.), and on the importance of preserving the existing political order, centred on the kings and the Gerontes (Tyrt. 2 and 4 W^2.).[43] Furthermore, as one can infer from Tyrt. 12 W^2., the reputation gained for fighting bravely in war constitutes the greatest honour for the Spartans, but it does not concern only individuals but also the whole civic community. The primary purpose of serving as soldiers is to benefit Sparta and to bring glory to all the citizens, even if this entails dying heroically on the battlefield. Similarly, the whole community of Spartans recognises and validates the soldiers' greatness by paying

[43] On the relationship between Tyrtaeus' fragments – especially fr. 4 W^2 – and the Great Rhetra as Plutarch transmitted it (*Lyc.* 6), cf. LÉVY (2003) 23-45, LIBERMAN (1997), MEIER (2002), MUSTI (1996), VAN WEES (1999) 6-14, (2002), WEST (1974) 184-6.

posthumous tributes to the dead or by revering the survivors of war in public offices (Tyrt. 12.23-42 W^2.):[44]

αἶψα δὲ δυσμενέων ἀνδρῶν ἔτρεψε φάλαγγας
τρηχείας· σπουδῆι δ᾽ ἔσχεθε κῦμα μάχης,
αὐτὸς δ᾽ ἐν προμάχοισι πεσὼν φίλον ὤλεσε θυμὸν,
ἄστυ τε καὶ λαοὺς καὶ πατέρ᾽ εὐκλεΐσας,
πολλὰ διὰ στέρνοιο καὶ ἀσπίδος ὀμφαλοέσσης
καὶ διὰ θώρηκος πρόσθεν ἐληλάμενος.
τὸν δ᾽ ὀλοφύρονται μὲν ὁμῶς νέοι ἠδὲ γέροντες,
ἀργαλέωι δὲ πόθωι πᾶσα κέκηδε πόλις,
καὶ τύμβος καὶ παῖδες ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἀρίσημοι
καὶ παίδων παῖδες καὶ γένος ἐξοπίσω·
οὐδέ ποτε κλέος ἐσθλὸν ἀπόλλυται οὐδ᾽ ὄνομ᾽ αὐτοῦ,
ἀλλ᾽ ὑπὸ γῆς περ ἐὼν γίγνεται ἀθάνατος,
ὅντιν᾽ ἀριστεύοντα μένοντά τε μαρνάμενόν τε
γῆς πέρι καὶ παίδων θοῦρος Ἄρης ὀλέσηι.
εἰ δὲ φύγηι μὲν κῆρα τανηλεγέος θανάτοιο,
νικήσας δ᾽ αἰχμῆς ἀγλαὸν εὖχος ἕληι,
πάντές μιν τιμῶσιν, ὁμῶς νέοι ἠδὲ παλαιοί,
πολλὰ δὲ τερπνὰ παθὼν ἔρχεται εἰς Ἀΐδην·
γηράσκων δ᾽ ἀστοῖσι μεταπρέπει, οὐδέ τις αὐτὸν
βλάπτειν οὔτ᾽ αἰδοῦς οὔτε δίκης ἐθέλει,
πάντες δ᾽ ἐν θώκοισιν ὁμῶς νέοι οἵ τε κατ᾽ αὐτὸν
εἴκουσ᾽ ἐκ χώρης οἵ τε παλαιότεροι.

Soon he turns back the foemen's sharp edged battle lines
and strenuously stems the tide of arms;
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 his own.
People point out his tomb, his children in 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.
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.

[44] For an analysis of the elegy, see FUQUA (1981) 219-21 and 224-6, LUGINBILL (2002) 407-12, SHEY (1976) 6-20; cf. also LORAUX (1977), MOURLON BEERNAERT (1961), PRATO (1965-67).

> 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.[45]

In this elegy, Sparta is depicted as a very cohesive society, whose internal political unity was not threatened by any form of rivalry or contention. The fact that Tyrtaeus writes his poems in a military context, when the menace posed by the external enemy – the Messenians – is perceived as imminent, may explain so strong an emphasis on the harmony of the Spartan community. Yet the complete absence of such peculiarly Spartan traits such as φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία from the work of the only lyric poet who composes his verses at Sparta is undoubtedly noteworthy.

Similarly, in Herodotus too love of honour and love of victory are not mentioned among the characteristics of the Spartans.[46] In the first book of the *Historiae*, for instance, within the discussion about the changes introduced by Lycurgus in the Spartan law system, there is no reference to φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία (1.65-66). Similarly, while talking about the qualities of the Spartans, neither the Persian king Cyrus the Great, replying to the Spartan herald (1.153), nor the exiled Spartan king Demaratus, being asked by Xerses (7.104), made direct allusion to love of honour and love of victory as important values of the Spartans.

The only cases that Herodotus explicitly describes as political quarrels (νείκεα) concern Demaratus, but they are not positive examples of emulation.[47] Herodotus writes that during the military campaign against Athens Demaratus had a disagreement with the other Spartan king Cleomenes (οὐκ ἐὼν διάφορος ἐν τῷ πρόσθε χρόνῳ Κλεομένει), after the

[45] Translation by WEST (1993) 26-7.
[46] While Herodotus never employs the term φιλονικία, he uses φιλοτιμία only once with a negative connotation: "Ambition is a mischievous possession" (φιλοτιμίη κτῆμα σκαιόν) (3.53.4). On Herodotus and Sparta, see LÉVY (1999) 125-34, MILLENDER (2002), VANNICELLI (1993) 9-98. On Archidamus' discourse, see MERIGGIÒ (2004) 288-94.
[47] On Herodotus' account of Demaratus and his quarrel with Cleomenes, see BOEDEKER (1987) 187-91, CARTLEDGE (2002²) 123-30 and 171-3, TIGERSTEDT (1965) 91-9.

aristocratic leader Isagoras, supported by the Spartans, had been banished and Cleisthenes had been recalled from exile by the Athenians (5.75.1). The relationship between the two kings deteriorated so much that Demaratus made accusations (διέβαλε) against Cleomenes. As Herodotus explains, Demaratus acted out of envy and jealousy (φθόνῳ καὶ ἄγῃ χρεώμενος) (6.61.1). Subsequently, Cleomenes decided to depose Demaratus as retaliation in kind (6.61.2). He set Leotychidas against Demaratus, knowing of the hostility between them caused by the fact that both loved the same woman, Percalus (6.65.1-3). In this case, too, the use of the adjective ἐχθρός and the substantive ἔχθρη reveals how Leotychidas and Demaratus did not have a constructive rivalry, but were merely full of hatred, bred by purely private reasons.

Only when examining the public repercussions of the enmity between Cleomenes, Leotychidas, and Demaratus, and the consequences of Leotychidas' allegation about Demaratus' illegitimate origin and unlawful succession to the throne, does Herodotus employ the term contention (νείκος): "At last, as there was contention about those matters, the Spartans resolved to ask the oracle at Delphi whether Demaratus was the son of Ariston".[48] Such a critical impasse, which hit the most important political institution of Sparta, is addressed again as a νεῖκος in Demaratus' discourse to his mother, when he inquired as to his true identity: "For Leotychidas spoke in his contention with me, saying that you came to Ariston being pregnant by your former husband".[49]

As in other cases analysed earlier, Herodotus does not connect contention and rivalry with the education and the political institutions of the Spartans. Conversely, the dramatic political crisis involving Demaratus is considered an anomaly, which the Spartans would try to avoid in the future. One should note, in this regard, that after the dispute

[48] Hdt. 6.66.1: τέλος δὲ ἐόντων περὶ αὐτῶν νεικέων, ἔδοξε Σπαρτιήτῃσι ἐπειρέσθαι τὸ χρηστήριον τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖσι εἰ Ἀρίστωνος εἴη παῖς ὁ Δημάρητος.
[49] Hdt. 6.68.2: Λευτυχίδης μὲν γὰρ ἔφη ἐν τοῖσι νείκεσι λέγων κυέουσάν σε ἐκ τοῦ προτέρου ἀνδρὸς οὕτω ἐλθεῖν παρὰ Ἀρίστωνα.

between Cleomenes and Demaratus the Spartans promulgated a law, which prohibited both kings from leading the army in expeditions abroad together and simultaneously (5.75.2).[50] It seems plausible to infer, therefore, that Herodotus does not regard rivalry, contentiousness, and ambition as an integral part of the Spartan political system.

The same conclusion can be drawn from the depiction of Sparta in Thucydides.[51] In the debate before deciding to declare war against Athens in 432 BC, the Spartan king Archidamus described several characteristics of the Spartans (1.84.3-4):

> πολεμικοί τε καὶ εὔβουλοι διὰ τὸ εὔκοσμον γιγνόμεθα, τὸ μὲν ὅτι αἰδὼς σωφροσύνης πλεῖστον μετέχει, αἰσχύνης δὲ εὐψυχία, εὔβουλοι δὲ ἀμαθέστερον τῶν νόμων τῆς ὑπεροψίας παιδευόμενοι καὶ ξὺν χαλεπότητι σωφρονέστερον ἢ ὥστε αὐτῶν ἀνηκουστεῖν, καὶ μὴ τὰ ἀχρεῖα ξυνετοὶ ἄγαν ὄντες τὰς τῶν πολεμίων παρασκευὰς λόγῳ καλῶς μεμφόμενοι ἀνομοίως ἔργῳ ἐπεξιέναι, νομίζειν δὲ τάς τε διανοίας τῶν πέλας παραπλησίους εἶναι καὶ τὰς προσπιπτούσας τύχας οὐ λόγῳ διαιρετάς.
>
> We are skilled in war and well-advised thanks to our orderly behaviour: skilled in war, because prudence is the greatest part of the sense of respect and sense of shame is the greatest part of courage; well-advised, because we are severely educated with too little learning to disdain the laws and with too great a prudence to disobey them. Without being excessively intelligent in useless matters, we do not criticise brilliantly the armaments of the enemy in words, but go out against them in a different way in action. Rather, we believe that our neighbours' thinking is similar to ours and the fates, which befall us, cannot be determined by a theory.

Archidamus' speech puts emphasis on the combination of courage, military preparation, sense of shame, prudence, and respect for the laws as the main outcome of Spartan education. Very significantly, nonetheless, it does not relate ambition and spirit of rivalry to the Spartan way of life.[52] A similar evaluation of the Spartan ἀγωγή can be found in Pericles' long funeral oration for the dead of the first year of the Peloponnesian War (431 BC). While commenting on the differences between the Spartans and the Athenians,

[50] Cf. Xen. *Hell.* 5.3.10. In general, on the trials of the Spartan kings, see LÉVY (2003) 177-82.
[51] For an introduction on this vast topic, one can refer to CARTLEDGE-DEBNAR (2006) with further bibliographical references.
[52] On the traditional Spartan values mentioned by Archidamus, see MERIGGIÒ (2004) 3-4, WASSERMANN (1964) 289-91. In general, on Archidamus' speech see BLOEDOW (1981), (1983), CRANE (1998) 197-221, DEBNAR (2001) 59-76, TOMPKINS (1993), WASSERMANN (1953).

Pericles highlighted the distinctly militaristic character of Spartan training. Neither φιλοτιμία nor φιλονικία, however, were discussed as typical Spartan values yet again (2.39.1).

In Thucydides' view, conversely, the notion of φιλοτιμία explains the Athenians' behaviour after Pericles' death, when they did not follow the recommendations about the war provided by their leader, condemning themselves to complete failure (2.65.6-7): that is to say, ambition was the passion that made the Athenians take wrong decisions during the Peloponnesian War. In this regard, Thucydides recalls again the Athenian φιλοτιμία while analysing the regime of the Four Hundred and the tensions between moderates and extremists as to whether the oligarchy should be replaced by the larger social group of the Five Thousand (411 BC). From Thucydides' perspective, private φιλοτιμίαι were ultimately responsible for ruining the oligarchy made out of a democracy (8.89.3). The conduct of the Athenians was also characterised by φιλονικία. Intense love of victory, in particular, connoted their imperialistic tendencies, which manifested themselves in subjugating the Aeginetans and punishing the Samians with the help of the Corinthians (1.41.3), and in continuing the war on the two fronts of Sicily and Greece despite the desperate situation (7.28.3). To sum up, φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία caused many atrocities, as is also confirmed by Thucydides' general comment about the subversion of the normal order of things, derived from the violence of war (3.82.8). These passions, however, are attributed to the Athenians rather than to the Spartans.

This brief survey of the historical sources dating back to the archaic and classical age suggests the presence of a marked divergence from the later texts discussed in the second part of the chapter. A simple explanation for so striking a difference might be that Tyrtaeus, Herodotus, and Thucydides do not seek to offer as thorough an analysis of the Spartan political system as those of Xenophon or Plutarch. Their views on Sparta,

therefore, may be limited to the features more suitable to prove the strength and unity of Spartan society. Yet it remains unclear – and also very significant – why such important aspects as φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία are never linked to Sparta by earlier authors, while being later attributed to the polity established by Lycurgus. One could also argue that the words φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία are first employed relatively late in Greek literature, becoming more frequent only from the fifth century BC onwards.[53] This, however, may only explain the absence of occurrences in Tyrtaeus' elegies; Herodotus and Thucydides, conversely, as we saw earlier, are familiar with the idea of love of honour and love of victory, and their implications. This type of answer to the question posed above, therefore, cannot be satisfactory and we should adopt a different approach.

3.4 – Explaining the crisis of Sparta

The issue concerning the absence of references to φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία in earlier texts can be better addressed by contextualising the later sources. As recalled earlier in this Chapter, Xenophon, Plato, Aristotle, Polybius, and Plutarch – and we can also add Isocrates and Ephorus – write about Sparta and the Spartan constitution at the time when the Spartan political system has already manifested its limits. Each author can see Sparta as a city either in decline or completely decayed in comparison to its glory days. Lysander's exceptional power as navarch and general of the army during the last phase of the Peloponnesian War, his enormous prestige as a private citizen after returning to Sparta, and his role in Agesilaus' controversial accession to the throne after king Agis' death (*c.* 401-400 BC) fostered political instability. The clash between Lysander and Agesilaus on the eve of the military campaign against the Persians (396 BC) as much as Lysander's conspiracy, aimed at overthrowing the Spartan kingship, proved how acute the Spartan political crisis

[53] Cf. DE POURCQ-ROSKAM (2012) 1-4.

was. Furthermore, the Spartan hegemony established by Lysander by imposing oligarchic regimes on the other Greek cities under Spartan domination revealed the imperialistic ambitions of the Spartans soon after the end of the Peloponnesian War. Finally, the battle of Leuctra and the defeat by the Thebans (371 BC) marked the end of the supremacy of Sparta and the beginning of her slow and inexorable slide into decadence.[54]

Undoubtedly, these historical events exerted a profound influence on the authors' perception of Sparta as a political system caught in a terrible predicament. For instance, despite his appreciation of the Spartan constitution, Xenophon has to admit that the Spartan customs changed substantially over the course of time. Flatteries, fondness for money, the desire to act as harmosts in foreign cities, the aspiration to command rather than to become worthy leaders constituted unmistakable signs that the Spartans no longer obeyed the Lycurgan constitution (*Lac.* 14).[55]

An analogous line of argument is deployed by Isocrates in the discourse *De pace* (355 BC), where he criticises Spartan imperialism by contrasting the current decline of Sparta with her glorious past, based on virtuous habits. In particular, Isocrates identifies the main causes of the Spartans' radical change as both the abandonment of the Lycurgan traditions and the creation of the maritime empire. As a result, the Spartans became aggressive and despotic even towards former allies. In his view, all the political and military decisions taken after the end of the Peloponnesian War – the expedition against the Persians (401 BC), the Corinthian War (395-386 BC), the support given to Dionysius the Elder, and so forth – proved that the Spartans adopted a new warlike and foolhardy attitude (*De Pace* 8.96-103).[56]

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[54] On the historical events concerning Lysander, Agesilaus, and the crisis of Sparta, see BOMMELAER (1981) 61-241, CARTLEDGE (1987) 77-412, (2002²) 228-59, CAWKWELL (1976), (1983), FUNKE (2009), HAMILTON (1979b), (1991) 67-257, SCHEPENS (1993).

[55] See HODKINSON (2000) 22-6, HUMBLE (1997) 232-4.

[56] Isocrates employs the adverbs φιλοπολέμως and φιλοκινδύνως, which may be considered pejorative terms used instead of the milder φιλονικία and φιλοτιμία. On the Spartans' greed abroad, while exerting their

The idea of a dramatic reversal in Spartan history, which should prevent us from drawing inferences about the past of Sparta from its later state of affairs, is also expressed by Ephorus, who again views the war against Thebes as a decisive turning point (*FGrH* 70 F 118 12-16 *ap*. Str. 8.5.5; F 149 31-33 *ap*. Str. 10.4.17).[57]

Plato, like Aristotle and Isocrates, discusses the causes of Spartan decadence. In his opinion, timocracy is not a stable form of government, but inevitably degrades into oligarchy because of the progressive accumulation of private wealth with the consequent growth of widespread love of money (φιλοχρηματία) and admiration for the rich. This makes timocratic men repeal their original laws and adopt a new constitution based on census (*Resp*. 8.550d-551b).[58] Indeed, as we argued earlier, one would wrongly assume that Plato's timocracy constitutes a completely faithful representation of historical Sparta. Nonetheless, it would be difficult to claim that the eighth book of the *Republic* contains no echo of the political and social crisis of Sparta, interpreted in philosophical terms.

More explicitly, in the second book of the *Politica* Aristotle repeatedly mentions the defeat at Leuctra as the key episode that exposed the limits of the Spartan constitution, especially as regards the boldness (θρασύτης) of women (2.1269b35), the scarcity of manpower (2.1270a29-34), and, above all, the education in military virtue alone, without developing any ability to live well in peace, free from occupations (2.1271b2-6; cf. 7.1334a2-9 and 7.1334a34-1334b5). Contrary to other authors, therefore, Aristotle places

power against other Greeks, cf. also Isoc. 11.18-19, 12.225-226. On Isocrates' image of Sparta, see GRAY (1994) especially 257-68.

[57] STYLIANOU (1998) 113-20 made insightful observations about Ephorus' moralistic attitude towards Sparta, but GREEN (1999)'s criticism of Stylianou's biased approach to Diodorus should also be taken into account. On the image of Sparta in Ephorus, see also CHRISTESEN (2010).

[58] See HODKINSON (2000) 31-2, ROSEN (2005) 305-11. In general, on Spartan coinage and for a critical assessment of the ancient sources, see CHRISTIEN (2002) especially 174-85, FIGUEIRA (2002) especially 138-47. Cf. also DAVID (1979-80).

emphasis on the continuity between Lycurgus' laws and the crisis of Sparta, without viewing Spartan decline simply as the result of a major upheaval.[59]

This concept is reaffirmed even more strongly later in the treatise. As Aristotle contends, Sparta's downfall shows that Lycurgus was not a good lawgiver, since his laws did not make the Spartans happy. In particular, the Lycurgan constitution merely aimed at conquest and war (πρὸς τὸ κρατεῖν καὶ πρὸς πόλεμον), without educating the citizens to practice virtue. Consequently, following Lycurgus' principles in time of war, the Spartans managed to impose their despotic rule on other cities. After creating their empire, however, they fell into arrogance because of the lack of moral values such as justice (δικαιοσύνη) and temperance (σωφροσύνη) (7.1333b5-35). The battle of Leuctra, moreover, put an end to the military supremacy of Sparta. The Spartan failure can be explained by the opposition of enemies who had an excellent military preparation, a challenge that the Spartans never faced before. In Aristotle's view, then, one should take into account not only the past successes but also the current situation of crisis in order to form a balanced judgment on Sparta (8.1338b24-38).

Following the trend of earlier generations, several authors of the Hellenistic and early imperial age also attach great importance to the historical period culminating in the battle of Leuctra. As we saw earlier in this Chapter, Polybius, like Aristotle, criticises Lycurgus and his laws, while still considering the battle of Leuctra the lowest point of Spartan decadence.[60] In the *Bibliotheca Historica*, conversely, summarising Ephorus' work, Diodorus Siculus praises the Lycurgan constitution and its positive effects on the Spartans, for, thanks to Lycurgus' legislation, the Spartans were able to establish their hegemony and to preserve their pre-eminence for more than four hundred years, that is, until the debacle

[59] HODKINSON (2000) 33-5, and SCHÜTRUMPF (1994) 338-41 convincingly argued that Aristotle's negative evaluation of Sparta is not based on a concept of historical development, but rather regards the whole history of the city as a continuum from the archaic age to Leuctra. DAVID (1982-83), conversely, hypothesises that Aristotle mostly criticises contemporary Sparta, while maintaining a positive judgement of Lycurgus' time.
[60] See pp. 80-3.

against the Thebans. Subsequently, as soon as they slowly (κατ᾽ὀλίγον) started to abolish their customs, turning to luxury and laziness, using coined money, and accumulating wealth, they became corrupted and lost their supremacy (7.12.8).

The disapproval of Sparta's moral decay is harsher in the prologues of the fourteenth and fifteenth books. By advancing different arguments from those in book seven, Diodorus points out that the Spartans, in committing injustice, mistreated their allies, but paid a high price for this in that they lost the hegemony (14.2.1). Once again, the emphasis falls on the contrast between Sparta's glorious past, when the ancestors established the moral supremacy of Sparta on a firm basis and preserved it thanks to their virtue, and the fourth century BC, characterised by unjust and arrogant wars against other Greeks. On numerous occasions, the Spartans acted violently and harshly (βιαίως καὶ χαλεπῶς), whereas in earlier generations they had treated their subjects with moderation and humanity (ἐπιεικῶς καὶ φιλανθρώπως) (15.1.3-4).[61]

This brief analysis of the various images of Sparta conveyed by fourth century BC and later literary sources reveal that the rise and fall of Sparta are thought to be indissolubly linked to one another. The Lycurgan constitution and Spartan hegemony cannot be fully evaluated – either in positive or negative terms – without considering simultaneously the decline of Sparta. This appears to be a recurrent strand of thought, whether the two extremes of the Spartan trajectory are seen as being connected in a cause and effect relationship (Aristotle and Polybius) or whether, conversely, greater importance is attached to the repudiation of traditional values, which created a caesura in Spartan history (Xenophon, Isocrates, Ephorus/Diodorus). Assessing the positive or negative long-term outcome of Lycurgus' laws is an integral part of the analysis of the Spartan political system. Similarly, the crisis of Sparta cannot be understood without exploring its roots in the past,

[61] See STYLIANOU (1998) 141-2. Cf. also Stylianou's remarks about Ephorus' moralistic idea of history (see p. 92 n. 57 of this Chapter), which may also apply to Diodorus.

either by emphasising the impact of external factors such as wealth, gained after establishing the empire, or the hatred of former allies, or by determining some internal cause such as the militaristic orientation of the Spartan constitution.

This implies that the authors who examine the Spartan socio-political system as a whole also attempt to investigate its intrinsic limits and the reasons for its ultimate failure. In this regard, φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία represent useful interpretative keys for this type of analysis. As we commented earlier, the desire to compete with other citizens so as to assume high offices and obtain public recognition, the ambition to excel, and the aspiration to demonstrate one's own superiority in public affairs are usually regarded as positive values at Sparta. In the later literary sources, these passions appear to play a vital role in Spartan success. Yet, in light of the events of the fourth century BC, giving a moral interpretation of the Spartan crisis, it is also easy to assume *a posteriori* that φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία created the conditions for the decadence of Sparta.

The various internal and external causes of the crisis – power struggles between political leaders, desire for command, imposition of a more aggressive and despotic imperialism, love of wealth, hatred of powerful enemies, and so forth – found breeding ground in the ambition, spirit of competition, and rivalry typical of Spartan society. Indeed, the delicate balance between courage (ἀνδρεία) and obedience (αἰδώς), military virtue (ἀρετή) and moderation (σωφροσύνη), which preserved unanimity (ὁμόνοια) among the Spartans, could be disrupted by excessive φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία.[62] Furthermore, the behaviour of the Spartan leaders as much as the military and political acts between the end of the Peloponnesian War and the battle of Leuctra proved that education in obedience was not an adequate means to counterbalance the effects of uncontrolled love of honour and love of victory. Nor was it able to guarantee moderation and the assertion of collective

[62] On the notion of φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία as mean-virtues requiring moderation, see FRAZIER (1988) 110-18, NIKOLAIDIS (2012) 32-3.

over private interests.[63] Eventually, regardless of the cause that triggered them, the φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία of the Spartans affected the other Greeks, transcending the narrow confines of Sparta and the simple relationship between citizens.

Thus by placing emphasis on φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία as essential features of the Lycurgan constitution, authors such as Xenophon, Plato, Aristotle, and Polybius might have tried to determine retrospectively which aspects of Spartan culture and society favoured the moral, social, and political decline of Sparta. The attribution of so decisive an importance to φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία, then, may constitute a form of projection onto the past of a later image of Sparta. Love of honour and love of victory characterised Spartan cultural identity, but at the same time they were distinctive traits that, reflecting the social and political condition of Sparta in the fourth century BC, could prefigure *ex post* her decadence. This may also explain the difference between later authors and the literary sources of the archaic and classical age, in which φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία are virtually absent.

In this regard, Plutarch is no exception. Just as the other literary sources mentioned earlier, he also considers the period between Lysander's command as harmost and the battle of Leuctra a time of radical changes. In the *Life of Lycurgus*, the explanation for the crisis is apparently similar to that of those of previous authors. Plutarch regards the silver and gold that Lysander acquired in war and sent to Sparta as the trigger for the moral decadence of the Spartans. He explicitly claims that Lysander filled Sparta with love of riches (φιλοπλουτία) and luxury (τρυφή): on account of this, material greediness (πλεονεξία) and desire for wealth (πλούτου ζῆλος) made entry into the city as well.

[63] On collective over private interests, see HODKINSON (1983) 245. Cf. also CARTLEDGE (2001) 84, DUCAT (1999) 50, POWELL (1988) 235. On education to obey, cf. Xen. *Lac.* 2.2, 2.10-11, and 8.1-2, Pl. *Leg.* 1.634d-e, 2.666e-667a, *Resp.* 8.549a. See CARTLEDGE (2001) 82-4, HODKINSON (1983) 247-8, POWELL (1988) 233-4, PROIETTI (1987) 52 and 58-9.

Plutarch adds that in this way Lysander subdued Lycurgus' laws (τοὺς Λυκούργου καταπολιτευσάμενος νόμους) (*Lyc.* 30.1).[64]

Indeed, earlier in the Life, Plutarch clarifies that by imposing a new iron currency (νόμισμα) instead of the previous silver and gold, Lycurgus managed to defeat the Spartans' πλεονεξία (*Lyc.* 9.2-3). This measure, however, was not the only innovation, through which Lycurgus tried to redress the economic inequality in Sparta. He also planned a redistribution of land (*Lyc.* 8.3-9), abolished arts and crafts considered unnecessary and superfluous (*Lyc.* 9.4-8), and instituted the common messes (συσσίτια) (*Lyc.* 10 and 12).[65] Despite its importance, then, money alone may seem to constitute too simplistic an explanation for the decadence of Sparta compared with the more thorough analyses of other authors.

Yet Plutarch's interpretation of Spartan decline is subtler that this. After mentioning Lysander's responsibility for initiating the Spartans' moral decay, he concentrates his attention on the beneficial effects of Lycurgus' measures. Among them, Plutarch refers in particular to the influence exerted by the Spartans over the other Greeks (*Lyc.* 30.2):

> ἡ πολις ἀπὸ σκυτάλης μιᾶς καὶ τρίβωνος ἄρχουσα τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἑκούσης καὶ βουλομένης, κατέλυε τὰς ἀδίκους δυναστείας καὶ τυραννίδας ἐν τοῖς πολιτεύμασι, καὶ πολέμους ἐβράβευε καὶ στάσεις κατέπαυε, πολλάκις οὐδ᾽ ἀσπίδα κινήσασα μίαν, ἀλλ᾽ ἕνα πέμψασα πρεσβευτήν, ᾧ πάντες εὐθὺς ἐποίουν τὸ προστασσόμενον, ὥσπερ αἱ μέλισσαι φανέντος ἡγεμόνος συντρέχοντες καὶ κατακοσμούμενοι. τοσοῦτον περιῆν εὐνομίας τῇ πόλει καὶ δικαιοσύνης.
>
> The city, exerting its leadership over Greece – which was well-disposed and willing to accept it – through a single dispatch and cloak, put down unlawful oligarchies and tyrannies in different states, arbitrated wars, ceased seditions, often without moving a single shield, but by sending only an ambassador, whose commands everyone at once obeyed just as bees that, when their leader appears, swarm

[64] On the impact of Lysander's decision to send money to Sparta, see CHRISTIEN (2002) 172-83.
[65] On land ownership in Sparta, see FIGUEIRA (2004), HODKINSON (2000) 65-104. On the συσσίτια, see LINK (1998), SINGOR (2009). On Lycurgus' economic measures in Plutarch's *Life of Lycurgus*, see HODKINSON (2000) 52-60.

> together and set themselves in order. Such a surplus fund of good government and justice did the city enjoy.

This great prestige and authority – Plutarch comments – inspired in the Greeks the desire to be led by the Spartans, who were often asked to send a Spartan commander (ἡγεμών) to foreign cities. In this respect, Plutarch mentions Gylippus, Brasidas, Lysander, Callicratidas, and Agesilaus as emblematic examples (*Lyc.* 30.5). Indeed, in this passage Plutarch does not offer an accurate reconstruction of the complex historical dynamics that led Sparta to establish its hegemony. Rather, Plutarch appears to idealise Spartan imperialism. As is well known, each case was different and the Spartan political and military interventions abroad were not always requested explicitly by other states. Similarly, the presence of Spartan commanders in foreign cities often caused civil strife.[66] Doubtless, the origin of Spartan imperialism was not as simple nor its effects as beneficial as Plutarch suggests in the *Life of Lycurgus*.

Nonetheless, by mentioning only the positive aspects of Spartan rule over Greek cities and by describing Sparta as a pedagogue and a master of decent life and a well-ordered polity (παιδαγωγὸν ἢ διδάσκαλον εὐσχήμονος βίου καὶ τεταγμένης πολιτείας) (*Lyc.* 30.5), Plutarch seems to create a sharp contrast between, on the one hand, the greatness and virtue of the Spartans, which – in Plutarch's view – were unanimously recognised by the Greeks, and on the other, Lysander's rather limited measure of both these traits, which caused the downfall of the city. This issue is analysed further in the next chapter of the Life, where Plutarch explicitly claims that Lycurgus' original intention was not to leave Sparta as a hegemonic state (*Lyc.* 31.1):

> οὐ μὴν τοῦτό γε τῷ Λυκούργῳ κεφάλαιον ἦν τότε, πλείστων ἡγουμένην ἀπολιπεῖν τὴν πόλιν· ἀλλ᾽ ὥσπερ ἑνὸς ἀνδρὸς βίῳ καὶ πόλεως ὅλης νομίζων εὐδαιμονίαν ἀπ᾽ ἀρετῆς ἐγγίνεσθαι καὶ ὁμονοίας τῆς πρὸς αὑτήν, πρὸς τοῦτο συνέταξε καὶ

[66] On Sparta's foreign policy in the fourth century BC and the harmosts, see BOCKISCH (1965), CARTLEDGE (1987) 49-50 and 90-3, HAMILTON (1979) 42-4 and 59-60, (1991) 81-2.

> συνήρμοσεν, ὅπως ἐλευθέριοι καὶ αὐτάρκεις γενόμενοι καὶ σωφρονοῦντες ἐπὶ πλεῖστον χρόνον διατελῶσι.
>
> Lycurgus' chief point then, however, was not to leave his city in command over the great majority of the others. Conversely, since he thought that in the life of an entire city, just as in that of a single individual, happiness springs up from virtue and unanimity within the city itself, he arranged and adjusted things so that the Spartans, after becoming free-spirited, self-sufficing, and moderate, could continue being in this condition as long as possible.

This general evaluation of Lycurgus' reforms and their true purpose makes it evident how the Spartans, assuming the leadership of the Greeks, betrayed the true spirit of their constitution, which originally aimed at preserving the virtue inside Sparta. Thus, rather than merely looking at political, economic, or military causes, Plutarch focuses on the nature of Sparta in order to explore the reasons for its decline: the Spartan cultural identity and political model could not sustain external contaminations, in whichever form they might come. In this sense, the Spartans – not only Lysander – were all responsible. Money, then, constitutes the symbol of Spartan expansionism, which proved fatal regardless of its intentions and initial results, however positive one might consider them. At the same time, nonetheless, Plutarch indirectly appears to recall that the Greeks themselves did not fully understand Sparta's true nature. As he clarifies, the Lycurgan political system was inimitable (ἀμίμητος) (*Lyc.* 31.3). For this reason, the aspiration to emulate the Spartan values by inviting Spartan commanders as harmosts, chasteners, and generals (ἁρμοσταὶ καὶ σωφρονισταὶ καὶ ἄρχοντες) was naive and unrealistic.

3.5 – Conclusion

Plutarch does not openly discuss how crucial Spartan values such as φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία without being moderated, naturally drove the Spartans to affirm their power over the other Greeks, crossing the boundaries of Sparta fixed by Lycurgus. Nor does he

show how love of honour and love of victory gave exceptional Spartan individuals the impulse to affirm their qualities as leaders. The history of Sparta, however, provides ample proof that φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία cannot be easily reduced to the right measure. These themes, which are only briefly outlined in the *Life of Lycurgus*, are examined much more thoroughly in the *Life of Lysander* and in the *Life of Agesilaus*, where they constitute the core of Plutarch's analysis of the Spartan crisis.[67] Yet, by simply mentioning historical figures such as Lysander, Callicratidas, Gylippus, and Agesilaus, Plutarch implicitly prepares the readers for the future development of his research. They are advised to activate their knowledge about Spartan history of the fourth century BC: they will examine the crisis of Sparta by reading Plutarch's Lives.

The *Life of Lycurgus*, then, represents Plutarch's first step in the analysis of Spartan history through the lives of its protagonists. Lycurgus, in this regard, constitutes the model to whom both Lysander and Agesilaus are constantly contrasted. Indeed, by examining the differences between these three characters, Plutarch also enriches his portrait of Sparta, showing the limits and the contradictions of a city that in Plutarch's view for a long time constituted the best political model in Greece. As Plutarchan scholarship has noted, in the *Life of Lycurgus* many elements of the Spartan constitution are idealised and one can recognise numerous Platonic stereotypes and commonplaces. Yet Lycurgan Sparta should be considered the initial phase of the history of a city that was complex and multifaceted.

[67] We can anticipate here some passages that will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5: Plu. *Lys.* 2.6, 16-17 (Lysander's silver and gold at Sparta); *Lys.* 5.5-6, 8.1-3, 13.3-14.4, 15.1-6, 19.1-4, 21, *Ages.* 15.1-2, 23-24 (Spartan imperialism); *Lys.* 23.4-24.2, *Ages.* 7-8 (the clash between Lysander and Agesilaus), *Lys.* 24-26, 30.3-5, *Ages.* 20.3-5 (Lysander's conspiracy), *Ages.* 26-28, 31-32 (the defeat against Thebes).

CHAPTER 4

THE *LIFE OF LYSANDER*

As we commented previously in Chapter 3, Plutarch establishes a close connection between the *Life of Lycurgus* and the *Life of Lysander* on account of Lysander's responsibility for the decadence of Sparta.[1] Very early in the *Life of Lysander*, he resumes this theme and reminds the readers again that Lysander was guilty of sending a vast quantity of money from Asia to Sparta, filling his city with a love of riches (φιλοπλουτία). The allusions to and echoes of the *Life of Lycurgus*, however, are not limited to this single episode. Rather, from the beginning, Plutarch appears to encourage readers to evaluate Lysander's character and actions in light of the Lycurgan tradition. Thus Lycurgus' political example, as much as his legislative measures, is a constant point of reference in the *Life of Lysander*.

By adopting this approach, Plutarch can reveal Lysander's moral ambiguity, which the protagonist displayed in managing the results of his military successes in Greece and Asia. Lysander named his friends harmosts of the Greek cities of Asia Minor, changed the constitution in several of these cities, agreed to receive divine honours, helped Agesilaus to ascend the throne, and, finally, tried to subvert the constitution of Sparta. In many respects, then, Lysander may be regarded as the opposite of Lycurgus: an antihero.

Yet Plutarch's presentation of Lysander is not entirely negative. Rather, as Duff has thoughtfully commented, in this Life – much as in the parallel *Life of Sulla* – Plutarch seems to have "problematized the moral status of the subject".[2] That is to say, on several occasions Lysander's behaviour might be considered morally positive or, at least, ambivalent. Plutarch, moreover, does not express a clear condemnation of Lysander's

[1] JONES (1966) 67-9 conjectures that the *Lives of Lysander and Sulla* might have appeared as the seventh, ninth, or tenth pair of the series. Their publication can be roughly dated to a period before AD 114 and after *c.* AD 104.
[2] DUFF (1999) 161. Cf. also PELLING (1988a=2002) 296-7.

actions. As we will see, however, in these episodes Lysander's ambivalence appears to be used by Plutarch to highlight the moral responsibility of the Spartans in a time of exceptional social and political transformation. A figure as unique as Lysander, who established a complex and, in many respects, extraordinary relationship with Sparta, reveals the moral decadence of Spartan society after the victory over the Athenians. If Lysander caused the decadence of Sparta, then the Spartan body politic was already ill and did not have enough 'antibodies' to remain immune to external contamination. Such intrinsic Spartan weakness and the inability of the Spartans to find an adequate response were equally important factors in the decline of the city. Thus Plutarch's constant reference to Lycurgan tradition indirectly emphasises how the Spartans also betrayed their cultural identity, just as Lysander did.

Indeed, the trajectory of the life of Lysander and the history of Sparta during the first decades of the fourth century BC are also emblematic examples of the moral decadence that permeated Greek society in general. Plutarch does not neglect this aspect of Greek history. The Greeks' acritical acceptance of Lysander's leadership or their attribution to him of divine honours are key episodes that show how the behaviour of the Greeks cannot be judged positively. Just like the Spartans, they too made Lysander who he was. In this way, the crisis of Sparta and the morally ambiguous rule of Lysander become inextricably linked with the crisis of the Greek world, which culminated in numerous conflicts between the Greek πόλεις. This theme is examined in detail in the *Life of Agesilaus*, but the *Life of Lysander* already anticipates it.

4.1 – Judging Lysander

The beginning of the *Life of Lysander*, with the description of the statue of Lysander located inside the treasury of the Acanthians in Delphi, appears to suggest a change in the usual

image of the hero, implying that the subject matter of this biography is different from and more complex than that of other Lives (*Lys.* 1.1-3).[3] First, Plutarch mentions the inscription on the treasury, arguing that it generated confusion about the identification of the marble figure.[4] It read: "Brasidas and the Acanthians from the spoils of the Athenians" (Βρασίδας καὶ Ἀκάνθιοι ἀπ᾽ Ἀθηναίων). This made the majority of people believe that the statue portrayed Brasidas, while, in fact, it was Lysander. Subsequently, Plutarch briefly describes the statue, explaining that it depicted Lysander with long hair and beard, following a traditional Spartan custom started by Lycurgus.[5]

Plutarch, then, seems to evaluate Lysander's image by using two different terms of comparison. On the one hand, the reference to Brasidas, the great Spartan general who died during the Battle of Amphipolis (422 BC) and was heroised and highly honoured by the Amphipolitans as their second founder (οἰκιστής), is certainly very significant.[6] Brasidas was an anomalous Spartan: he had great success in fighting abroad, established a very close relationship with the people in Chalcidice, and gained enormous prestige and power, for which he was envied by the Spartans (cf. Thuc. 4.108.7). His personal interests occasionally clashed with those of Sparta, as one may infer from the *Life of Nicias*, where Plutarch claims that Brasidas opposed the suggested peace treaty between the Athenians and the Spartans, because the war was giving him the opportunity to display his military virtue and to achieve great success (*Nic.* 9.3).[7]

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[3] As noted by STADTER (1992a) 42, the opening section of the *Life of Lysander*, which suggests significant uncertainty about the hero's nature, indirectly reflects on the *Life of Sulla* as well.
[4] The treasury of the Acanthians is also mentioned at Plu. *De E ap. Delph.* 401 D.
[5] This habit is described in Plu. *Lyc.* 22.2 and *Apophth. Lac.* 228 E; cf. also Xen. *Lac.* 11.3. On Plutarch's use of statues to describe not only the physical traits of the protagonists but also their moral qualities, see DUFF (1999) 163-5, MOSSMAN (1991), TATUM (1996) especially 135-9, WARDMAN (1967), (1974) 140-52.
[6] On Brasidas' death, see Thuc. 5.11.1-3. On Brasidas' positive portrayal, see Thuc. 2.25, 4.81-87, 4.108, 4.126, and 5.9. On Brasidas, see BOEGEHOLD (1979), DAVERIO ROCCHI (1985), HARLEY (1941-42), HOFFMANN (2000), HOWIE (2005), MARI (2012), PRANDI (2004), WESTLAKE (1980), WYLIE (1992),
[7] Cf. Thuc. 5.16.1. On the Spartans' desire to cease the war during Brasidas' military campaigns, see also Thuc. 4.15.2, 17-20, 81.2, 117; 5.16.1.

One may suppose, then, that to a certain extent Plutarch highlights the apparent similarity between these two unconventional Spartans.[8] At the same time, however, Plutarch remarks strongly upon the fact that Lysander was not Brasidas. Brasidas is usually viewed by Plutarch as a virtuous military leader.[9] Lysander, conversely, while at first glance appearing a hero, proved to be a problematic and morally ambiguous historical figure, as the Spartans witnessed at that time. As we will see later in this Chapter, the fact that Lysander may have tried to present himself as a new Brasidas and a quasi-divine being, and the fact that his contemporaries paid him divine honours are major themes in the *Life of Lysander*.

On the other hand, with regard to the long hair and beard of the statue, which made it difficult to identify Lysander's face, Plutarch recalls the Lycurgan habit of making the soldiers remain unshaven, so that the handsome (καλοί) could appear more attractive (εὐπρεπέστεροι) and the ugly (αἰσχροί) more fearful (φοβερώτεροι). This introduces another element of ambiguity, since it is not easy to determine in which category between the καλοί and the αἰσχροί (adjectives that express simultaneously aesthetic and moral concepts) Lysander belonged.[10] Plutarch does not solve this dilemma at the beginning of the Life. Yet he already offers an indication about Lysander's ambivalent nature, stressing indirectly the necessity for readers to activate their intellectual faculties, since the moral assessment of Lysander is a particularly arduous task.

The first chapter of the *Life of Lysander* also seems to elucidate the method one must adopt in order to examine Lysander's character. Given the complexity of Lysander's nature, one should try to compare and contrast Lysander's traits, behaviour, and actions with

[8] DUFF (1999) 165 suggests that Lysander conformed to Brasidas' pattern, while he rejects the idea that Brasidas simply represented the Spartan tradition, *contra* MOSSMAN (1991) 111.
[9] In particular, Plutarch seems to appreciate Brasidas' brave conduct during the Peloponnesian War: see *Apophth. Lac.* 219 C-D. The same anecdotes occur with minor variations at *Lyc.* 25, *De prof. virt.* 79 E, *Reg. et imp. apophth.* 190 B, *Apophth. Lac.* 240 C, and *De ser. num. vind.* 548 B-C.
[10] Cf. STADTER (1992a) 42.

Spartan tradition. As we have just seen, Plutarch applies this procedure to elucidate the right identification of the statue, correcting the common mistake about it. Yet even this approach may not grant unequivocal results. Spartan customs are not easy to understand, as is demonstrated by the incorrect hypotheses about the long hair and beard of the statue that Plutarch mentions (*Lys.* 1.2). This indirectly places emphasis on Plutarch's role in leading the readers towards the correct judgment of Lysander. The short sentence that solves the question about the marble figure (ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦτο Λυκούργειόν ἐστι) clearly distances Plutarch from 'the many' (πολλοί), who confuse Lysander with Brasidas, and from 'the few' (ἔνιοι), who are not able to recognise the importance of explaining Lysander by reference to Lycurgus.[11]

Finally, one should notice that the confusion between Brasidas and Lysander was generated by a traditional Spartan habit. This could symbolise the fact that the roots of Lysander's moral ambivalence were planted in Spartan tradition. Indeed, as we will see later in this Chapter, Lysander distorted Lycurgan customs and betrayed the identity of his city, but this was made possible only because Sparta gave birth and raised such leaders as Lysander. As one can deduce, then, the *Life of Lysander* and the *Life of Lycurgus* can be read in close interconnection, so that the former biography allows the readers to re-assess and re-evaluate some aspects of Sparta already discussed in the latter.

4.2 – Lysander's portrait

After alerting the readers to Lysander's ambiguity and after posing indirectly numerous preliminary questions about the best method for interpreting Lysander's life, Plutarch

[11] On Plutarch's narrative strategy of accumulating different versions of the facts narrated before offering his interpretation, see DUFF (1999) 186 n. 106, SHIPLEY (1997) 13; cf. also PAUW (1980) 90-1.

presents some more explicit details about Lysander's character.[12] Great emphasis falls on Lysander's great respect for Lycurgan tradition and the characteristic values of Sparta. Yet, just as in the opening section of the Life, some contradictory elements distinctly emerge, starting with his family: his father Aristocleitus was not a member of the royal families, yet he was a descendant of the Heraclidae (*Lys.* 2.1). As we will see later in this Chapter, then, Lysander could not become king, although his power became superior even to that of the kings.

Among the main traits of Lysander's personality, Plutarch mentions the fact that he grew up in poverty (ἐν πενίᾳ), was disciplined following the customs of the city (εὔτακτος πρὸς τοὺς ἐθισμούς), had manly spirit (ἀνδρώδης), and was superior to every form of pleasure (κρείττων πάσης ἡδονῆς). Subsequently, Plutarch focuses his attention on Lysander taking pleasure from military enterprises (καλαὶ πράξεις) and connects this feature with Spartan education (*Lys.* 2.3-4):

> ταύτης δὲ οὐκ αἰσχρόν ἐστιν ἡττᾶσθαι τοὺς νέους ἐν Σπάρτῃ. βούλονται γὰρ εὐθὺς ἐξ ἀρχῆς πάσχειν τι τοὺς παῖδας αὐτῶν πρὸς δόξαν, ἀλγυνομένους τε τοῖς ψόγοις καὶ μεγαλυνομένους ὑπὸ τῶν ἐπαίνων· ὁ δὲ ἀπαθὴς καὶ ἀκίνητος ἐν τούτοις ὡς ἀφιλότιμος πρὸς ἀρετὴν καὶ ἀργὸς καταφρονεῖται. τὸ μὲν οὖν φιλότιμον αὐτῷ καὶ φιλόνικον ἐκ τῆς Λακωνικῆς παρέμεινε παιδείας ἐγγενόμενον, καὶ οὐδέν τι μέγα χρὴ τὴν φύσιν ἐν τούτοις αἰτιᾶσθαι.
>
> In Sparta, it is not shameful for the young to be overcome by this [pleasure]. Indeed, from the beginning, they desire that their children are sensitive towards public opinion, distressed by censure, and exalted by praise; who is insensible and unmoved in these matters is despised as unambitious with regard to virtue and indolent. Ambition, then, and love of victory firmly endured in him after being implanted by the Laconian training and his natural disposition should not receive any serious accusation on this account.

Lysander' upbringing, then, followed typical Spartan training, in which φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία played an essential part. Compared to the *Life of Lycurgus*, however, here

[12] Lysander's portrait has been masterfully commented on by DUFF (1999) 177-82. Cf. also PELLING (1988a=2002) 292-5.

Plutarch adds a significant corollary: the importance of δόξα (public opinion). Being praised or blamed by other people appears to be a complementary aspect of love of honour and love of victory. There may be a vague echo of the habit according to which Spartan girls used to make fun of the boys' mistakes or to celebrate their merits, inspiring in them love of honour and the spirit of emulation (*Lyc.* 14.4-6). Similarly, Plutarch may be recalling the elders' presence at the boys' games, observing their natural disposition (*Lyc.* 16.9). Nonetheless, in the passage quoted above, δόξα assumes a much stronger connotation: Plutarch seems to imply that for the Spartans honour and victory could not be obtained fully without the validation of and recognition from external observers. While in Sparta, where all the members of the body politic shared the same moral values as much as the same political aims, honour and victory could have some objectivity, in different contexts the search for τιμή and νίκη could become subordinate to personal interests and to the quest for public approval. Later in the Life, Plutarch discusses the consequences of this complex problem for Lysander, Sparta, and the Greeks. In Lysander's portrait, conversely, Plutarch simply recalls how sensitivity to δόξα depended on a Spartan education.

Similarly ambivalent were Lysander's natural inclination to be obsequious (θεραπευτικός) towards powerful people and his ability to bear the weight of authority to his advantage. This trait represented an anomaly for a Spartiate; nonetheless, it could be regarded as a major feature of political schrewdness (πολιτικὴ δεινότης). Melancholy too is ascribed to Lysander, as he suffered from it later in his life, but just as in the case of the other traits, it cannot be considered entirely negative, since other great natures (μεγάλαι φύσεις) such as those of Socrates, Plato, and Heracles were affected by it as well (*Lys.* 2.5).

Thus, in Plutarch's view, the only characteristic for which Lysander deserved to be blamed concerned the fact that he sent money to Sparta and filled the city with love of riches (φιλοπλουτία) (*Lys.* 2.6). In this case, Plutarch's words are harsh and unequivocal.

Plutarch, however, recognised that Lysander was incorruptible and was never attracted by money himself. Yet, despite this, he provoked radical change in Sparta. This confirms that Lysander was a complex figure, difficult to pin down, and certainly he could not be defined a typical Spartan. Was, then, Lysander faithful to the Lycurgan tradition or did he distort it with unacceptable alterations? To some extent, the entire *Life of Lysander* is centred on this question, which remains unanswered until the final chapters.

4.3 – Lysander's impact in Asia

The first aspect of Lysander's life on which Plutarch concentrates his attention is represented by Lysander's role in the Peloponnesian War and his influence in Asia Minor. Plutarch informs us that Lysander was called to join the Spartan navy when the conflict was already at an advanced stage: the Athenians had already suffered the terrible defeat in Sicily and it was clear (ἐπίδοξων ὄντων) that they would soon lose their naval supremacy. Their only hope was represented by the return of Alcibiades from exile, for he was able to produce a great change (μεγάλην μεταβολὴν ἐποίησε) and to re-establish balance in the naval battles (*Lys.* 3.1). Lysander, then, was given the command of the fleet (τῆς θαλάττης ἡγεμονία, literally 'the hegemony over the sea') in order to oppose such a dominant figure.

Alcibiades and Lysander are implicitly presented as very similar characters. Both of them could radically alter the course of events by making a strong impact on the situations in which they became involved. That was the case for Lysander when he arrived in Ephesus, the city where he set up the Spartan headquarters (*Lys.* 3-4).[13] As Plutarch remarks, Ephesus was well disposed towards him and very eager to support the Spartans (λακωνίζουσαν προθυμότατα). Yet the city also ran the risk of complete barbarisation by Persian customs as a consequence of interaction (τοῖς Περσικοῖς ἔθεσι διὰ τὰς ἐπιμειξίας),

[13] See CARTLEDGE (1987) 80.

since it was surrounded by Lydia and the Persian generals spent a lot of time there. Lysander, then, made Ephesus his headquarters and gave orders that all the merchant ships should land their cargoes there. He also installed nearby a naval dockyard for the construction of triremes and revived the merchant harbour by increasing the volume of trade. In brief, Lysander gave Ephesus a new identity.

Interestingly, by reading this chapter of the *Life of Lysander* in light of the *Life of Lycurgus*, one can notice that Ephesus was in a paradoxical situation. From a Spartan perspective, it was a foreign city, which, nonetheless, was eager to Laconize.[14] Yet, just as Lycurgus had feared for Sparta, by having contacts with foreigners and by being contaminated by un-Spartan customs, Ephesus lost its cultural identity. Lysander's course of action, however, cannot be considered Lycurgan: rather than limiting or abolishing the use of money, he increased it. That is to say, money, which in the *Life of Lycurgus* is regarded as the most serious threat to the identity of Sparta, in the case of Ephesus became the indispensable means of preserving Greek cultural identity in Asia. Thus, while Asia appears to have been a geographical area where Spartan values could not be applied, to a certain extent Lysander represented a paradoxical lawgiver: his actions were successful and were appropriate for the particular context in which he operated, but they also betrayed Spartan moral principles, to which Lysander should have adhered.

As Lysander's operations in Asia continued, money assumed even more importance. In this regard, the collaborative friendship between Lysander and Cyrus, the Great King's son, was particularly significant.[15] When Cyrus arrived at Sardis, Lysander went to meet him so as to make accusations against Tissaphernes, who was not maintaining

[14] On the verb λακωνίζω having the meaning of 'imitating Spartan manners', cf. Plu. *Alc.* 23.3, *Lyc.* 20.16, *Lys.* 28.12. On λακωνίζω having political implications and being a reason for formal accusations, see Plu. *Agis/Cleom.* 34(13).6, *Cim.* 17.3-6, *Lys.* 28.12. Cf. also e.g. Dem. 54.34.4; Isoc. 7.110, 12.155, Philostr. *Ep.* 28, Pl. *Prt.* 342b-c, Xen. *Hell.* 4.8.19.

[15] See CARTLEDGE (1987) 79-81, (2002²) 224-5. On the presence of Cyrus in Sardis, cf. Diod. Sic. 13.70.3, Paus. 5.6.5 and 9.32.7, Xen. *Hell.* 1.5.2-7.

the promise of helping the Spartans against the Athenians (*Lys.* 4.1). Lysander's obsequious (θεραπευτικός) attitude and love of honour (φιλοτιμία) won him Cyrus' friendship and support. Lysander, then, asked and obtained money in order to raise the sailors' pay by one obol (*Lys.* 4.3-7).[16] The immediate result was again extremely positive for Lysander and the Spartans, inasmuch as, thanks to Persian money, they could convince a great number of sailors to betray the Athenians and to cross over to the Spartan side. Lysander's initiative brought the Spartans an undeniable advantage, so that they reduced the difference between themselves and the Athenian naval force.

Yet one cannot but notice that Lysander's effortless diplomatic success had also negative consequences for Sparta. By establishing Spartan naval power and by engaging in economic warfare against the Athenians with the decisive help of the Persians, Lysander made Sparta start fighting in a fashion unprecedented in its history. This radical change may be considered another aspect of Lysander's distortion of Spartan cultural identity.

Indeed, fighting in accordance with the traditional style and expertise of the city constituted an important value in classical Greece. In this regard, one can recall Pericles' funeral oration, in which the Athenian military and commercial superiority in sailing is intrinsically connected with the constitution, the values, and the traditions of the city (Thuc. 2.39). This was the premise for Pericles' indication to the Athenians that they should continue the war by committing the fortunes of the city to the navy (Thuc. 2.65).[17] Indeed, in the case of Athens, the πάτριος νόμος of the city was to change continuously and to embark always on new enterprises, while other cities, founded upon different principles, were much more cautious in taking risks in trade as much as in war (2.40.3). In

[16] In Plutarch, the adjective θεραπευτικός is a *vox media*, that is, while often it has the negative meaning of 'excessively obsequious' (it is a typical feature of flatterers: cf. e.g. *Luc.* 16.2, *Artax.* 4.3, *De adulat.* 60 F, 64 F, 71 D, *Quaest. conv.* 622 D, 634 B, *Cum princ. phil.* 776 B, 778 B), it may also assume the positive sense of 'careful about people or things' (e.g. *Praec. ger. reip.* 810 C and 819 C). In *Lys.* 4.3, Plutarch probably means both obsequiousness and a genuine interest in the evolution of war.
[17] See HORNBLOWER (1991) 303-4 and 341-9.

this respect, one may easily suppose that in Thucydides' text there is an allusion to Sparta. Lysander's political and military initiatives, therefore, despite being successful, could appear hazardous. In addition to this, by reading the *Life of Lysander* in light of the *Life of Lycurgus*, they also seem to have been dangerous for the integrity of Sparta.

The idea that Lysander's presence in Asia modified the power relationship between Athenians and Spartans to the Spartans' advantage is confirmed by victory in the Battle of Notium (407 BC), which was not of decisive importance, but did lead to the removal of Alcibiades from the command of the Athenian fleet (*Lys.* 5.1-4). In his account, Plutarch emphasises the contribution of fortune (τύχη) to the ultimate outcome of the battle, whose consequences were favourable to the Spartans even beyond the military success itself. Yet neither in Xenophon (*Hell.* 1.5.12-17) nor in Diodorus Siculus (13.71) does fortune assume so great a role in the defeat of Alcibiades. Rather, Alcibiades' deposition seems to have been caused primarily by political rivalries in Athens.[18] Perhaps, the marginal presence of Alcibiades as the commander abandoned by τύχη may implicitly hint at Lysander's later reversal of fortune. That is to say, the brief reference to Alcibiades may remind the readers that, just as in the past, Alcibiades had often been able to exert decisive political influence at Athens and now was forced to leave the political scene in disgrace, so an analogous destiny might await Lysander too, a suggestion that readers familiar with the history of the Peloponnesian War might easily grasp.

Lysander's victory at Notium allowed him to proceed with a political reorganisation of the Greek cities in Asia. As Plutarch explains, Lysander called to Ephesus from various cities men who distinguished themselves for courage and lofty spirit (τόλμαις καὶ φρονήμασιν) (*Lys.* 5.5). He encouraged them to gather in factions and be ready to take power when, after the defeat of Athens, the democratic regime would be overthrown. The

[18] See Diod. Sic. 13.71; Xen. *Hell.* 1.5.12-15.

scene may echo that of Lycurgus' return to Sparta, when he started to discuss his radical political reforms with an initial group of friends (*Lyc.* 5.5). Yet, the similarity, if any, seems to emphasise the negative intent of Lysander, who was planning the subversion of legitimate political regimes for his personal advantage at Sparta rather than an action for the common good.

4.4 – Lysander and Callicratidas

In this situation, Callicratidas is presented as the best example of the typical Spartan behaviour which conformed with the Lycurgan tradition. Yet, Lysander continued to be more popular and the Spartan virtue of Callicratidas was admired like the beauty of the statue of a hero[19]. In other words, Callicratidas's being ἄριστος καὶ δικαοίτατος was not sufficient for the Spartans and Sparta. The competition between the two generals, however, cannot be viewed simply as the comparison between virtue and vice, good and bad. On the one hand, Plutarch is certainly not reticent about the negative consequences of Lysander's opposition to traditional values. He describes the bond between the general and his subordinates and soldiers as founded primarily on the favours and the privileges that Lysander granted them, often by abusing his power and his role and by becoming a party to injustices and wicked actions (*Lys.* 5.6). In this sense, for Plutarch such a friendship – Lysander is called φιλέταιρος (*Lys.* 5.8) – is morally problematic. However, he also underlines how Lysander's unscrupulous and in many respects 'un-Spartan' conduct in war was what could lead Sparta to victory and represented what the city needed in that historical moment.

Once more, money is a sort of litmus test through which Plutarch examines this issue. For the economic support Lysander had previously obtained from Cyrus was an

[19] On the statue of Callicratidas see DUFF (1999) 168-70.

indispensable means to continue the war and to maintain the naval supremacy of Sparta. Lysander, however arrogantly, left the command of the fleet and went back to Sparta, so that one cannot define his behaviour as improper or disloyal to Sparta. In this regard, one should notice how Plutarch slightly but significantly changed the version of Lysander's discourse at the moment of leaving Asia as it is given by Xenophon. For in *HG* 1.6.2 Xenophon makes Lysander affirm his personal power as θαλαττοκράτωρ and winner of sea battles, while in Plutarch's account more emphasis is placed on the merits of the fleet that had been victorious and had established a thalassocracy (τέλος δὲ ἀποπλέων ἐμαρτύρατο πρὸς αὐτὸν ὅτι θαλασσοκρατοῦν τὸ ναυτικὸν παραδίδωσιν) (*Lys.* 6.2)[20]. Instead of thinking about a simple misinterpretation or a misunderstanding of Xenophon's text, one can assume that in this way Plutarch might have wished to diminish Lysander's responsibilities for the contrast with Callicratidas by presenting his role as remaining within the limits of legality. Moreover, as Moles has remarked, the title of θαλαττοκράτωρ applied to individuals was exceptional and in the past only Minos and Polycrates, two kings, had arrogated the right to use it[21]. Therefore, while Xenophon described the enormous power of Lysander as creating *de facto* and in his intentions a sort of monarchy that was no longer possible to restrain, for Plutarch Lysander's excesses seem to have given birth to a different kind of Spartan imperialism. The apparent faithfulness to the laws barely concealed the substantial betrayal of the Spartan identity, but that could not be deemed inappropriate in itself in order to defeat the Athenians.

Once he had relieved Lysander, Callicratidas had to confront the same difficult situation that his predecessor had faced, but in Plutarch's account his answers to the lack of money and to the necessity of continuing the war were the opposite of Lysander's solutions. Callicratidas was by nature unfit to ask for money from the Persians, since he

[20] It seems probable that Plutarch used Xenophon (*HG* 1.6.2-3) as the main source of this section of *Lysander*, as the many similarities between the two narrations seem to demonstrate.
[21] MOLES (1994) 72.

was ἐλευθέριος καὶ μεγαλόφρων (*Lys.* 6.4). Moreover, he severely criticised the divisions between the Greeks, since because of them it was necessary to turn to the barbarians for economic help. Callicratidas eventually was forced to go to Lydia to meet Cyrus, but unlike Lysander he was not received. In short, Callicratidas failed in maintaining the alliance with the Persians that Lysander had successfully made (*Lys.* 6.6-8). Moreover, his swearing an oath about reconciling the Greek cities in order to intimidate the Persians appears to be simply an utopian desire. As Plutarch remarks for the second time in this part of the biography, Callicratidas' behaviour confirmed him to be extremely virtuous and to have the highest moral values worthy of the tradition of Sparta, which he certainly embodied better than Lysander. At the same time, though, his ideals turned out to be impracticable and he remained distant from the reality of the war, just as the image of the statue, perfect and admired but far from being really loved by the Spartan soldiers, had already suggested. Callicratidas could not understand and deal with the practical needs of his fleet and the logical consequence was his failure. In *Lys.* 7.1 Plutarch gives a quick account of Callicratidas' death that may symbolise precisely such an incompatibility with the time in which he lived, which represents another paradoxical element in the history of Sparta.

Lysander subsequently obtained an appointment to lead the fleet for the second time. Because a law would not allow the Spartans to appoint the same person as navarch twice, they came to a compromise by choosing Aracus for the navarchia and by sending with him Lysander nominally as lieutenant – ἐπιστολέυς –, but in fact as κύριος ἁπάντων. Plutarch remarks how such a decision was prompted by the requests of the Spartan allies in Ionia and Cyrus, who sent their ambassadors to Sparta asking for the return of Lysander (*Lys.* 7.2-3). Moreover, Plutarch's account points out that the Spartans consented to what was – once again – *de facto* a transgression of the νόμος in order to please the allies. One can notice how such a distortion of the true spirit of the Spartan law was the consequence of

external influences, which was the danger Lycurgus had tried to avert from Sparta, as we have already seen. Furthermore, there seems to be a parallelism between the ambiguity of the Spartans in avoiding the legal obstacles and the ambiguous expectations of the politicians in Asia, who were hoping that Lysander could defend their interests by removing all of the democratic governments. Lysander – Plutarch notes – was not as ἁπλοῦς and γενναῖος as Callicratidas but πανοῦργος and σοφιστής. However, his large use of deceit in military operations, his considering his own interest as the good, his attributing a relative value to truth and falsehood only in consideration of their usefulness on each occasion were not different from what the Spartan allies were trying to obtain. To a certain extent, Lysander was the answer they wanted to have and the one that Sparta gave, leaving aside the Lycurgan νόμοι.

CHAPTER 5

THE *LIFE OF AGESILAUS*

The *Life of Agesilaus* is the second biography that Plutarch devotes to a protagonist of the crisis in Sparta.[1] While the *Life of Lysander* focuses on the beginning of Spartan moral decadence, in the *Life of Agesilaus* Plutarch examines how that decay advanced, culminating in the crucial event of the battle of Leuctra (371 BC). In many respects, therefore, the *Life of Agesilaus* varies, integrates, and develops some topics that are already treated in the *Life of Lysander*: the complex relationship of the protagonist with enemies and friends, the military campaign in Asia Minor, the controversial use of money, the ambiguous relationship with religion, the betrayal of the Lycurgan constitution and traditional Spartan values, the inability to moderate φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία, and so forth.

Just like Lysander, Agesilaus is also portrayed as an anomalous Spartiate and an ambiguous leader, who governed Sparta in its most difficult historical period, making controversial decisions. Agesilaus' behaviour often violated the traditional Spartan code of conduct, which is described in the *Life of Lycurgus*. Yet, as we shall see, the successes of the Greeks in Asia against the Persians were mainly due to Agesilaus' pragmatic choices, which did not conform to the Spartan value system. Similarly, Agesilaus was responsible for saving Sparta from complete destruction when the Thebans invaded Laconia after the battle of Leuctra. Agesilaus' un-Spartan measures enabled the survival of the city and its constitution.

Agesilaus' rule, then, with its own contradictions and paradoxes, revealed the intrinsic contradictions and paradoxes of the Spartan education and political systems, which became progressively evident in the course of the fourth century BC. In particular, as

[1] According to JONES (1966=1995) 109 and 113-14, it is not possible to establish any *terminus ante* or *post quem* for the *Lives of Agesilaus and Pompey*, but one must simply conjecture that these Lives might have appeared as the fifteenth pair of the series.

already anticipated in Chapter 3, the Spartans were not meant to impose their hegemony over the other Greeks: their supremacy created a constant state of war and, eventually, caused the downfall of Sparta. Agesilaus was certainly guilty of fighting the Thebans at all costs, without trying to find a peaceful solution to the conflict. According to Plutarch, however, Agesilaus was constantly driven by φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία, two of the most important values promoted by the Spartan ἀγωγή, which he was not able to maintain at the right level. Indeed, Agesilaus' failure can be considered the failure of traditional Spartan training.

After the battle of Leuctra, Sparta could no longer remain the same superpower that had dominated Greece for decades. Its trajectory, nonetheless, seems to be emblematic of the entire Hellenic past and of the inability of the Greeks to join forces to fight a common external enemy. That is, despite their limits, Agesilaus and Sparta could have succeeded against the Persians, but the endemic rivalry among the Greek states constituted an insurmountable obstacle. To a certain extent, Plutarch seems to suggest that just as Sparta was destined to fail and decline, so too was the Greek world.

5.1 – Ruling at Sparta

As in the case of the *Lives of Lysander and Sulla*, the *Lives of Agesilaus and Pompey* also do not have a formal prologue. Rather, the *Life of Agesilaus* begins with a brief note about Agesilaus' descent from King Archidamus and his second wife Eupolia (*Ages.* 1.1-2):

> Ἀρχίδαμος ὁ Ζευξιδάμου βασιλεύσας ἐπιφανῶς Λακεδαιμονίων, κατέλιπεν υἱὸν ἐκ γυναικὸς εὐδοκίμου Λαμπιδοῦς Ἄγιν, καί πολὺ νεώτερον ἐξ Εὐπωλίας τῆς Μελησιππίδα θυγατρός, Ἀγησίλαον. ἐπεὶ δὲ τῆς βασιλείας Ἄγιδι προσηκούσης κατὰ τὸν νόμον ἰδιώτης ἐδόκει βιοτεύσειν ὁ Ἀγησίλαος, ἤχθη τὴν λεγομένην ἀγωγὴν ἐν Λακεδαίμονι, σκληρὰν μὲν οὖσαν τῇ διαίτῃ καί πολύπονον, παιδεύουσαν δὲ τοὺς νέους ἄρχεσθαι.
>
> Archidamus, the son of Zeuxidamas, after reigning remarkably over the Lacedaemonians, left behind him a son, Agis, by an honourable woman named

> Lampido, and by Eupolia, the daughter of Melesippidas, a much younger son, Agesilaus. Since it seemed likely that Agesilaus would spend his life as a private person, because the kingdom belonged to Agis by law, Agesilaus was brought up following the so-called *agôgê*, which was austere in its mode of life and full of hardships, but educated the young to be ruled.

The text places emphasis on the differences between Agis and Agesilaus. As Shipley thoughtfully observed, Plutarch seems to remark upon "Agesilaos' juniority to his brother" through the rhetorical sophistication of the opening sentence.[2] The name of the protagonist is conveniently placed at the end, causing a surprise effect that seems to stress how unexpectedly Agesilaus became king. Furthermore, the contrast between Lampido, Agis' mother, defined as honourable (εὐδόκιμος), and Eupolia, Agesilaus' mother, simply identified as Melesippidas' daughter, accentuates the distance between the two brothers.[3]

We are also informed about their different education: Agesilaus received the traditional ἀγωγή of the Spartans, from which, incidentally, future kings were exempt, since they only learned to rule (*Ages.* 1.3). As we saw in Chapter 3, one of the primary goals of the ἀγωγή was to prepare the young to obey the laws of Sparta (cf. *Lyc.* 30.3-4). Agesilaus' learning to be ruled (ἄρχεσθαι) then, did not constitute an anomaly. Yet the fact that a Spartiate became king after being educated to obey surely constituted an exceptional circumstance.[4]

Plutarch explores this topic even further, as one can infer from the repetition of words such as νόμος ('law', three times), ἄρχω ('to rule', three times), ἀγωγή ('training', two times) throughout the first chapter. This semantic choice seems to imply that the relation between command and obedience and between the traditional Spartan laws and the

[2] SHIPLEY (1997) 57-9.
[3] On the probable noble origin of Eupolia and Melesippidas, however, see CARTLEDGE (1987) 22.
[4] Plu. *Ages.* 1.4: "This was also unusual in Agesilaus, the fact that he came to command not uneducated in obeying" (Ἀγησιλάῳ δὲ καὶ τοῦτο ὑπῆρξεν ἴδιον, ἐλθεῖν ἐπὶ τὸ ἄρχειν μὴ ἀπαίδευτον τοῦ ἄρχεσθαι). For a critical discussion about the reasons for exempting the kings from the ἀγωγή, the exceptionality of Agesilaus' education, and some possible historical antecedents (e.g. Dorieus and Leonidas), see CARTLEDGE (1987) 23-5, DUCAT (2006) 148-9, LÉVY (1997) 155, SHIPLEY (1997) 59-60 and 64-7. Cf. also KENNELL (1995) 133.

necessity of leadership assumed a great complexity in Agesilaus' life. In particular, Plutarch highlights the contrast between Agesilaus' natural inclination to rule (τὸ φύσει βασιλικὸν καὶ ἡγεμονικόν) and the initial impossibility of reigning by law. In addition, Agesilaus' great harmony with his subjects (εὐαρμοστότατον ἑαυτὸν τοῖς ὑπηκόοις παρέσχε) together with his popularity and kindness (τὸ δημοτικὸν καὶ φιλάνθρωπον), which he developed more than other kings, made him a unique Spartan ruler (*Ages.* 1.5).

Indeed, Agesilaus' tendency to adapt to the people over whom he ruled represented another problematic aspect of his character. Εὐαρμοστία (adaptability), the concept to which Plutarch refers, usually has a positive meaning. A marked affability, for instance, gave Cimon the opportunity to begin his political career and win favour with the Athenians (*Cim.* 5.5), despite his previous bad reputation and the difficulties in his private life (*Cim.* 4). A similar comment about Cimon can be also read in the *Life of Aristides*, where Plutarch contrasts the positive attitude towards the allies that both Cimon and Aristides had during the Persian war with the arrogant behaviour of the Spartans led by Pausanias (*Arist.* 23.1). In the *Parallel Lives*, one can also find several negative examples of characters who are not εὐάρμοστοι. As regards Sparta, the case of Leonidas, Cleonymus' son, is emblematic: according to Plutarch, he did not get along with his fellow citizens because of his rejection of tradition (*Agis/Cleom.* 3.8-9).[5]

Εὐαρμοστία, nonetheless, is not simply a personal quality of virtuous politicians. It also constitutes an important political objective, being the premise on which politicians base their attempts to change the ἦθος (character) of their citizens, guiding them towards the good. These two phases of political activity are described in detail in the *Praecepta gerendae reipublicae*, where Plutarch argues that moulding the character (ἠθοποιεῖν) and

[5] Some Roman negative examples: by nature, Lucullus was unable to maintain a harmonious relationship with the Roman notables and with men of equal rank (*Luc.* 33.2); Coriolanus was excessively harsh because of his bad temperament (*Cor.* 1.4). Εὐαρμοστία was also one of the many reasons for hope that, in Plutarch's view, Alexander the Great could find in himself when he started his expedition in Asia (*De Alex. fort.* 342 F).

correcting (μεθαρμόττειν) the nature of the people is a long and difficult process, which requires time and ability (*Praec. ger. reip.* 799 B-C).[6] He employs the metaphor of wine: first, it is assimilated without difficulty; then, it gradually changes the drinker's character. Similarly, the statesman has to adapt to current customs (τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις ἤθεσιν εὐάρμοστον εἶναι), while strengthening his leadership with good reputation and public trust (δόξα καὶ πίστις). Only at a second stage can he try to harmonise the ἦθος of the citizens so as to steer them towards what is better, leading them gently (*Praec. ger. reip.* 800 A-B).[7] The harmony between ruler and citizens, therefore, can bring further εὐαρμοστία to the city. A significant example, in this respect, is king Numa, who made the Romans and the Sabines, the two major ethnic groups of archaic Rome, blend together thanks to his legislative measures (*Num.* 17.1-4).

Agesilaus' εὐαρμοστία, however, appears to have been a different case, as one can infer from the use of the adjective ἴδιος (distinctive), which recalls the substantive ἰδιώτης (private citizen) employed previously. Plutarch brings two aspects to attention. First, Agesilaus' harmony with his subjects represented an element of novelty in Sparta, as Plutarch suggests through the comparison with the other kings (πολὺ τῶν βασιλέων). As we saw in Chapter 3, one of the dominant values in Spartan society was ὁμόνοια (unanimity), which resulted from the delicate balance between ambition, rivalry, contentiousness, and moderation (σωφροσύνη), and was strengthened by egalitarian economic and social measures. Harmony between rulers and subjects, conversely, does not seem to have been an important element of Spartan kingship. Second, Agesilaus' popular touch and humanity (τὸ δημοτικὸν καὶ φιλάνθρωπον), derived from Spartan education, do not seem to be perfectly compatible with his natural disposition to exert leadership as king

[6] On the concept of harmony applied to politics by Plutarch, see DUFF (1999) 89-94.
[7] In this regard, cf. Pericles' flexible way of governing the Athenians like a doctor who administers harmless pleasures or biting drugs at the right time (*Per.* 15.1); see STADTER (1989) 189-90. See also the distinction between the simple imitation of the people's character, typical of courtesans (αὐλικοὶ κόλακες), and its deep understanding in *Praec. ger. reip.* 800 A.

and military commander (τῷ φύσει ἡγεμονικῷ καί βασιλικῷ) (*Ages.* 1.5). Rather, the two pairs of qualities mentioned by Plutarch, being intrinsically different from one another, appear to have been merely juxtaposed in Agesilaus.[8] Popular touch and humanity, moreover, cannot be considered typical Spartan values nor are they mentioned among the features enhanced by the ἀγωγή. They were never associated with the Lycurgan constitution by Xenophon, Plato, Aristotle, Ephorus, Polybius, or Diodorus. This presents the possibility that the Spartan ἀγωγή might have produced unexpected results in Agesilaus. Thus the impression that Agesilaus constituted a very exceptional case and an anomaly in Sparta seems to be confirmed.

Indeed, the opening section of the *Life of Agesilaus* – as usually happens in the *Parallel Lives* – presents some key themes that are examined throughout the biography. In particular, as we have commented, Plutarch focuses his attention on the presence of conflicting features in Agesilaus' character. This highlights one of the dominant motives in the Life: Agesilaus' ambivalence. For, on the one hand, Agesilaus' contrasting and competing qualities could potentially represent – and, indeed, represented to some extent – a positive force, which produced positive effects. As we will see, especially in the first part of the Life, Plutarch shows how this characteristic trait made Agesilaus successful at governing Sparta as much as at leading the Greeks against the Persians. Yet, on the other hand, Plutarch appears to suggest that Agesilaus' inconsistent nature and character could also be problematic. In the narration, Plutarch often refers to the main characteristics of Agesilaus' personality to explain his later political and moral difficulties – that is, as the Life goes on, Agesilaus' initial ambivalence proves to be moral ambiguity.

Furthermore, in the first chapter of the *Life of Agesilaus* Plutarch appears to invite the readers to examine the life of the protagonist against the background of Sparta and its

[8] One may notice the symmetrical disposition of the elements of the clause (φύσει/ἀπὸ τῆς ἀγωγῆς, βασιλικόν/δημοτικόν, ἡγεμονικόν/φιλάνθρωπον), which emphasises their difference. On the combination of natural qualities with education in Agesilaus, see SHIPLEY (1997) 63-7.

laws, a feature common to all the Lives of Spartan characters. As we commented earlier, by discussing Agesilaus' education, Plutarch indirectly establishes a strong link between the *Life of Agesilaus* and the *Life of Lycurgus*. The interconnection between the two Lives is strengthened by the comparison between the Spartan ἀγωγή and the training of horses: in both cases, the main objective is obedience, as is emphasised by the use of the adjective πειθήνιος (docile) in both the *Life of Agesilaus* and the *Life of Lycurgus* (*Ages.* 1.3 recalling *Lyc.* 30.4). One can also notice that in the *Life of Lycurgus* Plutarch explicitly discusses the Spartan attitude towards command and obedience by anticipating how leaders such as Lysander, Agesilaus, or Gylippus altered the Lycurgan tradition in this regard, as they made Sparta rule over other Greek cities (*Lyc.* 30.4-5 and 31.1). By reading the beginning of the *Life of Agesilaus* in light of the *Life of Lycurgus* then, one can understand that Agesilaus' uncharacteristic leadership corresponded to an exceptional phase of Spartan history. In many respects, Agesilaus did not follow the principles underlying the Lycurgan constitution. This cannot but confirm the idea that the *Life of Agesilaus* represents Plutarch's next step in the analysis of distinctive Spartan topics within the *Parallel Lives* and Agesilaus constitutes another case study of the Spartan saga.

5.2 – Agesilaus' portrait

The theme of Agesilaus' training creates an even stronger link between the *Life of Agesilaus* and the *Life of Lysander*, for Lysander, who was Agesilaus' ἐραστής (active lover), played an important role in Agesilaus' education. Only Plutarch, both in the *Life of Agesilaus* and in the *Life of Lysander* (*Ages.* 2.1, *Lys.* 22.6), mentions this intimate relationship, which had both pedagogic and erotic implications. Other literary sources (e.g. Xenophon's *Agesilaos* or Nepos' *Life of Agesilaus*) do not make any reference to it. In Xenophon's case, in particular, Cartledge explains the reticence about this very relevant aspect of Agesilaus'

youth by "the obvious and tendentious reason that he [Xenophon] did not wish to dilute his hero's eulogy by making him owe any part of his alleged success to Lysander".[9] Plutarch, conversely, probably has the opposite intention. For not only does the prominence given to the love and friendship between Lysander and Agesilaus show the personal bond between the two leaders, but it also emphasises the continuity between their political and military acts. Thus, by discussing their personal ties, Plutarch anticipates that Agesilaus took over Lysander's leading role in Sparta.[10]

Plutarch writes that Lysander was attracted, in particular, by the decorum of Agesilaus' nature (τῷ κοσμίῳ τῆς φύσεως αὐτοῦ). The word κόσμιον, which reminds us again of the idea of harmony and good order, was often employed by Plato to describe the balance in a virtuous life founded on philosophical values. Decency and order are relevant aspects, for instance, of just love (ὀρθὸς ἔρως), defined as the natural inclination to love what is orderly and beautiful according to temperance and musical harmony (Pl. *Resp.* 403a-b).[11] In Plutarch too the term κόσμιον assumes a similar meaning and the interrelation between decency and virtue emerges quite distinctly, especially in erotic contexts. In the *Amatorius*, we can read that love can be stirred up by harmonious and prudent characters both in heterosexual and homosexual relationships. Yet not only is τὸ κόσμιον a 'trigger' for love, although not the only one, but also one of its effects, inasmuch as ἔρως has the power to make a licentious soul become respectful and orderly (*Amat.* 767 E). Love, in this

[9] CARTLEDGE (1987) 78. BOMMELAER (1981) 27 n. 11, conversely, supposes that Xenophon changed his opinion about Lysander when he wrote the *Agesilaos*.

[10] The relationship between Sulla and Pompey shows several similarities: Sulla, for instance, had an initial fascination with Pompey, followed by a growing hostility towards him (*Pomp.* 9.1); family ties held them together (*Pomp.* 9.2-4, *Sull.* 33.4); most importantly, Pompey's political measures presented both evident similarities with and substantial differences from Sulla's tyrannical power (e.g. *Pomp.* 14). This may suggest that Plutarch may have written the *Lives of Lysander and Sulla* and the *Lives of Agesilaus and Pompey* as a double pair. That is, in these four Lives, Plutarch may have tried to examine a double pair of characters, who led their cities in succession to one another. On the relationship between Sulla and Pompey and its representation in Roman literary sources, see KEAVENEY (1982) 130-4, SEAGER (2002²) 26-29.

[11] See LUDWIG (2007) 217-22, PELOSI (2006). A similar remark on orderly love can be found at Pl. *Symp.* 188b; see SCOTT-WELTON (2008) 57-63. On the contrast between temperate life and dissolute conduct, see Pl. *Grg.* 493d-494a.

regard, exerts a pedagogic action on lovers.[12] From this perspective, therefore, Lysander's attraction towards Agesilaus would not be atypical, especially if one considers the educational value of love relationships in Sparta (cf. *Lyc.* 17.1 and 18.8-9).[13]

There is another aspect that should be taken into account: κόσμιον is also an essential concept in the relationship between the older politician and the young, which ought to be based on the young's desire to follow the example of experienced and successful men. This principle is formulated in the *Praecepta gerendae reipublicae*, where Plutarch distinguishes between men who enter into politics after one single great enterprise, pursuing a fast and brilliant career (804 C-D), and men who, while still young, attach themselves to someone older and more famous so as to attain success gradually (805 E-F). Among those who embarked on the second path to politics, Plutarch mentions Agesilaus, who was supported by Lysander:[14]

> Τὴν δ' ἀσφαλῆ καὶ σχολαίαν εἵλοντο πολλοὶ τῶν ἐνδόξων, Ἀριστείδης, Φωκίων, Παμμένης ὁ Θηβαῖος, Λεύκολλος ἐν Ῥώμῃ, Κάτων, Ἀγησίλαος ὁ Λακεδαιμόνιος. […] Ἀριστείδην μὲν γὰρ ηὔξησε Κλεισθένης καὶ Φωκίωνα Χαβρίας, Λεύκολλον δὲ Σύλλας, Κάτωνα δὲ Μάξιμος, Ἐπαμεινώνδας δὲ Παμμένη, καὶ Λύσανδρος Ἀγησίλαον·
>
> Many famous men, however, chose the safe and leisurely way, for instance Aristides, Phocion, Pammenes the Theban, Lucullus at Rome, Cato, the Lacedaemonian Agesilaus. […] For Aristides was made great by Cleisthenes, Phocion by Chabrias, Lucullus by Sulla, Cato by Maximus, Epaminondas aided Pammenes, and Lysander Agesilaus.

Plutarch, therefore, makes it clear that the young should pay special attention to the virtue of his potential protector when choosing his political guide (806 C). A similar remark can be found in the *An seni respublica gerenda sit*, in which Plutarch explains that old men are

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[12] See Plu. *Amat.* 766 A-767 B.

[13] On ἔρως and education in Sparta, see DUCAT (2006) 164-8, KENNELL (1995) 132, VATTUONE (2004a) and (2004b).

[14] Interestingly, Pompey and Sulla are also mentioned in this section of the *Praecepta gerendae reipublicae*. First, Plutarch refers to Pompey as a politician who started his career after a great triumph, which was awarded to him despite Sulla's opposition (804 E-F). Then, Sulla's constant support of Pompey is presented as an example of virtue, benevolence, and liberality towards the young (806 B-F). Cf. Plu. *Pomp.* 14, *Sull.* 33.4.

feared and respected by the young who follow them, since they stimulate and encourage decorum and nobility in the young (τὸ κόσμιον καὶ τὸ γενναῖον αὔξοντας καὶ συνεπιγαυροῦντας) (796 A). In this treatise, moreover, by mentioning a discourse of Lysander, Plutarch expresses his admiration for Sparta as a civic community, in which the elders were all considered legislators and the young were obedient to them (795 E-796 A).[15] Accordingly, the κόσμιον of the young should come as a result of their formative process.[16]

Thus, by employing such a key term as decorum at the beginning of *Agesilaus*, Plutarch appears to refer implicitly to the later development and the political implications of the relationship between Lysander and Agesilaus. In *Agesilaus*, however, the pattern of the bond between the older politician and the young man starting his career seems to have been reversed. For, as we saw earlier, Lysander, the ἐραστής, saw in Agesilaus the signs of a decent nature: that is to say, it was the older man who was fascinated by the young rather than the other way round. Agesilaus seems to have made a good impression on Lysander, as the verb ἐκπλήσσω (to strike) suggests. The sudden astonishment and the immediate passion triggered by Agesilaus, nonetheless, also indicate that Lysander's attraction remained superficial. An interesting comparison, in this regard, can be drawn with Alcibiades' many suitors, who were struck (ἐκπεπληγμένοι) by Alcibiades' youthful beauty (*Alc.* 4.1).[17] Contrary to Socrates' gaze, which was much more intense and penetrating (Plutarch describes it through verbs such as ἐμφαίνω, διαλάμπω, and ἐνοράω), the suitors' attitudes remained passive to the brilliance radiated by Alcibiades. Consequently, just as the suitors were not able to recognise Alcibiades' potential or his good nature (εὐφυία) beyond the exterior form (εἶδος), one may wonder whether Lysander's attraction towards Agesilaus

[15] See CAIAZZA (1993) 224 nn. 133-4. Cf. Plu. *Lyc.* 17.1, 24.1.
[16] In the *Respublica*, Plato refers the same pattern concerning the κόσμιον to philosophers, who should try to conform to the orderly and the divine so as to become orderly and divine themselves. Subsequently, philosophers can also become δημιουργοί (makers) of temperance, justice, and other social virtues, applying their theories to the private and public characters (ἤθη) of men; see Pl. *Resp.* 500c-d.
[17] On this passage, see DUFF (2009) 38, VERDEGEM (2010) 131-5.

was also due to a lack of comprehension of Agesilaus' temperament. Was, then, Agesilaus' κόσμιον really generated by high moral values? Or, was it simply an impression, something that Lysander wanted to see in his lover? This question is not answered in the first chapter, yet its spectre adds a further element of uncertainty over Agesilaus' nature.

Plutarch appears to confirm this idea of ambiguity in his portrayal of Agesilaus. The qualities of Agesilaus that are mentioned seem to correspond to Plutarch's/the external narrator's 'objective' evaluation of the protagonist's character. Nonetheless, they may also represent the result of Lysander's idealisation of Agesilaus, presented through a secondary focalization. In this respect, Agesilaus' strong desire to excel in everything is emblematic (*Ages.* 2.2):

> φιλονικότατος γὰρ ὢν καὶ θυμοειδέστατος ἐν τοῖς νέοις καὶ πάντα πρωτεύειν βουλόμενος, καὶ τὸ σφοδρὸν ἔχων καὶ ῥαγδαῖον ἄμαχον καὶ δυσεκβίαστον, εὐπειθείᾳ πάλιν αὖ καὶ πρᾳότητι τοιοῦτος ἦν οἷος φόβῳ μηδέν, αἰσχύνῃ δὲ πάντα ποιεῖν τὰ προσταττόμενα, καὶ τοῖς ψόγοις ἀλγύνεσθαι μᾶλλον ἢ τοὺς πόνους βαρύνεσθαι.
>
> For, being the fondest of victory and highest-spirited among the young, and wishing to be the first in everything, while he had vehemence and a fury impossible to contend with and hard to overpower, on the other hand he was of such ready obedience and gentleness that he could do nothing for fear, but everything that was ordered to him for sense of shame, and he would be distressed by reproaches rather than oppressed by hardships.

Agesilaus' qualities can be partly related to Spartan education: φιλονικία ('love of victory', 'contentiousness'), θυμός ('high spirit'), εὐπείθεια ('ready obedience'), and αἰσχύνη ('sense of shame') were traditional values that the ἀγωγή aimed to promote, as we saw in Chapter 3. Agesilaus, then, would appear to have been a true Spartiate. The verb πρωτεύω ('to excel'), conversely, is more problematic: it cannot be merely considered an equivalent for φιλοτιμία ('love of honour', 'ambition'). Rather, it is the term with which Plutarch defines Spartan hegemony over Greece, which lasted until the reign of king Agis, when Sparta began its decline (*Lyc.* 29.10). Thus Agesilaus' desire for primacy, while not being the

same as ambition and the spirit of emulation, which made the Spartiates compete for public offices, echoed their determination to lead the other Greeks – a determination that often led to a desire to be ruled by Spartan generals (*Lyc.* 30.4). In the *Life of Lycurgus*, however, Plutarch makes it clear that this was not what Lycurgus had planned for Sparta; rather, it represented a radical change from tradition and was one of the main causes of the Spartan downfall (*Lyc.* 31.1). By reading the *Life of Lycurgus* and the *Life of Agesilaus* as complementary, one can understand better how the aspiration to be the first constituted another ambiguous aspect of Agesilaus' character. Indeed, this aspiration contributes to the depiction of Agesilaus as leader during a very problematic time for Sparta, a theme that Plutarch anticipates in the *Life of Lycurgus* and discusses throughout this Life.

Other elements of ambiguity in Agesilaus' portrait may be highlighted by analysing the syntactic construction of the passage quoted above. In particular, the conjunction γάρ appears to indicate that Agesilaus' virtues are observed from Lysander's perspective – that is, Plutarch seems to mention the traits that, in Lysander's view, made Agesilaus κόσμιος. The main emphasis is laid again on the contrast between Agesilaus' leadership skills and his readiness to obey, gentleness, and sense of shame, as is suggested by the emphatic πάλιν αὖ in the main clause. In this regard, one may remember that Lysander's character also had conflicting features. As we discussed in Chapter 4, on account of his education Lysander was φιλότιμος and φιλόνικος, but he was also excessively obsequious (θεραπευτικός) towards powerful people (*Lys.* 2.4). The similarity between Lysander and Agesilaus may not be particularly significant, since φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία were considered the most important and – we may assume – the most popular virtues in Sparta. Yet it can also explain the reasons for Lysander's interest in Agesilaus – that is, Lysander might have been impressed and attracted by Agesilaus' anomalous character, which was not very different

from his own. This indirectly prepares the readers for some more equivocal characteristics of Agesilaus.[18]

In this regard, Agesilaus' physical disability also reinforces the impression that Agesilaus' nature was unclear and ambiguous. We read that Agesilaus was limping, but that the grace of his youthful body concealed his condition. Plutarch adds that the way in which Agesilaus coped with this difficulty – that is, with joking and self-mockery (παίζων and σκώπτων) – constituted a correction of his suffering and made his ambition (φιλοτιμία) more evident, since he did not decline any hardship and enterprise because of his lameness (*Ages.* 2.3).

These considerations may still express Lysander's viewpoint, as much as they can be taken as Plutarch's opinion of Agesilaus. Both of these interpretations are plausible: Plutarch, while still developing Agesilaus' portrait from Lysander's perspective, also indirectly warns the readers about Agesilaus being an exception in Spartan society. On the one hand, one should consider that Plutarch is the only ancient author who mentions eugenic practices and infant exposure in Sparta (cf. *Lyc.* 16.2). The historicity of this information is debatable, although recent studies hypothesise that Plutarch may have adapted a utopian topos to fit his idealised view of Sparta.[19] Yet, although possibly inaccurate or, worse, invented, Plutarch's testimony implies that the physical malformation must have represented a serious threat to Agesilaus' survival. Agesilaus' situation, then, was truly extraordinary.

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[18] The considerations of SHIPLEY (1997) 69 on Plutarch's characterisation by 'reaction' – an expression borrowed from PELLING (1988b) 40, where it is defined as "to pass comments on a principal by reconstructing how observers of the time would have responded" – are not entirely convincing, because Plutarch does not seem to intend to increase "the sense of authenticity by using indirect characterization", as Shipley puts it.

[19] HUYS (1996) 59-74 argues that Plutarch may have followed some texts that describe ideal states and envisage the selection of the newborn (especially Arist. *Pol.* 7.1335b18-20 and Pl. *Resp.* 5.460c). DUCAT (2006) 28 conjectures that infanticide may have been introduced into the Spartan tradition under the influence of the Cynics and the Stoics. See also CARTLEDGE (1987) 22, (2001) 84, EVANS GRUBBS (2013) 84 and 87-8, KENNELL (2013) 382-3.

On the other hand, it is hard to believe that the physical pleasantness of Agesilaus' body could really hide the malformation, which must have remained evident, despite the fact that the use of the term ἐπανόρθωμα (correction) would indicate the contrary. Rather, the idea of Agesilaus' 'correcting' his limping may well represent Lysander's impression of Agesilaus, which is expressed again through secondary focalisation. Plutarch, then, seems to focus again on the 'visual' impact of Agesilaus on external observers, as is also suggested by the adjective ἔκδηλος (conspicuous) – that is, Agesilaus' portrait does not reveal (only) the protagonist's true characteristics, but rather his effect on other people, especially Lysander. Consequently, it becomes difficult to ascertain Agesilaus' true personality.

Finally, Plutarch concludes these opening chapters of the *Life of Agesilaus* by expressing his point of view as narrator (this time unequivocally) and remarking upon the lack of images of Agesilaus. Agesilaus prohibited representations of his body even after his death (*Ages.* 2.4-5). As we saw in Chapter 4, in the *Parallel Lives* statues and pictures of the Spartan leaders have a deep meaning. The absence of images (εἰκόνες) portraying Agesilaus increases the sense of uncertainty about him. No one could be sure about his physical appearance, although it was common opinion that he was short and easily underrated. Yet his spirit was always cheerful and kind: this made him more loved than the beautiful and young until he reached old age (ἄχρι γήρως). This last contrast concludes the portrait and reaffirms how difficult it was – and still is for Plutarch's readers – to understand and evaluate Agesilaus.

Furthermore, the reference to Agesilaus' long-lasting desirability through the adjective ἐρασμιώτερος reminds us of Alcibiades yet again, for Alcibiades was also loved (ἐράσμιος) even when he grew up and entered into adulthood (*Alc.* 1.4-5). As Wohl thoughtfully wrote, being the object of sexual attraction at an age when beauty normally

disappears constituted an evident anomaly.[20] This form of attractiveness, related to physical and moral beauty, was the quality that raised the sexual desire of older partners (ἐρασταί) for their young lovers (ἐρώμενοι). In the case of Alcibiades, moreover, erotic desire qualified the fascination of the Athenians for their leader, even after being betrayed by him repeatedly and after enduring severe hardships (cf. *Alc.* 34.7). By employing the adjective ἐράσμιος with reference to Agesilaus, therefore, Plutarch might be alluding to a similarly strong bond with the Spartans, a topic that, like several others anticipated in the opening chapters, Plutarch discusses in detail later in the Life.

5.3 – The controversial accession to the throne

The theme of Agesilaus' ambiguity assumes even more relevance in one of the most important episodes of the Life: the accession to the throne. This topic is anticipated at the end of the second chapter by an anecdote concerning king Archidamus, which has no evident connection with Agesilaus' portrait. Plutarch, quoting Theophrastus, narrates that Archidamus was fined by the ephors for having married a little woman, because she would generate kinglets rather than kings (οὐ γὰρ βασιλεῖς ἁμῖν, ἀλλὰ βασιλείδια γεννασεῖ) (*Ages.* 2.6). Plutarch, therefore, returns to the question of whether Agesilaus was fit to become king or whether he was going to be a mere βασιλείδιον because of his physical condition.

After what may be regarded as a sinister prologue, the section devoted to Agesilaus' rise to power begins with Alcibiades' arrival in Sparta, after he deserted the Athenians in consequence of the scandal of the Hermae (415 BC) (*Ages.* 3.1).[21] The facts are narrated in greater detail in the *Life of Alcibiades*, which was most probably prepared at the same time as

[20] WOHL (2002) 131. Cf. also VERDEGEM (2010) 108-14.
[21] Cf. Thuc. 6.27-29 and 6.53-61; Plu. *Alc.* 18-22, *Nic.* 13.3.

Agesilaus and *Lysander* or not long after these Lives.[22] Here Plutarch concentrates his attention on Alcibiades' ability to adapt to the Spartan way of living, as if he were a true Spartiate who had received the traditional Spartan education (*Alc.* 23-24). In Plutarch' view, nonetheless, Alcibiades' nature could not easily change as often as Alcibiades changed the city where he lived nor could Alcibiades undergo a complete transformation of his character. Rather, despite the fact that he managed to take on various appearances, each time displaying a facade suitable to the people and places with which he was dealing, his true feelings and actions remained the same in every circumstance (*Alc.* 23.5-6). The affair with the Spartan queen Timaea, Agis' wife, exemplifies just such a chameleonic attitude. As Plutarch clarifies, while Agis was leading an expedition abroad, Alcibiades seduced Timaea, who later gave birth to Leotychidas, with the intention of making his descendants reign at Sparta (*Alc.* 23.8). In the *Life of Alcibiades*, therefore, Alcibiades' aim appears to have been consistent with his ambition (φιλοτιμία) and desire to be always the first (φιλοπρωτεία), features also attributed to Agesilaus, as we saw earlier.[23]

Indeed, we cannot rule out the possibility that the faction averse to Leotychidas fabricated the whole story of Timaea's adultery. Nonetheless, whether the anecdote was considered authentic or false, we can plausibly think that this episode, which had extremely serious consequences for the succession of Agis, was still well-known in Plutarch's time and the readers of the *Parallel Lives* were familiar with it. As Cartledge puts it, this "was surely the most sensational scandal of the Athenian War and perhaps the greatest domestic scandal of all Spartan history".[24] The fact that earlier literary sources either do not mention the affair or contain only elliptical allusions to it should not surprise us: because the

[22] Cf. also Plu. *De tranq. an.* 467 F. On the relative chronology of the *Life of Alcibiades*, see VERDEGEM (2010) 91-6.
[23] On Alcibiades' stay at Sparta, his affair with Timaea, and the enmity towards Agis, see LITTMAN (1969), who dates Leotychidas' birth to 425 BC, (pp. 272-4), PICCIRILLI (1997), VERDEGEM (2010) 269-83. On Alcibiades' φιλοτιμία and φιλοπρωτεία, cf. Plu. *Alc.* 2.1.
[24] CARTLEDGE (1987) 113, LITTMAN (1969) 274.

incident was so fresh in everyone's mind, it may not have been necessary to recall all the facts explicitly. Thus, as Vickers intriguingly argued, Aristophanes may have hidden in the *Birds* some references to Alcibiades and Timaea, which the audience was able to decode.[25] Similarly, Thucydides could simply note that Alcibiades was hostile to Agis, without offering any further explanation (Thuc. 8.12.3). In the *Hellenica*, Xenophon did not mention the hypothesis that Alcibiades may have been Leotychidas' real father (*Hell.* 3.3.1-2) and, in the *Agesilaos*, Agis' paternity is not even questioned (*Ages.* 1.5).[26] Perhaps more details may have been supplied by later sources such as Satyrus (quoted in Athenaeus' *Deipnosophists*) or Duris.[27] Assuming that the readers have a sufficient knowledge of the scandal, which involved Alcibiades and the royal family of the Eurypontids, in the *Life of Agesilaus* Plutarch can omit several particulars so as to concentrate on the institutional impasse that the Spartans had to solve.

Plutarch, therefore, taking the perspective of the Spartans, presents the illicit affair between Timaea and Alcibiades as the reason for the accusations hurled at Alcibiades, as is implicitly confirmed by the use of the phrase αἰτίαν ἔσχε ('was accused') to refer to Alcibiades (*Ages.* 3.1). Subsequently, the reactions of Timaea and Alcibiades are briefly summarised. The queen had no remorse: she even used to call her baby Alcibiades instead of Leotychidas at home. As regards Alcibiades, here too the main emphasis falls on his ambition to make Sparta subject to his offspring (*Ages.* 3.2). Plutarch's account is almost identical to the narration in the *Life of Alcibiades* (*Alc.* 23.8): "In addition, [Duris says that] Alcibiades declared that he did not have intercourse with Timaea by reason of arrogance,

[25] VICKERS (1989) 286-7, (1995) 350-3.
[26] On Thucydides' account of Alcibiades' stay at Sparta and the general suspicion surrounding him, see LITTMAN (1969) 271 n. 7. On Xenophon's markedly different presentation of Agis' succession in the *Hellenica* and in the *Agesilaos*, see CARTLEDGE (1987) 111-2, TUPLIN (1993) 52-3. Cf. also LITTMAN (1969) 272-3.
[27] Cf. Ath. 12.534b-c, Duris *FGrH* 76 F 69 (= Plu. *Ages.* 3.2). Pausanias, conversely, did not mention Timaea's adultery (3.8.7). On Plutarch's use of Satyrus see VERDEGEM (2010) 149 n. 151 and 282-3 n. 19. On Duris as Plutarch's source for the episode see LITTMAN (1969) 276-7, SHIPLEY (1997) 52-3 and 81.

but with the ambition that the Spartiates were ruled by his descendants".[28] On this occasion, however, the Spartiates are rendered the subject of the passive verb βασιλεύεσθαι, revealing that Plutarch highlights the possible consequences for the Spartans by focalising on them. The choice of verbs to indicate the intercourse between Alcibiades and Timaea is also noteworthy. In the *Life of Alcibiades*, Plutarch employs the verb διαφθείρω (to destroy), adding a strongly negative connotation of moral and physical corruption (*Alc.* 23.7). Furthermore, διαφθείρω places emphasis on Alcibiades' active role in the affair and reminds us of his suitors (οἱ διαφθείροντες), who made him have great ambitions too early in his life (*Alc.* 6.4).[29] In the *Life of Agesilaus*, on the other hand, the verb σύνειμι is more neutral, as if from the Spartan viewpoint the private question of the dishonour brought upon Agis' family was not as essential as the political implications for the whole city: the Spartans' main concern, that is, was that Timaea's adultery could ruin the kingship, the most distinctive and important of the Spartan institutions.

Agis' reaction to the scandal, reported very succinctly, constitutes the premise for Lysander's intervention in support of Agesilaus as the successor to Agis, the main point of the whole episode:[30] Agis never treated Leotychidas as his son. Only when he was already very ill and his death seemed imminent, was he moved by Leotychidas' prayers and agreed to recognise him as his legitimate son and heir in the presence of many witnesses (*Ages.* 3.3).[31] After Agis' death, however, Lysander, whose power and prestige were enormous at Sparta since the victory at Aegospotami, argued that Leotychidas could not become king, because Agis was not the real father (*Ages.* 3.4). Agesilaus also added that Leotychidas was born ten months after Agis' last intercourse with Timaea, the night when an earthquake

[28] Plu. *Ages.* 3.2: [φησι Δοῦρις] καὶ μέντοι καὶ τὸν Ἀλκιβιάδην αὐτὸν οὐ πρὸς ὕβριν φάναι τῇ Τιμαίᾳ πλησιάζειν, ἀλλὰ φιλοτιμούμενον βασιλεύεσθαι Σπαρτιάτας ὑπὸ τῶν ἐξ αὐτοῦ γεγονότων.
[29] See VERDEGEM (2010) 280.
[30] Cf. SHIPLEY (1997) 83-4.
[31] Pausanias describes an analogous scene and adds that the recognition happened at Heraea in Arcadia in the presence of the people, called by Agis to witness his official pronouncement, so that they could also announce it to the Spartans (3.8.7). Xenophon, conversely, does not record this episode (*Hell.* 3.3.2). Agis II's death can be dated to the spring of 400 BC; cf. CARTLEDGE (1987) 110.

forced Agis to leave the house (*Ages.* 3.9).[32] Thanks to these arguments, Lysander and Agesilaus managed to convince the other Spartans that Agesilaus was the right person to choose as king. Plutarch, moreover, confirms how on this occasion too Agesilaus and the Spartans were in accord because of their common education: "Many other citizens shared Agesilaus' ambition and were eagerly helping him because of his virtue and because they had been brought up together and had partaken in the public training".[33] This connects the question of the accession to the throne to the first chapters of the Life. For the relationship between Lysander and Agesilaus proved to be a major factor in Spartan politics. Similarly, Agesilaus' education and φιλοτιμία are presented again as features that he had in common with the Spartans and that won him great popularity.[34]

In this case, too, there are considerable differences between Plutarch's various accounts of the same historical facts, something that is worth analysing. In the *Life of Alcibiades*, Plutarch does not mention the Spartan institutional crisis and the solution devised by Lysander and Agesilaus. Rather, as one would expect, Plutarch primarily focuses on Alcibiades and continues following him after his departure from Sparta, when Alcibiades joined the Persians a few years before Agis' demise. Another important variation concerns the night of the earthquake: it is Agis who remembered this circumstance and the interval of time until Leotychidas' birth, after hearing the accusations against Alcibiades. This was sufficient to convince him to disavow the paternity of Leotychidas for a long time (*Alc.* 23.9-10). In the *Life of Lysander*, Plutarch makes different narrative choices, in that here Plutarch narrates that Lysander persuaded Agesilaus to claim the throne (ἐραστὴς τοῦ Ἀγησιλάου γεγονὼς ὁ Λύσανδρος ἔπεισεν αὐτὸν ἀντιλαμβάνεσθαι τῆς βασιλείας) (*Lys.*

[32] Cf. VERDEGEM (2010) 281-2. In Xenophon, too, Agesilaus mentions the earthquake in his polemic dialogue with Leotychidas (*Hell.* 3.3.2).
[33] *Ages.* 3.5: πολλοὶ δὲ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων πολιτῶν διὰ τὴν ἀρετὴν τοῦ Ἀγησιλάου καὶ τὸ συντεθράφθαι καὶ μετεσχηκέναι τῆς ἀγωγῆς <συν>εφιλοτιμοῦντο καὶ συνέπραττον αὐτῷ προθύμως. A similar remark on the superiority of Agesilaus' virtue can be found at Xen. *Ages.* 1.5.
[34] See SHIPLEY (1997) 85-6.

22.6). Lysander, moreover, played a crucial role in overcoming the resistance of Leotychidas' supporters, who had been reassured by the numerous witnesses present when Agis acknowledged the paternity of Leotychidas before dying (*Lys.* 22.9-10). Just as in the *Life of Alcibiades*, therefore, the facts are described in such way as to highlight the importance of the protagonist. While the opinion of the Spartans was sharply divided on so critical a controversy, Lysander's prestige and rhetorical ability determined Agesilaus' success. In this regard, the chapter devoted to such dramatic events in Spartan politics is part of a broader section of the Life, in which Plutarch discusses Lysander's great faculty for convincing his interlocutors and exerting his influence on his opponents (cf. *Lys.* 22.1).

The presence of such significant variations concerning Agesilaus' accession to the throne can be explained by the necessity to adapt the narration of historical events to the specific context in which they are inserted and to the meaning that is attributed to them in each biography. Thus, in the case of the *Life of Agesilaus*, one may suppose that the facts related to the succession to Agis, being discussed after the section devoted to Agesilaus' education, contribute to elucidate Agesilaus' character as it manifested itself through his early deeds. This is a well-known narrative device that Plutarch frequently uses in the *Parallel Lives*.[35] One can also try to read the three versions of Agesilaus' appointment as king as complementary to one another to reveal how the echoes of *Alcibiades* and *Lysander* may confer a deeper meaning to the same episode in the *Life of Agesilaus*. The presence of Alcibiades in the narrative reminds the readers of the fragility of the Spartan cultural system, which could not prevent a foreigner, driven by personal interests, from counterfeiting the typical behaviour of the Spartans and from faking his conformity to Spartan customs. The ἀγωγή, which distinguished Sparta from all the other Greek states, could not preserve Spartan identity. As we saw earlier, moreover, Alcibiades was as

[35] See ALBINI (1997), DUFF (2008) especially 1-11 and 18-23, C. GILL (1983) 469-78, PELLING (1988a=2002) 283-8, (1990=2002) 301-21, SWAIN (1989b) 62-6.

φιλότιμος and φιλόπρωτος as Agesilaus, something that may raise the suspicion that Agesilaus might become as dangerous for Sparta as Alcibiades. Similarly, the reference to Lysander and his role in this crucial moment of Agesilaus' existence reminds the reader of Lysander's ambition, desire to affirm his authority at any cost, even using illicit means, and, most importantly, his impiety. As we saw in Chapter 4, Lysander was a powerful symbol of the moral decadence of Sparta. This throws a sinister light on Agesilaus' accession to the throne, which could represent a further chapter in Spartan decline. By connecting the various accounts, the sense of ambiguity surrounding Agesilaus' image becomes more pervasive than that which one may grasp from the *Life of Agesilaus* alone.

5.4 – The oracle

The same method of interpretation can be fruitfully adopted to analyse the oracle concerning the succession to king Agis, which warned Sparta about its future and was used by both Agesilaus and Leotychidas as a means to discredit one another (*Ages.* 3.7):

> φράζεο δή, Σπάρτη, καίπερ μεγάλαυχος ἐοῦσα,
> μὴ σέθεν ἀρτίποδος βλάστῃ χωλὴ βασιλεία.
> δηρὸν γὰρ νοῦσοί σε κατασχήσουσιν ἄελπτοι
> φθερσίβροτον τ᾽ ἐπὶ κῦμα κυλινδόμενον πολέμοιο.
>
> Be careful, Sparta, although you are boastful,
> not to sprout a limping kingship from you, sound of foot,
> because for a long time unexpected plagues
> and the onward whirling billow of war that destroys men will overtake you

Plutarch and Pausanias are the only authors who preserve the full text.[36] Xenophon, conversely, simply summarises the response in the *Hellenica* (3.3.3), while he does not even

[36] Cf. Paus. 3.8.9, where the text has only minor differences from that at Plu. *Ages.* 3.7: μόχθοι instead of νοῦσοι, φθερσιβρότου instead of φθερσίβροτον, and κυκωόμενον instead of κυλινδόμενον. According to MEADOWS (1995) 105, κυκωόμενον might have been a variant reading in the manuscript tradition of the fourth century source common to Plutarch and Pausanias.

mention it in the *Agesilaos*.[37] Nepos too does not quote the oracle in his *Agesilaus*. One should add that similar versions of this oracular message are also associated with other phases of Spartan history: in Diodorus Siculus, with a debate on the prospect of declaring war on Athens in 478/7 BC (11.50.4); in Justinus, with the discussion as to whether to let Agesilaus lead the expedition in Asia in 396 BC (*Epit.* 6.2.4-5). Just as in the case of Timaea's adultery, Plutarch's source, probably common to Pausanias, no longer survives and there is no possibility of identifying it with any certainty (Ephorus or Theopompus are nothing more than a guess). Similarly difficult is to trace the origin of the oracle, whether it belonged to a collection of oracles, formed long before the quarrel between Agesilaus and Leotychidas, or whether it was fraudulently composed by some member of one of the two factions and was later adapted to different contexts.[38] As seems evident, nonetheless, Plutarch must have considered the words of the god extremely important, if he decided to recall them as accurately as possible not only in the *Life of Agesilaus*, but also in the *Life of Lysander* (22.11) and in *De Pythiae oraculis* (399 B-C).[39]

Sparta is defined as μεγάλαυχος (boastful), a word that does not occur very many times in Greek literature before Plutarch.[40] Plutarch employs it to indicate the excessive pride that individuals or groups may take in their achievements, something that no doubt represents a negative trait, especially for the characters of the *Parallel Lives*, since it implies lack of moderation.[41] The god, therefore, seems to have acknowledged the greatness of the

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[37] See TUPLIN (1993) 52-3.

[38] On the oracle's origin see CARTLEDGE (1987) 112; cf. also POWELL (2010) 114-7. On the historical source common to Plutarch and Pausanias, see MEADOWS (1995) 105-6.

[39] In comparison with the text in *Life of Agesilaus*, the only variant present in both the *Life of Lysander* and *De Pythiae oraculis* is μόχθοι instead of νοῦσοι, which should be considered the original *lectio*. As MEADOWS (1995) 105 explained, this discrepancy may be due to Plutarch's inattention or may be an alternative reading entered early in the manuscript tradition of the *Life of Agesilaus*. The *Life of Lysander*, moreover, reads φθεισίβροτον instead of φθερσίβροτον, while in *De Pythiae oraculis* the text has φθισίβροτον and κυλινδομένου instead of φθερσίβροτον and κυλινδόμενον respectively.

[40] E.g. Aesch. *Pers.* 533 (the Persians), *Sept.* 1054, bis (the Erinyes), Bacchyl. 3.23, Pind. *Pyth.* 8.15.

[41] E.g. Sulla was naturally boastful, a feature that emerged especially after capturing Jugurtha (*Sull.* 3.8). Boastfulness is also a characteristic attributed to Fortune (*De fort. Rom.* 317 E). Other examples can be found at Plu. *Aem.* 12.5 (the messengers sent by Perseus to the Macedonians), *Cleom.* 52.2 (Therycion, Cleomenes' friend).

city, but pointed out also the risks of its arrogance and immodesty, which could bring many evils to the Spartans. Such a contradictory condition is vividly highlighted by the metaphor of the limping reign. The words of the god did not offer any clear suggestion as to whom the Spartans should choose as king. Rather, they appear to have raised doubts about the stability of the Spartan system, without merely focusing on the succession to Agis. In this regard, the abstract noun βασιλεία may not simply refer to the Spartan king, since its meaning is 'kingship' or 'kingdom'.[42] One may argue that βασιλεία is purposely used in an ambivalent sense to express both concepts: the oracle can specifically allude to the form of government and can also imply a threat to the 'kingdom' – that is, the Spartan state – warning the Spartans about the type of leadership as much as the future direction to give to the city in a time (i.e. since the end of the Peloponnesian War) of political, economic, and social changes. The king and Sparta, therefore, appear to be inextricably linked to one another.

In this sense, it would not be unreasonable to imagine that the oracle also contained an implicit reference to the current political situation in Sparta, which had radically changed since Lysander imposed the Spartan hegemony on Greece and Asian Minor. While new territories and cities were under Spartan rule, often exerted through decarchies and oligarchic puppet regimes loyal to Sparta, the legitimate authority of kings and ephors often clashed and had to come to terms with the personal power and prestige of military leaders such as Lysander or Gylippus, just as had previously happened with Brasidas. Especially in the dominions abroad, Spartan power was represented by Lysander rather than the kings, something that undeniably had social and political repercussions at Sparta. Indeed, from this perspective Sparta was already a limping βασιλεία, as we saw in Chapter 4. The oracle, then, may have indirectly challenged the Spartans on who could be the right – sound-of-

[42] This is the interpretation of SHIPLEY (1997) 87.

foot – king to guide Sparta during so complex a phase of transformation, which had already revealed serious risks for the stability of the entire political system.

Is this, however, an interpretation that the Spartans could give to the oracle at the time of the dispute? It is difficult – if not impossible – to offer a definite answer. In the *Life of Agesilaus* as much as in the *Life of Lysander*, Plutarch narrates that Lysander and Diopeithes attributed a different meaning to the words of the god: Diopeithes applied them to Agesilaus' disability, while Lysander construed them as a metaphor for Leotychidas' illegitimacy (*Ages.* 3.7-8, *Lys.* 22.10-12). Such opposite readings are also presented by Leotychidas and Lysander in Xenophon's *Hellenica*, and by Leotychidas and Agesilaus in Pausanias. Yet in Diodorus Siculus the oracular message was adapted to a different context, in which lameness indicated Sparta's loss of naval supremacy (ἡγεμονία) to the Athenians. Similarly, in Justinus the term *imperium* was connected to Sparta's kingdom (*regnum*) and international leadership in addition to the king (*Epit.* 6.2.6). Thus we cannot rule out completely the possibility that Agesilaus' contemporaries may have advanced a broader explanation of the oracle. Plutarch and the readers of the *Parallel Lives*, moreover, knowing already the development of Spartan history, could fully understand the political allusions present in the response of the god – from their viewpoint, that is, the oracle constituted a prophecy *post eventum*, whose implications could be thoroughly evaluated after the fact. To some extent, their approach may have been similar to that of Sarapion in *De Pythiae oraculis*, who regards the divine words as an example of sure prognostication of future events (τῶν πάντως ἐσομένων προδήλωσις) (399 B).

There is also another important aspect of the oracle that allows us to set it in a wider context. Just as in the cases of Timaea's adultery and Agesilaus' quarrel with Leotychidas, the response about the succession to Agis can also be read in light of the other Lives of Spartan characters. We have already pointed out how significant Agesilaus'

disability was. In the oracle, this theme is introduced again not only by the reference to the risk concerning the limp of Sparta' βασιλεία, but also by the use of such terms as νοῦσοι (diseases) – a variant absent in the other Plutarchan texts and in Pausanias, as we saw earlier – and φθερσίβροτος, a rare compound of the noun φθίσις, which means 'natural decay'.[43] Consequently, in the *Life of Agesilaus*, Plutarch appears to continue the analysis of Spartan political dynamics as a diagnostic examination, which seeks to reveal Sparta's disease and its causes. This use of medical terms and metaphors with reference to Sparta's moral and political decay confirms the presence of a strong link between the *Life of Agesilaus* and the other Spartan biographies, where such images are frequently adopted. As we saw earlier in the thesis, in order to prepare the Spartan constitution, Lycurgus acted as a doctor, comparing the severe customs of the Cretans with the opulence of the Ionians just as the physician would do with healthy and diseased bodies (*Lyc.* 4.4). Lysander, conversely, 'infected' Sparta by sending large sums of money from Asia Minor and, consequently, by introducing into the city greed for wealth and luxuriousness, which made the Spartans subvert the Lycurgan constitution (*Lyc.* 30.1, *Lys.* 17). As the oracle cryptically indicates, after Agis' death Sparta was about to embark on a new phase of its developing decadence, in that its contradictions were about to explode. Sparta, therefore, was already ill and required a king capable of finding the right cure and of reversing the process. In a moment of such great uncertainty, the choice of the new king assumed crucial importance. Was limping Agesilaus the right person for limping Sparta? Was he, with all his personal contradictions, the king capable of healing Sparta?

From this viewpoint, one can retrospectively argue that Diopeithes and Lysander – as much as Agesilaus and the Spartans – addressed the wrong problem and offered their interpretations without considering the real condition of Sparta. Indeed, they tried to

[43] On the adjective φθερσίβροτος and its use in military contexts, cf. Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 3.1357, Hom. *Il.* 13.339, *Od.* 22.297.

explain the meaning of the limp (Diopeithes taking it literally, Lysander and Agesilaus metaphorically), but they did not pay sufficient attention to the rest of the response. In particular, Lysander was right in highlighting that βασιλεία did not simply mean 'king' but also 'kingship'; yet the question of how the Spartans would prepare for future dramatic events remained unanswered.

The speeches of both Diopeithes and Lysander, summarised by Plutarch, attempted to appeal to the proverbial superstition of the Spartans by employing such terms as θεμιτός (allowed by divine laws), φοβέομαι (to fear), and φυλάσσομαι (to guard oneself) (*Ages.* 3.7-8). Agesilaus too invoked the divine authority of Poseidon to prove that Leotychidas was not Agis' legitimate son.[44] Eventually, the Spartans were convinced by Lysander and Agesilaus, but their final decision did not derive from a thorough analysis of the Spartan political condition. Rather, as we saw earlier, their verdict was conditioned by the close relationship between Lysander and Agesilaus as much as by Agesilaus' popularity. Furthermore, the Spartans apparently maintained the continuity of the legitimate royal lineage, as Lysander urged them to do. On the other hand, however, they *de facto* increased Lysander's personal power, which constituted the most serious danger to the stability of the city, for Lysander's military conquests had already created the conditions for the subversion of Spartan laws and his loyalty to the two legitimate royal families was only a temporary compromise, destined to end because of his ambition. These topics are progressively revealed and debated as the narrative develops.

In Agesilaus' time, the Spartans were probably not able to grasp – at least, not entirely – the political and historical implications of the oracle. Plutarch's readers, conversely, might have been able to analyse this episode in connection with the other Lives of Spartan characters. In this case too, therefore, the readers of the *Parallel Lives* could gain

[44] On Spartan religion, especially belief in divination, omens, and oracles, see R. PARKER (1989) 154-62, POWELL (2010) 95-9, 116-7, and 126-9. Cf. also RICHER (2007) 237-42.

a deeper insight thanks to their knowledge of Spartan history as much as of other Plutarchan biographies, at least those written before *Agesilaus*. Similarly, their evaluation of Agesilaus' accession to the throne in light of more complex events offers them a valid interpretative key to reading the other parts of the *Life of Agesilaus*. This broader hermeneutic possibility appears to be embedded in the *Parallel Lives* and, although it cannot be considered indispensable for deciphering correctly the content of each biography, it certainly adds a more meaningful and richer dimension to the facts.

5.5 – Agesilaus' principles of government

Plutarch continues examining the theme of Agesilaus' popularity in the chapters that follow the dispute over the succession to Agis, where Agesilaus' political measures are also discussed. The analysis of Agesilaus' political conduct allows Plutarch to explore further some topics already introduced in the opening section of the Life: the ability to obey and command, the constant comparison with Lysander, the relationship with friends and opponents, the complex and often ambiguous results of Agesilaus' behaviour, the ambivalence of Agesilaus' harmony with the Spartans. As in the early chapters of the biography, Plutarch's evaluation is not entirely positive.

Plutarch begins with internal affairs. The first measure instituted by Agesilaus concerned the redistribution of the land he inherited after Agis' death and Leotychidas' subsequent exile. Instead of keeping everything for himself, Agesilaus donated half of his new possessions to his wife's relatives. Consequently, he gained favour and fame (εὔνοια and δόξα) with the Spartans rather than envy and discredit (*Ages.* 4.1).[45] This decision, by which Agesilaus was probably trying to avoid igniting controversy over Agis' possessions,

[45] On land ownership at Sparta, see SHIPLEY (1997) 98-101.

prevented the opposition provided by Leotychidas' relatives from becoming stronger and more difficult to control.

Subsequently, Plutarch examines Agesilaus' relationship with the ephors. As Plutarch puts it, these magistrates were traditionally in constant tension with the kings, whose power they were called upon to limit.[46] The terms employed by Plutarch to describe such hostility are very significant: φιλονικία and διαφορά. While the latter means disagreement – that is, a potentially negative feeling – the former, as we saw in Chapter 3, represents an important value, on which Spartan education and the polity were founded. Thus one should not assume too quickly that the frictions and the antagonism between kings and ephors were entirely negative. Contrary to his predecessors, however, Agesilaus showed great reverence (ἐθεράπευε) for the ephors by avoiding any possible conflict, by acting on his initiatives only after receiving their consent, and by hurrying to them whenever he was summoned (*Ages.* 4.3-5). By paying the ephors such great respect, Agesilaus might have intended to create a more stable political climate at Sparta. Indeed, Agesilaus increased his power and the importance of the Spartan kingship, winning favour with the Spartans: "Consequently, while he seemed to honour and exalt the dignity of their office, he secretly increased his authority and added to the monarchy a greatness that was conceded out of goodwill towards him".[47] At the same time, nonetheless, he neglected one of the cornerstone virtues of the Spartan political system. Furthermore, the contrast between the participle δοκῶν and the main verb ἐλάνθανεν highlights again the difference between the impression given by Agesilaus' conduct and the real purpose of his actions, which Agesilaus kept secret.

[46] On the ephorate, cf. Plu. *Lyc.* 7.1-4.

[47] Plu. *Ages.* 4.6: ἐκ δὲ τούτων τιμᾶν δοκῶν καὶ μεγαλύνειν τὸ ἀξίωμα τῆς ἐκείνων ἀρχῆς, ἐλάνθανεν αὔξων τὴν ἑαυτοῦ δύναμιν καὶ τῇ βασιλείᾳ προστιθεὶς μέγεθος ἐκ τῆς πρὸς αὐτὸν εὐνοίας συγχωρούμενον. Cf. SHIPLEY (1997) 101-4.

Analogously, Agesilaus displayed ambiguous behaviour towards the other citizens, as Plutarch illustrates in detail (*Ages.* 5.1-3):

> Ἐν δὲ ταῖς πρὸς τοὺς ἄλλους πολίτας ὁμιλίαις ἐχθρὸς ἦν ἀμεμπτότερος ἢ φίλος. τοὺς μὲν γὰρ ἐχθροὺς ἀδίκως οὐκ ἔβλαπτε, τοῖς δὲ φίλοις καὶ τὰ μὴ δίκαια συνέπραττε. καὶ τοὺς μὲν ἐχθροὺς ἠσχύνετο μὴ τιμᾶν κατορθοῦντας, τοὺς δὲ φίλους οὐκ ἐδύνατο ψέγειν ἁμαρτάνοντας, ἀλλὰ καὶ βοηθῶν ἠγάλλετο καὶ συνεξαμαρτάνων αὐτοῖς· οὐδὲν γὰρ ᾤετο τῶν φιλικῶν ὑπουργημάτων αἰσχρὸν εἶναι. τοῖς δ' αὖ διαφόροις καὶ πταίσασι πρῶτος συναχθόμενος καὶ δεηθεῖσι συμπράττων προθύμως ἐδημαγώγει καὶ προσήγετο πάντας.
>
> In his dealings with the other citizens, he was more irreproachable as enemy than as friend, for he did not damage his enemies unjustly, but he aided his friends even in unjust matters. On the one hand, he also felt ashamed not to honour his enemies when they were successful; on the other hand, he was not able to blame his friends when they did wrong, but he took delight in helping them and in sharing their faults. For he believed that none of the services exchanged with a friend was shameful. Furthermore, being the first to sympathise with his adversaries when they made a false step and to aid them when they were in need, he was an enthusiastic leader of the people and brought everyone close to himself.

In this passage, Plutarch appears to have reinterpreted some qualities of Agesilaus, which Xenophon praises in his *Agesilaos* (6.4-5, 7.2-3, 8.1-2). From a political perspective, placating the enmity towards adversaries might have been either a shrewd move, which was designed to expand Agesilaus' base of support after the controversial accession to the throne, or an inevitable compromise, into which he was forced because of his political weakness. In fact, just as for other aspects of Agesilaus' public life, Plutarch focuses his attention on the moral ambivalence of Agesilaus' actions. As Shipley rightly observes, Agesilaus does not seem to have complied with the traditional code of helping friends and harming enemies. This would strengthen the suspicion that Agesilaus was consciously trying to weaken the Lycurgan constitution in order to establish tyrannical power.[48] In this respect, the popularity that he gained cannot be considered absolutely positive and, indeed,

[48] SHIPLEY (1997) 105-8. On the relationship with enemies and friends in popular philosophy and in Greek politics, see KONSTAN (1997) especially 56-67 and 87-90, MITCHELL-RHODES (1996) 11-26, SMITH PANGLE (2002) 99-103, SCHOFIELD (1998), WHITLOCK-BLUNDELL (1989) 26-59.

Plutarch does not judge it so. A proof is provided by the use of the verb δημαγωγέω to describe Agesilaus' popular leadership, since this verb usually has a negative connotation, especially when it is employed with regard to the style of government of the Spartan kings.[49]

Agesilaus' principles of government, moreover, show an important similarity with those of Lysander. For Lysander also favoured his friends in Asia Minor regardless of their merits or census (*Lys.* 13.7 and 19.1-2). This may constitute another element of continuity between the two leaders. As in the case of Lysander (*Lys.* 19.7), in the *Life of Agesilaus* too the ephors decided to limit the king's increasing popularity, accusing him of "making the citizens, common property of the state, his own" (τοὺς κοινοὺς πολίτας ἰδίους κτᾶται) and levying a fine on him (*Ages.* 5.4). Although the circumstances were different, because the ephors intervened against Lysander only in consequence of an international crisis, after the satrap Pharnabazus accused Lysander's troops of plundering his territory (*Lys.* 19.7), in both Lives, nonetheless, the personal power of great individuals seems to have posed a threat to the Spartan political system and for this reason it needed to be curtailed. In this regard, one can recall how in the *Life of Lysander* the Spartan kings appear to have been extremely worried about Lysander's successes and his great influence over many Greek cities, since they feared that Lysander could even become the only ruler of Greece (*Lys.* 21.1-4).

The way in which Agesilaus attracted popular support, however, was not the same as that of Lysander and represented again an anomaly within the Spartan political system. For the third time, after discussing the distribution of Agis' possessions and the

[49] On Plutarch's definition of demagoguery, see Plu. *Praec. ger. reip.* 802 D-E. On the use of the verb δημαγωγέω and the substantive δημαγωγός with a negative connotation with reference to Sparta and Spartan characters, cf. *Agis/Cleom.* 1.4, 2.9; *Lyc.* 2.2; *De frat. am.* 482 D. A typical negative example of demagoguery is Clodius: see *Ant.* 2.6, 10.5, *Brut.* 20.5, *Cat. Mi.* 19.5, 31.2, 45.2. Sometimes, however, δημαγωγέω and δημαγωγός remain ambiguous, since they may also indicate the leadership of the people, as in the case of Alcibiades: see *Alc.* 23.3, 34.7, *comp. Cor.-Alc.* 40(1).4, *Nic.* 9.1, *De adul. et am.* 52 E.

relationship with the ephors, Plutarch insists on the idea that Agesilaus' desire to avoid internal conflicts and to create perfect harmony contrasted with the true nature of the Lycurgan constitution, which was based on φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία, as we have repeatedly argued. After introducing this topic at the beginning of the Life, Plutarch explores it further by making a comparison with celestial bodies, which are kept in motion by strife and discord rather than by harmony (ἁρμονία). This physical principle also explains the generation of life and movement in all things. In Plutarch's view, the same dynamics characterised Spartan politics. Reinforcing a concept already illustrated in the *Life of Lycurgus*, Plutarch comments that Lycurgus deliberately instilled love of honour and love of victory in the constitution as 'fuel' (ὑπέκκαυμα) for virtue, so that the good citizens always had some disagreement (διαφορά) and contest (ἅμιλλα) with one another (*Ages.* 5.5). Averting or solving political conflicts and enmities at any cost, as Agesilaus did, did not constitute virtuous behaviour for a Spartan ruler. Blurring the distinction between enemies and friends or between good and bad actions, and creating confusion of political roles with the ephors may have been the consequences of a misguided notion of unanimity (ὁμόνοια) and harmony (ἁρμονία). In addition to violating the 'help the friend, harm the enemy' code, therefore, Agesilaus also compromised some fundamental values of Spartan cultural identity.

The explicit reference to Lycurgus, moreover, creates a strong link between the *Life of Agesilaus* and the *Life of Lycurgus*, which invites again the readers to interpret Agesilaus' conduct by adopting the same method employed for Lycurgus' political choices. Plutarch seems to suggest that, as in the case of the *Life of Lycurgus*, the theory of passions, which is thoroughly discussed in *De virtute morali*, may help to illuminate some aspects of Agesilaus' political acts. Indeed, Lycurgus' way of regulating the complex harmony of Spartan society through moderation (σωφροσύνη), so that the effects of φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία could be

counterbalanced, may be regarded as an attempt to reduce political passions to the right measure (μεσότης or μετριοπάθεια). In Chapter 3, however, we saw that Lycurgus' purely restrictive measures, without being associated with philosophical training, were not sufficient to make Sparta practise virtue permanently. This constituted the major weakness of the Lycurgan constitution. Political passions, nonetheless, played an important role in the education of the young as much as in the social dynamics at Sparta. In the *Life of Agesilaus*, conversely, Plutarch implicitly draws attention to the fact that Agesilaus tried to eradicate political passions from the public arena rather than finding their right mean and maintaining them in equilibrium. Very interestingly, in *De virtute morali* too, Plutarch voices disapproval for the Stoic philosophers from an analogous perspective, having recourse to a parallel with musical harmony (451 F):

> οἷον γὰρ ἐν φθόγγοις μουσικὴ τὸ ἐμμελὲς οὐκ ἀναιρέσει βαρύτητος καὶ ὀξύτητος, ἐν δὲ σώμασιν ἰατρικὴ τὸ ὑγιεινὸν οὐ φθορᾷ θερμότητος καὶ ψυχρότητος, ἀλλὰ συμμετρίαις καὶ ποσότησι κραθεισῶν ἀπεργάζεται, τοιοῦτον ἐν ψυχῇ τὸ ἠθικόν ἐγγενομένης ὑπὸ λόγου ταῖς παθητικαῖς δυνάμεσι καὶ κινήσεσιν ἐπιεικείας καὶ μετριότητος.
>
> For just as in the case of sounds music does not create harmony by eliminating the lowest and the highest note, and in the case of bodies medicine does not produce health by removing the most intense heat and the most extreme cold, but through the suitable proportions and quantity of the elements blended together, so in the case of the soul too, moral virtue is produced when fairness and moderation are engendered by reason in faculties and motions of passions.

From a philosophical perspective then, Agesilaus' way of dealing with enemies and friends was not virtuous, inasmuch as it did not promote μετριοπάθεια. It did not bring real harmony to Sparta, but only an unstable balance between political forces, which was destined to dissolve at the first difficulty. More explicitly than in the earlier chapters of the Life, therefore, Plutarch shows how morally problematic a figure Agesilaus was. Furthermore, another passage of *De virtute morali* confirms that Agesilaus' ethical standards were confused, since he did not distinguish between virtue and vice, something that did not

correspond with the original spirit of the Spartan education and constitution: "Indeed, the famous Spartan pedagogue did not wrongly say that he would make the young take delight in noble actions and be grieved over those shameful".[50]

This topic, which reminds us of an analogous remark about the education of the young in the *Life of Lycurgus*, raises doubts about the results of Agesilaus' training.[51] As we saw earlier in this Chapter, Agesilaus was seen as a true Spartiate, who held distinctively Spartan values. How could so Spartan a ruler assume so un-Spartan an attitude? Plutarch has already hinted at various anomalies and ambiguities in Agesilaus' character, and has implicitly suggested that the Spartans may have misunderstood Agesilaus' real nature. Furthermore, Agesilaus' education in how to be ruled might have influenced his leadership style. Yet the unique circumstances of Agesilaus' accession to the throne may not be the only explanation for Agesilaus' public conduct that Plutarch encourages us to take into account. For one is also tempted to argue that the ἀγωγή did not adequately prepare Agesilaus for his duties, since it could not teach him how to regulate the passions between citizens, which, in Plutarch's view, was one of the most important tasks for a political leader:[52] that is to say, the intrinsic limits of the Spartan education system eventually emerged in Agesilaus' time, when Sparta's moral and political decadence had already started, after being triggered by Lysander's money, as we saw in Chapter 4. At the exceptional time of the Spartan crisis, therefore, an anomalous king indirectly demonstrated with his behaviour, atypical for Sparta, that the Spartan political and cultural system had

[50] Plu. *De virt. mor.* 452 D: ὥστε μὴ κακῶς εἰπεῖν τὸν Λάκωνα παιδαγωγόν, ὅτι ποιήσει τὸν παῖδα τοῖς καλοῖς ἥδεσθαι καὶ ἄχθεσθαι τοῖς αἰσχροῖς. The name of the Spartan pedagogue remains anonymous, but his identification as Lycurgus is not implausible.

[51] Cf. Plu. *Lyc.* 25.3: "But the greatest part of such pastime consisted in praising some noble action or blaming those shameful with jests or laughs, mildly bringing one to warning and correction" (ἀλλὰ τὸ πλεῖστον ἦν τῆς τοιαύτης διατριβῆς ἔργον ἐπαινεῖν τι τῶν καλῶν ἢ τῶν αἰσχρῶν ψέγειν μετὰ παιδιᾶς καὶ γέλωτος, ἐλαφρῶς ὑποφέροντος εἰς νουθεσίαν καὶ διόρθωσιν).

[52] In this regard, one can compare Agesilaus with Philopoemen, who was unable to imitate Epaminondas' political virtues because of the lack of philosophical education. In this case, too, passions such as contentiousness (φιλονικία) and anger (ὀργή) were merely channelled towards military training, a weakness that affected Philopoemen later in his career (*Phil.* 3-4). Cf. SWAIN (1988) 335-9, WALSH (1992) 209-12 and 218-21; see also SCUDERI (1996).

serious deficiencies and weaknesses. In this respect, Plutarch's analysis of Agesilaus' political principles again alerts the readers to this crucial theme in the Life, so that they can use their prior knowledge of Spartan history, as much as of other Plutarchan works, to engage with Plutarch's interpretation of the facts and draw their personal moral lesson.

5.6 – The beginning of Agesilaus' military leadership

Plutarch concludes the section on Agesilaus' principles of government by mentioning the *Odyssey* and Agamemnon, who rejoiced in the quarrel between Odysseus and Achilles, because the mutual rivalry (ζῆλος) and disagreement (διαφορά) between the chieftains maintained a positive tension within the Greek army (*Od.* 8.77) (*Ages.* 5.6). Agamemnon may have represented an alternative political role model to Agesilaus. The Homeric reference, nonetheless, immediately assumes a more sinister meaning, for Plutarch adds a warning against the excesses of φιλοτιμίαι, which can be dangerous for the city. One cannot but think that, in fact, Agamemnon did not restrain his passions nor moderate his rivalry with Achilles, putting all the Greeks at risk. Agamemnon's behaviour at the beginning of the Trojan War, therefore, can be paralleled with Agesilaus' relationship with Lysander, which deteriorated during the Spartan expedition against the Persians. Agamemnon and Agesilaus, moreover, had in common the fact that their respective quarrels took place in Asia Minor, the region where the Spartans were trying to consolidate their hegemony, but their cultural identity and traditional values became confused, as we saw in Chapter 4.[53]

Agesilaus' excessive φιλονικία and the relationship with Lysander are discussed at *Ages.* 6-8, the section of the biography where Plutarch also examines Agesilaus' political

[53] The analogies between Agesilaus and Agamemnon return at Plu. *Ages.* 6.6-9, where Plutarch narrates Agesilaus' dream in Aulis. On the ambivalent parallelism between Agamemnon and Agesilaus in the *Life of Agesilaus*, see NEVIN (2014) especially 47-9.

and military leadership abroad. Just as in the case of Agesilaus' accession to the throne, the decision to organise a military campaign against the Persians was due to Lysander's political initiative.[54] In the whole episode, the focalisation of the narrative constantly shifts between the various characters. Plutarch begins with the arrival at Sparta of men coming from Asia to inform the Spartans about the Persian king's plan to assemble a great army. The king's intention was to deprive the Spartans of their naval hegemony (*Ages.* 6.1).[55] On the one hand, through the secondary focaliser (the ambassadors) Plutarch appears to express the fear that the Greek cities had for the imminent danger, which in their view would certainly threaten Sparta too. On the other hand, through the tertiary focaliser (the Persian king) he also reveals the Persians' ambition to assert their imperialism over Sparta and the Greeks. Subsequently, Plutarch shows how the message delivered by the Asian people offered Lysander the opportunity of going back to Asia Minor and helping his friends, whom he had left as harmosts of the oligarchic regimes loyal to Sparta (*Ages.* 6.2). Because of their iniquity and violence, the harmosts had often been driven out or killed. This note, which constitutes a form of zero focalisation inserted into Lysander's train of thought, voices Plutarch's negative evaluation of the harmosts' regimes. Yet, after Agesilaus became king, Lysander saw the possibility of restoring their power. By employing Lysander as secondary focaliser then, Plutarch discloses that the decisive reason, which convinced the Spartans to take action, was not the threat posed by the Persians, but Lysander's great influence over Agesilaus. For Lysander urged his friends to request formally that Agesilaus should lead the mission (*Ages.* 6.3).

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[54] Plutarch's main source seems to be Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.1-2, where Lysander also plays a major role in convincing the Spartans, being mainly motivated by the friendship with the harmosts. At Xen. *Ages.* 1.8, conversely, the initiative to propose the expedition to Asia is taken by Agesilaus. Cf. LUPPINO MANES-MARCONE (1996) 158 n. 33, SHIPLEY (1997) 116-9, TUPLIN (1993) 56-7.

[55] The expedition was launched in 399 BC, one year after Agesilaus' accession to the throne; see CARTLEDGE (1987) 180.

Thanks to Lysander's prestige, the Spartans agreed to give Agesilaus an army of two thousand chosen neodamodes, six thousand allies, and thirty Spartiates as commanders and counsellors, the first of whom was Lysander.[56] As Plutarch comments, Lysander obtained this position of pre-eminence not only because of his fame and power (δόξα and δύναμις) but also because of his friendship (φιλία) with Agesilaus (6.4-5). The command of the army, moreover, was seen by Agesilaus (this is the fourth viewpoint presented by Plutarch) as a benefit greater than the kingship. Just as in the first chapters of the Life, therefore, here too Plutarch places emphasis on the personal relationship between the two Spartan leaders, which constituted a major factor in the decision-making process. Furthermore, as signposted by the multiple focalisations, the private interests of Lysander and Agesilaus appear to have been more prominent than the public good of Sparta. This seems to be confirmed by the fact that neither Lysander nor Agesilaus as secondary focalisers reflect on the Persian king's aspirations. The absence of a tertiary focaliser, therefore, except when the Asian people arrive at Sparta, may indicate that the primary concern of the two Spartan leaders was not for the safety of Sparta and the Greeks in Asia Minor, but for their own personal advantages.

Plutarch's narration omits many historical details such as the involvement of Sparta in the conflict between the Persian satraps Pharnabazus and Tissaphernes, and the military operations conducted by the navarchs Thibron and Dercylidas in Asia, Caria, Thrace, and the Troad.[57] The explanation may be simply that Plutarch has no need to recall earlier political and military strategies, since Agesilaus was not involved in them. Yet one can also notice that Plutarch examines the facts from his usual moral perspective, in that he is extremely selective. In this respect, he seems to be inclined to consider the military conflict

[56] On the composition of the Spartan army, cf. D.S. 14.79.1, Xen. *Ages.* 1.7, *Hell.* 3.4.2.
[57] See BOCKISCH (1965) 209-13, CARTLEDGE (1987) 180-93 and 354-7, CAWKWELL (1976) 66, WESTLAKE (1986) 406-26. At *Artax.* 20.1-3, conversely, Plutarch briefly connects Agesilaus' appointment as commander of the Spartan army to the general anti-Persian climate at Sparta in those years. Cf. also Isoc. *Paneg.* 4.144.

with the Persians not only as a response to the Persians' potential attack but also as an aggressive act motivated by personal ambition. In his view, this was a further occasion on which Spartan imperialistic ambitions emerged. This hypothesis appears to be supported by the fact that Plutarch gives the same ambivalent interpretation to these events in the *Life of Lysander*, where the delegation of Asian Greeks is not even mentioned (*Lys.* 23.1).

It is plausible to think that to a certain extent Plutarch may have been influenced by Xenophon, the source followed for this part of the Life. For in the *Hellenica*, together with the menace posed by the Persians, Xenophon places emphasis on Lysander's plan to restore the decarchies (3.4.2), while in the *Agesilaos*, as one would expect, Agesilaus is presented as the saviour of Greece, who decided to attack the enemy, without remaining passive to its threat (1.7-8). We can also compare the motivations indicated by Plutarch with those presented by other authors. In both the *Philip* and the *Ad Archidamum*, Isocrates argues more explicitly than Xenophon that because of ambition (φιλοτιμία) Agesilaus pursued two objectives inconsistent with one another: fighting against the Persian king and putting his friends back in power (*Phil.* 5.86-87, *Ep.* 9.13-14). Diodorus Siculus, conversely, does not explicitly relate the organisation of the war against the Persians to the personal objectives of Lysander and Agesilaus. In fact, in the *Bibliotheca Historica* Agesilaus' appointment as commander of the army simply represents the Spartans' best option to counter the Persians, after Thibron and Dercylidas achieved only modest successes (14.79.1). Pausanias too focuses his attention mainly on the anti-Persian nature of the expedition, which aimed to destroy Artaxerxes' power in Asia (3.9.1). The differences between Plutarch's account and other historical sources, nonetheless, appear to confirm that Plutarch re-moulded the material collected on this complex period so as to concentrate on Agesilaus, Lysander, their relationship and personal aspirations.

In this regard, Plutarch reinforces the idea that Agesilaus' intentions were not disinterested by narrating the sacrifice at Aulis, an episode whose symbolic value is already noted by Xenophon. In the *Hellenica*, that Agesilaus makes offerings before sailing to Asia is briefly mentioned together with the dispatch of envoys to other Greek cities to communicate how many soldiers were requested and where the army would gather. The parallel with Agamemnon is viewed by Xenophon as Agesilaus' attempt to attach a grandiose Panhellenic significance to the enterprise, similar to that of the Trojan War (*Hell.* 3.4.3).[58] Pausanias too, who mentions Agesilaus' attempt to form an alliance with other Greek cities and the disappointing answer from Athens and Thebes, views the mission from a similar perspective. In his account, not only did Agesilaus offer sacrifices at Aulis, but he also compared himself to Agamemnon, even considering the victory against the Persian king superior to the conquest of Troy (3.9.1-4).

Plutarch's narration is quite different, because it provides more details and, most importantly, shows again Agesilaus' ambivalence. Continuing the parallelism between Agesilaus and Agamemnon introduced earlier in the Life (*Ages.* 5.6), Plutarch informs us that Agesilaus, while at Aulis, had a dream and heard a voice, which compared his enterprise to the Trojan War, the only other case when one single man was called to lead all Greece. The voice also urged Agesilaus to offer the same sacrifice that Agamemnon had been asked to perform (*Ages.* 6.7).[59] Agesilaus, however, reporting the dream to his friends, said that he would not imitate Agamemnon's insensibility, making reference to the sacrifice of Iphigenia to Artemis (*Ages.* 6.8-9):

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[58] In the *Agesilaos*, conversely, the sacrifice is not mentioned. As supposed by PROIETTI (1987) 96-7, and TUPLIN (1993) 57, a possible explanation may be that in Xenophon's view the sacrifice reflected Agesilaus' improper ambition rather than heroism. Isocrates, too, offered an analogous political interpretation of the Trojan War as a unique moment of unity between all the Greeks, who fought against a common foreign enemy under Agamemnon's leadership (*Panath.* 12.70-86); see RACE (1978).

[59] For the dream, which is not narrated by Xenophon, Diodorus, or Pausanias, Plutarch may have used an additional Boeotian source, possibly Callisthenes or Callisthenes through Ephorus (Theopompus is a less likely hypothesis); see HAMILTON (1979b) 156-8, (1991) 31 n. 106, HARRIS (2009) 152 n. 170, NEVIN (2014) 52 n. 13, SHIPLEY (1997) 127.

> ἅμα δέ πως ὑπῆλθε τὸν Ἀγησίλαον ὁ τῆς κόρης σφαγιασμός, ἣν ὁ πατὴρ ἔσφαξε πεισθεὶς τοῖς μάντεσιν. οὐ μὴν διετάραξεν αὐτόν, ἀλλ᾽ ἀναστὰς καὶ διηγησάμενος τοῖς φίλοις τὰ φανέντα τὴν μὲν θεὸν ἔφη τιμήσειν οἷς εἰκός ἐστι χαίρειν θεὸν οὖσαν, οὐ μιμήσεσθαι δὲ τὴν ἀπάθειαν τοῦ τότε στρατηγοῦ, καὶ καταστέψας ἔλαφον ἐκέλευσεν ἀπάρξασθαι τὸν ἑαυτοῦ μάντιν.
>
> Almost at once, the sacrifice of the girl, whom the father [Agamemnon] slaughtered in obedience to the soothsayers, came to Agesilaus' mind. This, however, did not disturb him. On the contrary, after rising up and describing to his friends what appeared to him in the vision, he declared that he would honour the goddess with a sacrifice, which she would likely accept gladly, since she was a goddess, but he would not imitate the cruel insensibility of the then commander. Having garlanded a doe, he ordered his own seer to perform the sacrifice.

Plutarch's choice of words is very significant. The verb διαταράσσω (to throw into confusion) expresses the feeling of internal turmoil caused by something unexpected and surprising. Plutarch often employs this term to describe the immediate effect produced by premonitions and divine manifestations such as supernatural events, signs, or visions. Some examples from the *Parallel Lives* are particularly notable: the distress and the confusion generated by the mutilation of the Hermae, which the Athenians considered a bad omen (*Alc.* 18.6); Alexander's fearful response to the omen of the birds eating barley, which preceded the foundation of Alexandria in Egypt (*Alex.* 26.9); Caesar's astonishment and fear when the night before being killed he saw the doors and the windows of his house suddenly opening and the light of the moon entering into his bedroom, while Calpurnia seemed to mourn his death in her sleep (*Caes.* 63.8).[60] Dreams too can create confusion and agitation, as in the case of Themistocles, who was warned about the Pisidians' assault by the goddess Cybele, whom he saw in a dream (*Them.* 30.2-3).[61] Agesilaus' impassiveness, therefore, can be considered an unusual and, to some extent, unnatural reaction. In fact, the only other case, in which Plutarch uses διαταράσσω in the negative form, is that of Brutus, for when Brutus had the vision of his own bad demon, who announced to him that

[60] See also *Cam.* 5.9, *Flam.* 7.7, *Marc.* 28.3, *Ad princ. ind.* 782 B.
[61] See also *Agis/Cleom.* 28(7).3-4, *Demetr.* 4.2-3, *De gen. Socr.* 587 A-B.

they would meet again at Philippi, Brutus "was not disturbed" (οὐ διαταραχθεὶς) (*Brut.* 36.7).[62]

It is also tempting to conjecture that, in addition to suggesting uncommon behaviour, οὐ διετάραξεν may evoke the philosophical ideal of impassiveness (ἀταραξία), corresponding to freedom from distress and worry, which Plutarch often relates to Cynicism and Epicureanism (cf. *Ep. Hdt.* 1.81-82). In this respect, one can notice that Plutarch attributes such a philosophical meaning to both the verb (οὐ) διαταράσσω and the substantive ἀταραξία on several occasions. In the *Life of Fabius Maximus*, for instance, one can find an explicit reference to Diogenes of Sinope's idea of imperturbability (*Fab.* 10.2). Similarly, in his polemic against the Epicureans, Plutarch frequently refers to the Epicurean notion of ἀταραξία as a state of mind in which men are not perturbed by celestial phenomena, passions, sensations (*Suav. viv. Epic.* 1092 A-D, *Col.* 1122 D-F), or the active involvement in the government of the state (*Col.* 1125 C).[63] One, however, does not need to stretch the argument too far and hypothesise that in the text quoted above Agesilaus exhibits Epicurean tendencies.

Equally noteworthy is the substantive ἀπάθεια (insensibility). Indeed, this is also a key philosophical term, which often defines Stoic equanimity, the final state to reach after eradicating emotional reactions to external events (cf. Arr. *Epict.* 4.6.34-35). In the *Moralia*, in particular, ἀπάθεια assumes just such a specific meaning when Plutarch describes the Stoic moral virtue, here interpreted as the complete suppression of passions (*De virt. mor.* 443 C, 449 B, *Stoic. absurd. poet. dic.* 1057 D-E). Yet, as Alexiou has convincingly demonstrated, in the *Parallel Lives* ἀπάθεια can also have a broader and more flexible sense: it does not always refer to Stoicism nor does it have a negative connotation each time

[62] Interestingly, Dion too remained impassive after a lunar eclipse, while his soldiers were deeply perturbed (τοῖς στρατιώταις διαταραχθεῖσιν). Plutarch, however, explains Dion's behaviour by referring to Dion's scientific knowledge of astronomic phenomena (*Dio* 24.1-3). The same episode is also mentioned at *Nic.* 23.6.
[63] Cf. also an implicit reference to the Epicurean ἀταραξία at *comp. Nic.-Crass.* 35(2).6.

Plutarch uses it.[64] Furthermore, it would be extremely difficult to sustain the thesis that Plutarch portrays Agamemnon in Stoic fashion. Rather, Plutarch might have simply tried to create a clever wordplay by connecting οὐ διετάραξεν with ἀπάθεια. He might have wanted to emphasise that Agesilaus' reaction to the dream and the instruction of the divine voice was not only atypical but also contradictory. For, while declaring that he would not imitate Agamemnon's character, Agesilaus displayed an equivalent attitude. This implies that Agesilaus, acting as military commander, made the same errors that he committed as political leader – that is, Agesilaus was not able to find the right balance for his passions (μετριοπάθεια) even when he sought to avoid being insensible.

One can make the same deduction about the conclusion to the whole episode. On the one hand, by not offering his daughter, Agesilaus took a decision that in his view underlined his superiority to Agamemnon's ἀπάθεια; on the other hand, the sacrifice of a doe recalls the end of the *Iphigenia Aulidensis*, where Artemis miraculously replaced Iphigenia with a doe when the girl was already prepared to offer her life for the safety of the Greeks. Thus Agamemnon was also spared his daughter's death (*IA* 1540-612).[65] Some significant verbal similarities may support the idea that the *Life of Agesilaus* echoes Euripides' tragedy. Calchas the seer (μάντις) garlanded (ἔστεψεν) Iphigenia, who is described as a young girl and virgin daughter (κόρη) (*IA* 1565-7). Subsequently, after the substitution, Artemis accepted with joy (the verb ἀσπάζεται is different from χαίρειν, used by Plutarch, but expresses the same concept) the doe (ἔλαφον) (*IA* 1594). The sacrifice is described through the verb σφάζω (to slaughter), which is used by Euripides in several

[64] ALEXIOU (1998).

[65] See SHIPLEY (1997) 126. Cf. also Apollod. *Epit.* 3.21-2, *Cypria* arg. 8, Eur. *IT* 10-33, Hes. *Cat.* fr. 23b=Paus. 1.43.1. On different versions of the myth, in which Iphigenia is sacrificed, see Aesch. *Ag.* 218-49 and 1520-59, Eur. *El.* 1018-30, Soph. *El.* 516-609, Stesich. fr. 215 Davies, *PMGF*: these all constitute less likely terms of comparison with Plutarch's text. On Agamemnon in the *Iphigenia Aulidensis*, see LAWRENCE (1989), MASARACCHIA (1983) especially 53-64, MASTRONARDE (2010) 234-40, RYZMAN (1989) 112-16, SIEGEL (1981) 259-63.

passages (*IA* 533, 935, 1186, 1348, 1360, 1367, 1463).[66] Indeed, it is impossible to establish with certainty which version of the *Iphigenia Aulidensis* and which form of the final scene Plutarch and his readers would have read or watched, considering the actors' interpolations and the textual fluctuations that have occurred since Euripides left the play unfinished until the modern era, as modern scholarship has conjectured.[67] This, however, does not change the fact that the *Iphigenia Aulidensis*, with its conclusion written or simply completed by Euripides the Younger, Euripides' son or nephew, presents a version of the Iphigenia myth in which the girl is saved. Considering the popularity of the play, it is plausible to think that Plutarch's readers – just like modern readers – may have noticed this further correspondence between Agesilaus and Agamemnon. Regardless of the initial intentions, the outcome of Agesilaus' actions was identical to that of Agamemnon's.

Agesilaus' likeness to Agamemnon, however, is more complicated than this, since, in light of the connection with the *Iphigenia Aulidensis*, the parallels between Agesilaus and Agamemnon may also assume a deep religious meaning. Agesilaus' sacrifice of a doe, in spite of the fact that the voice asked him to make the same offering made by Agamemnon, can be regarded as a transgression of the divine order and an act of arrogance (ὕβρις) towards Artemis. Despite their doubts, fears, and moral dilemmas, in the end Agamemnon and Iphigenia chose to obey the divine directive, placing their destiny in Artemis' hands. Agesilaus, conversely, arbitrarily decided to replace the human sacrifice with an animal, a decision that Artemis took in the myth to bestow grace upon Iphigenia. After the controversial interpretation of the oracle concerning Agis' succession, Agesilaus pretended again to know the divinity's will, without limiting himself by accepting its demands. Such a

[66] None of these terms occurs at Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.3. A further proof is that the verb σφάζω is not employed with reference to Iphigenia in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Euripides' *Electra*, Sophocles' *Electra*, and Stesichorus' fragment. Indeed, it appears in the fragment of Hesiod's *fr.* 23 M-W. While, however, the Hesiodic text simply refers to the offering of the girl (κόρη), in Euripides, just as in the *Life of Agesilaus*, the substantive κόρη and the verb σφάζω are associated with the idea of sacrificing the daughter.

[67] On this complex question, see DIGGLE (1994) 490-507, KOVACS (2003a) 138-45, (2003b), GURD (2005) 61-168 with further bibliography.

religious violation throws a sinister light on Agesilaus' enterprise against the Persians. The sacrifice at Aulis, having the value of a prophecy *post eventum*, seems to suggest that the expedition, which began with noble intent – the unification of all the Greeks against a common enemy – would not have had the favour of the god nor a positive conclusion.[68]

This interpretation is confirmed by a passage in the *Life of Pelopidas*, where this episode is recalled as an example of a divine request ignored. Because of his disobedience, Plutarch comments, Agesilaus "brought his expedition to an unsuccessful and inglorious ending".[69] This brief mention is inserted into the narration of the signs that preceded the battle of Leuctra. Pelopidas found himself in a situation analogous to that of Agesilaus, since he saw in a dream Scedasus' daughters weeping at their tombs and Scedasus, who asked him to offer in sacrifice a virgin with auburn hair (*Pel.* 21.1). Just as in the case of Agamemnon and Iphigenia, or that of Agesilaus at Aulis, for Pelopidas too the suggestion of a human sacrifice was morally problematic, so that it ignited a debate among seers and commanders. The impasse was resolved by the appearance of a filly with a fiery red mane, which was immediately recognised as the right victim for the sacrifice (*Pel.* 22).[70] Unlike Agesilaus, Pelopidas did not decide alone, but pondered carefully the meaning of the dream and waited for the god to clarify the sense of the request. As thoughtfully commented by Nevin, therefore, the main difference between Agesilaus and Pelopidas lies in the way in which the two leaders tried to interpret their dreams: "by acting without counsel, Agesilaus demonstrates his characteristic desire for preeminence".[71] This bad attitude, one can infer,

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[68] See BOMMELAER (1983) 21, SHIPLEY (1997) 128. Pace NEVIN (2014) 54-5, the voice's request appears to indicate clearly – though implicitly – the sacrifice of Agesilaus' daughter. In all the various narrations of Iphigenia's myth, moreover, the demand is constantly the same: a human sacrifice. Only the conclusion of the story varies in the different literary sources. One, therefore, does not need to consider Agesilaus' response problematic because it derived from a personal misinterpretation of the dream. Nevin is right, conversely, in pointing out Agesilaus' disobedience as a sign of "his characteristic tendency to address his friends' needs before considering the needs of the state" (p. 55 n. 20).

[69] Plu. *Pel.* 21.4: κατέλυσε τὴν στρατείαν, ἄδοξον καὶ ἀτελῆ γενομένην.

[70] On Plu. *Pel.* 21-22, see BRENK (1977) 20 n. 9, 55-7.

[71] NEVIN (2014) 55. See also BRENK (1975=1998) 109-10. Cf. Plu. *Arist.* 11.5-9.

reverberated negatively on Agesilaus' campaign in Asia, whose results were disappointing compared to those of Pelopidas' military enterprise against Sparta.

It is difficult to establish whether Plutarch's readers might have been able to read the two passages from the *Life of Agesilaus* and the *Life of Pelopidas* as complementary, although one should not completely rule out this possibility.[72] Undoubtedly, nonetheless, Agesilaus' dream and sacrifice at Aulis again invite the readers to activate their previous knowledge of historical facts in order to decipher Plutarch's textual hints and, to some extent, anticipate the development of the narrative. In this respect, the Boeotians' abrupt interruption of the sacrifice added a further sinister connotation to the whole episode (*Ages.* 6.11),[73] for in the *Life of Agesilaus* Plutarch introduces the theme of enmity between the Spartans and the Boeotians, which was crucial in the downfall of Sparta. The Boeotarchs gave orders to interrupt the sacrifice, because Agesilaus did not follow the Boeotian laws (νόμοι) and traditional customs (πάτρια) (*Ages.* 6.9-10). Rather than merely describing Agesilaus' anger at being offended by the Boeotians, as Xenophon does in the *Hellenica* (3.4.4), Plutarch yields another important clue about Spartan imperialism and lack of respect for the cultural identity of other Greek people, a topic that has a great relevance in the *Life of Agesilaus* as much as in the other Lives of Spartan characters.[74]

Agesilaus, therefore, might have sought to promote his image as a strong and charismatic leader, whose ambition was to emulate and even surpass Agamemnon. In Plutarch's view, nonetheless, the parallelism between Agesilaus and Agamemnon represents a complex topic. Indeed, Plutarch recognises that Agesilaus did bear a certain likeness to Agamemnon, although their differences were also substantial. At the same time, however,

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[72] According to JONES (1966) 68, the *Lives of Pelopidas and Marcellus* must have been published early in the series of the *Parallel Lives*, while the pair *Agesilaus and Pompey* probably appeared quite late.
[73] See SHIPLEY (1997) 128. Xenophon attributes the same meaning to the Boeotians' intervention at *Hell.* 3.4.3-4; see DILLERY (1995) 116. Pausanias, too, reports this episode, but does not add any comment or explanation (3.9.4).
[74] Cf. HAMILTON (1991) 32.

Plutarch seems to play with Agesilaus' propaganda, transmitted by the historical sources, to suggest that the most important aspect of the resemblance between Agesilaus and Agamemnon consisted primarily in their being morally problematic leaders of expansionist forces. While Agesilaus must have tried to appear as successful a general as Agamemnon and a morally superior political figure to Agamemnon, Plutarch considers him just as ambiguous as his mythical predecessor. Doubtless, this confirms the impression of Agesilaus' moral ambivalence, which Plutarch developed in the first chapters of the Life.

5.7 – The quarrel with Lysander

After much anticipation of and many allusions to future events, Plutarch begins his narration of the expedition to Asia, which represented a major landmark in the moral decadence of Sparta and resulted in the full exposure of Agesilaus' character. The first important episode, on which Plutarch focuses his attention, is the quarrel between Agesilaus and Lysander, which happened at Ephesus. Plutarch analyses in detail the reasons for their profound disagreement (*Ages.* 7.1):

> ἐπεὶ δὲ ἦκεν εἰς Ἔφεσον, εὐθὺς ἀξίωμα μέγα καὶ δύναμις ἦν ἐπαχθὴς καὶ βαρεῖα περὶ τὸν Λύσανδρον, ὄχλου φοιτῶντος ἐπὶ τὰς θύρας ἑκάστοτε καὶ πάντων παρακολουθούντων καὶ θεραπευόντων ἐκεῖνον, ὡς ὄνομα μὲν καὶ σχῆμα τῆς στρατηγίας τὸν Ἀγησίλαον ὄντα διὰ τὸν νόμον, ἔργῳ δὲ κύριον ἁπάντων καὶ δυνάμενον καὶ πράττοντα πάντα τὸν Λύσανδρον.[75]
>
> When he [Agesilaus] came to Ephesus, soon the great reputation and power surrounding Lysander became grievous and burdensome, for, on each occasion, a crowd waited at the doors and everyone followed and courted Lysander, as if by law Agesilaus had the nominal title and the role of command, but, in actual fact,

[75] The text does not seem to require Reiske's emendation, which added <περὶ> before τὸν Ἀγησίλαον. This correction is accepted by LINDSKOG-ZIEGLER (2002²), *ad hoc*; *contra* FLACELIÈRE-CHAMBRY (1973), *ad hoc*. The conjecture was suggested by the comparison with Plu. *Lys.* 23.6, where Plutarch expresses a similar judgement of Agesilaus and Lysander. In the case of the *Life of Lysander*, however, Plutarch employs a metaphor, which can justify the preposition περὶ. The meaning of *Ages.* 7.1, conversely, is clear and the syntactical parallelism between τὸν Ἀγησίλαον and τὸν Λύσανδρον should be maintained without any unnecessary alteration.

> Lysander had authority over everything, had real power, and managed all the affairs.

Just as in other sections of the Life discussed earlier, in this passage Plutarch also highlights the contrast between appearance and reality. On this occasion, Agesilaus found himself in a situation different from that at Sparta: his role was apparently clear, but Lysander exercised a much greater power thanks to his popularity. Agesilaus' annoyance, in this respect, expressed through the adjectives ἐπαχθής and βαρεῖα, was similar to that of the other Spartiates, who had often found Lysander's ambition and harshness of character while being navarch intolerable (cf. *Lys.* 19.1 and 19.6). The confusion and the overlap between official command (στρατηγία) and effective power (δύναμις) are reflected again in the multiple focalisations of the narrative. At the beginning, Plutarch presents Agesilaus' viewpoint (a secondary focaliser) and his growing resentment towards Lysander, but he quickly moves to focalise through the people of Ephesus (once again, a secondary focaliser) instead.[76] In particular, it seems that everyone saw Lysander as the man who could exercise full discretion in guiding Sparta. Interestingly, the phrase πράττων πάντα, referring to Lysander, could remind the readers of an analogous expression (ποιεῖν ὃ βούλοιτο) employed by Plutarch at *Ages.* 4.2, where he describes Agesilaus' ability to increase his authority through popular support. Away from Sparta, therefore, Agesilaus felt himself to be subject to Lysander's power, contrary to what his role as king and commander entailed.

Subsequently, with an extradiegetic comment, which focalises through the Greeks of Asia, Plutarch corroborates Agesilaus' concern about his leadership by mentioning Lysander's well-established reputation (ἐνδοξότερος) and the awe (φοβερώτερος) in which he was held by the people of Asia, as well as the policy of benefitting friends and harming enemies, which Lysander employed as navarch more regularly than any other Spartan

[76] Cf. SHIPLEY (1997) 132.

commander (*Ages.* 7.2). In Plutarch's view, moreover, people in Asia could observe that, whereas Agesilaus looked unpretentious, simple, and affable (ἀφελής, λιτός, and δημοτικός), Lysander maintained his usual vehemence, harshness, and brevity in speech (σφοδρότης, τραχύτης, and βραχυλογία) (*Ages.* 7.3). Paradoxically, therefore, in Asia Agesilaus' condition was completely reversed: the same qualities that allowed him to succeed at Sparta made him appear less authoritative and strong than Lysander, who, conversely, embodied the traditional traits of the Spartans.

This situation seems to have recreated the same unfavourable circumstances under which Aracus, Callicratidas' successor, had to operate as navarch a few years earlier, when Lysander, though no longer officially in charge, was still the *de facto* commander and the recognised leader of the Spartan forces, as we saw in Chapter 4. The two episodes are narrated at the same point in the two biographies (chapter 7 in each case, as it happens) and present some remarkable verbal correspondences. In particular, the phrases ὄνομα τῆς ναυαρχίας and κύριος ἁπάντων are employed in both Lives (*Ages.* 7.1 and *Lys.* 7.3). This strong connection between the two passages offers further proof that Lysander's great power could undermine Agesilaus' authority, just as happened with other Spartan leaders. By reading the two texts as complementary, however, one can also reflect on how the political situation had changed for the Spartans over the years. Despite the analogies, Agesilaus was not an obscure navarch like Aracus: as we saw earlier in this Chapter, he had the solid support of the Spartans. The Spartiates in Agesilaus' retinue did not support Lysander, since they resented being treated as Lysander's subordinates (ὑπηρέται) rather than as Agesilaus' advisers (σύμβουλοι) (*Ages.* 7.4). That is to say, the Spartan elite repeated the pattern of opposition to Lysander, but this time with more success than in previous years.

Indeed, Agesilaus, overcoming his initial difficulties, was able to assert his prerogatives by gradually isolating Lysander. He progressively reduced Lysander's role in the army and constantly rejected his suggestions for the war (*Ages.* 7.5). Similarly, he started to discriminate against the people who relied on Lysander, turning down their requests. In judicial proceedings, moreover, Agesilaus used to discharge those whom Lysander despised, while, conversely, he punished readily those whom Lysander was willing to help (*Ages.* 7.6-7). Thus, in this case too, Agesilaus appears to have violated the 'help the friends, harm the enemies' principle, continuing this trend in his life.[77] More importantly, Agesilaus' behaviour towards Lysander and his friends proves that, contrary to the values fixed in the Lycurgan constitution, which he learnt through the ἀγωγή, Agesilaus did not try to preserve the unity and the unanimity of the Greek army. Rather, he was driven by a fierce desire for primacy, which made all the other priorities fade into the background. Plutarch's analysis of Agesilaus' psychology, in this respect, is illuminating and confirms the relevance and dangerousness of ambition and contentiousness (*Ages.* 7.4):

> ἔπειτα δ᾽ αὐτὸς ὁ Ἀγησίλαος, εἰ καὶ μὴ φθονερὸς ἦν μηδ᾽ ἥχθετο τοῖς τιμωμένοις, ἀλλὰ φιλότιμος ὢν σφόδρα καὶ φιλόνεικος, ἐφοβεῖτο μή, κἂν ἐνέγκωσί τι λαμπρὸν αἱ πράξεις, τοῦτο Λυσάνδρου γένηται διὰ τὴν δόξαν.
>
> In the second place, Agesilaus himself, although he was not envious nor did he hate when other people were honoured, but was exceedingly ambitious and contentious, began to fear that, even if his actions were to bring some brilliant success, this would be attributed to Lysander because of his repute.

Plutarch, therefore, returns to the main theme of this section of the *Life of Agesilaus*, clarifying how Agesilaus' excessive passions made the relationship with Lysander fell apart. While before sailing to Asia Minor Agesilaus' intention was not to imitate Agamemnon's ἀπάθεια, at Ephesus he fell into the opposite fault, as he could not restrain his φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία. This further demonstration of Agesilaus' failure to moderate his passions as

[77] See SHIPLEY (1997) 134.

much as to establish social and political μετριοπάθεια with other political leaders increases the doubts about the incisiveness of the Spartan training system. Once immersed in a foreign environment, where the Lycurgan tradition could not be followed as scrupulously and faithfully as at Sparta nor could the various Spartan social actors exert their control on one another, exceptional political figures such as Agesilaus could lose sight of their primary duties and the good of Sparta. Thus the main purpose of the ἀγωγή – that is, the unity of the Spartan body politic – was defeated because of the same passions that Spartan education aimed to promote.

Plutarch also explores in detail Lysander's reaction to Agesilaus' resentment (*Ages.* 7.8). The focalisation of the narration, therefore, shifts to Lysander so as to present his perception that Agesilaus was adopting a deliberate strategy against him and his friends (οἷον ἐκ παρασκευῆς καὶ ὁμαλῶς). Noticing the reason for Agesilaus' hostile attitude and recognising that Agesilaus was too strong a leader to oppose, Lysander urged his friends to court (θεραπεύειν) the king and his counsellors. Interestingly, in the *Life of Lysander* the verb θεραπεύω – incidentally, the same verb that defines the attitude of the crowd towards Lysander at *Ages.* 7.1 – is often employed by Plutarch to describe Lysander's nature (*Lys.* 2.3), the way in which he approached Cyrus (*Lys.* 4.3), and the constant presence of flatterers around him, having a negative influence on his character (*Lys.* 19.2). One can argue, then, that Lysander applied to the Spartan king the same code of conduct that regulated the political relationships in Asia. This may suggest, on the one hand, that Lysander distorted the correct way of dealing with the Spartan kingship, a key political institution at Sparta. On the other hand, Plutarch appears to heighten the impression that Asia Minor was a land where Spartan values became compromised.

Subsequently, the focalisation switches back to Agesilaus (the secondary focaliser), who interpreted Lysander's recommendations to his friends (Lysander may constitute the

tertiary focaliser) as an attempt to bring envy (φθόνος) upon him (Ages. 8.1). The participle μηχανώμενος (contriving), which expresses Agesilaus' distrust of Lysander's intentions, is a key term. For, as we saw in Chapter 4, Plutarch employs it to describe Lysander's attempt to conspire to change the constitution, manipulating the religious superstitions and fears of the Spartans (*Lys.* 24.2 and 25.2). This may denote that Agesilaus was able to identify a characteristic of Lysander that, as it happened, went on to be very dangerous. That is to say, as in several other examples examined earlier, the narrative foreshadows future events, which the readers can anticipate either because they are familiar with Spartan history or because they can read the *Life of Agesilaus* in light of the *Life of Lysander*. The substantive φθόνος, moreover, conveys further complexity to the passage. For it seems to attest to the presence of another level of focalisation in addition to Agesilaus and Lysander: Lysander's friends and their possible jealousy of Agesilaus. Once again, so complex a narrative structure corresponds to the ambiguity occurring in personal relationships, with everyone – Agesilaus, Lysander, and the crowd – trying to read each other's minds. Just as the various protagonists of the historical events could hardly discern the real feelings and motivations behind political decisions, so it is equally difficult for the readers to do so too.

The conflict between Agesilaus and Lysander escalated so much that Agesilaus even reduced Lysander to the mortifying role of carver of meats (κρεοδαίτης).[78] As further humiliation, referring to Lysander by this title, in the presence of many people he told Lysander's friends to go and flatter (θεραπεύειν) him (*Ages.* 8.1). The repetition of the verb θεραπεύω may indicate that Agesilaus, distancing himself from Lysander and his circle of acquaintances, uncovered their duplicity and the true nature of their bond. Subsequently, the brief conversation between Lysander and Agesilaus, which concludes the whole episode, constituted the moment in which the two Spartan leaders apparently spoke the

[78] Such a role in public dinners and sacrifices cannot be considered a punishment; in fact, it was regarded as an honour; yet it implied a relation of dependence to the king. See LUPPINO MANES-MARCONE (1996) 163 n. 42, SHIPLEY (1997) 135-6. On the functions of the κρεοδαίτης cf. Plu. *Quaest. conviv.* 644 B.

truth to one another (*Ages.* 8.2). Lysander reminded Agesilaus of their friendship and how he was being diminished: "I see, Agesilaus, that you know very well how to degrade friends" (ἤδεις ἄρα σαφῶς, ὦ Ἀγησίλαε, φίλους ἐλαττοῦν). Agesilaus' laconic answer, conversely, centred on the theme of power: "Yes, by Zeus, those who want to be more powerful than me" (νὴ Δί᾽ […] τοὺς ἐμοῦ μεῖζον δύνασθαι βουλομένους). The dialogue, therefore, continues analysing the theme of the relationship between enemies and friends, and its interference in political leadership. Lysander's perspective seems to have been that of a friend, whose expectations were disappointed, while Agesilaus' viewpoint was that of a political leader, worried about his role and power.

Plutarch's final comment, however, reverses this first impression and surprisingly presents Lysander's motivations as primarily political and those of Agesilaus as merely personal: "Yet it seems that because of the same passion one [Lysander] did not recognise the authority of the ruler, the other [Agesilaus] did not endure being ignored by a friend".[79] Thus one can imply from Plutarch's remark that neither Lysander nor Agesilaus sincerely expressed their opinions and feelings. Since they arrived in Asia Minor, their close friendship and love, based on harmony, had become as ambiguous and two-faced as political associations usually are.[80] It would seem Agesilaus and Lysander failed to understand that their condition was no longer the same as at Sparta. This might have prevented them from adjusting to the new situation.

Plutarch, nonetheless, draws a deeper moral lesson from the beginning of the Spartan military campaign. Once again, he attributes a decisive importance to love of honour, as he argues that ambitious natures (φιλότιμοι φύσεις), when they do not keep guard against excess (τὸ ἄγαν) in acts of government, can cause greater harm than good

[79] Plu. *Ages.* 8.7: ἀλλ᾽ ἔοικε ταὐτῷ πάθει μήτε ἐκεῖνος ἄρχοντος ἐξουσίαν γνῶναι, μήτε οὗτος ἄγνοιαν ἐνεγκεῖν συνήθους.

[80] In this regard, the break of the harmony between Lysander and Agesilaus is suggested by the verb πλημμελέω (to strike a false note in music) referring to Lysander's φιλοτιμία. Cf. also Plu. *Lys.* 23.7. See SHIPLEY (1997) 140.

(*Ages.* 8.5). Being unable to control their passions, then, Agesilaus and Lysander did not fix clear boundaries between the public and the private spheres or between ruling and being ruled. From Plutarch's analysis and the use of both the verb γιγνώσκω and the substantive ἄγνοια, one can conclude that the main fault concerned the correct use of reason. Plutarch, moreover, implicitly illustrates an important difference between Lysander and Agesilaus. The fact that Lysander failed to discern Agesilaus' role and exceeded the right measure (καιρός) of φιλοτιμία was not the same as Agesilaus' awareness (οὐκ ἠγνόει) of a more blameless way of correcting (ἐπανόρθωσις) Lysander, which, nonetheless, did not make Agesilaus take the firm decision to conduct himself well (*Ages.* 8.6). In this respect, one can apply to Lysander and Agesilaus the characteristics of licentiousness (ἀκολασία) and incontinence (ἀκρασία) respectively. Plutarch makes the distinction between these two personal qualities in *De virtute morali* and we employed them in the examination of the Spartan education system in Chapter 3. Lysander appears to have been intemperate, because he was led by evil reason and an evil passion, so that not only did he engage in shameful conduct but he also lost the ability to perceive his errors. Agesilaus, conversely, was incontinent, inasmuch as he preserved his right judgement, but reason was not able to guide the passionate element of his soul. Thus φιλοτιμία seems to have become too strong a force for Agesilaus to limit appropriately (cf. *De virt. mor.* 445 D-E). Just as in the rest of this section of the Life, in this case too Plutarch highlights how neither of the two Spartan leaders managed to establish μετριοπάθεια in their souls and in public relations. In different degrees, Agesilaus and Lysander were morally guilty and ended up creating serious difficulties for the Spartan military campaign in Asia. This suggests again that Spartan education, which aimed to instil φιλονικία and φιλοτιμία in the Spartiates, did not provide them with sufficient means to moderate their passions, especially when they were not under the strict control of Spartan institutions.

Just as for the sacrifice at Aulis, for the quarrel between Agesilaus and Lysander Plutarch also follows Xenophon's *Hellenica* (3.4.7-10).[81] Xenophon, however, does not discuss the personal aspects of the dispute, but concentrates his attention on the political implications of Lysander's popularity and luxurious way of living. Agesilaus' reaction as well as the jealousy of the other Spartiates was provoked by these two elements of Lysander's behaviour. The clash between Agesilaus and Lysander, moreover, is viewed only in relation to the context of Ephesus, characterised by serious political instability, due to the crisis of the decarchy installed by Lysander a few years earlier. Finally, in Xenophon's account Agesilaus and Lysander found a compromise and their friendship seemed to be restored, as Lysander managed to be sent to the Hellespont in order not to remain inactive in Agesilaus' retinue. As we saw earlier in the thesis, in the *Life of Lysander* Plutarch concentrates his attention on Agesilaus, who is held accountable for the quarrel, caused by his envy and ambition (*Lys.* 23.3-13).[82] This episode, moreover, represented a crucial landmark in the trajectory of Lysander as a tragic character, which continued with the conspiracy to change the Spartan constitution. Lysander's transfer to the Hellespont then was merely a temporary truce, during which Lysander could hatch his plot.

Yet neither in Plutarch's *Life of Lysander* nor in Xenophon's *Hellenica* does the conflict between Agesilaus and Lysander assume as symbolic and paradigmatic a meaning as in the *Life of Agesilaus*, where it heralds the most acute phase of the Spartan crisis, in which political decline and moral decadence are inextricably linked. It is no surprise that Lysander's conspiracy plans are only mentioned very briefly in comparison with the more extensive discussion in the *Life of Lysander*. Plutarch simply points out that Lysander was moved to action by anger (ὀργή), but many other details about his intention to change the

[81] Unsurprisingly, Xenophon does not mention the episode in the *Agesilaos*. Equally silent on the events at Ephesus are Diodorus Siculus and Pausanias.
[82] As we noticed, for instance, the term φθόνος refers to Agesilaus' envy for Lysander's honour (τιμή) (*Lys.* 23.3).

rights of succession to the throne are omitted (*Ages.* 8.3-4). If one reads the two Lives as complementary, one can understand the paradoxality of Sparta's situation: while Agesilaus was pursuing dreams of glory in Asia, Sparta was particularly weak and vulnerable, since it was exposed to a serious internal menace, which would threaten the entire political system. The danger represented by Lysander, for which both Agesilaus and Lysander were equally responsible because of their immoderate passions, was also the consequence of the intrinsic moral and political limits of Sparta. Long before the battle of Leuctra (371 BC), therefore, after Lysander's command, Sparta's inner contradictions continued to emerge and were destined to explode as soon as some external 'triggers' accelerated the process of the Spartan implosion.

To sum up, just as Lysander before him, Agesilaus, with his moral ambivalence and driving ambition, was emblematic of how Sparta failed to offer its leaders a sufficient philosophical education to maintain Spartan cultural identity. Furthermore, Agesilaus' vicissitudes, connected with his military leadership, demonstrate how problematic it is to interpret the critical phase of Spartan history at the beginning of the fourth century BC. By constantly changing the focalisation of the narrative, by showing the inability of each character to have a clear view of other people's intentions, and by making all the protagonists project their fears and suspicions onto one another, Plutarch tries to display how difficult it is to decipher the historical events of this period. Most importantly, Plutarch seems to encourage his readers to employ all their interpretative faculties in this complex task, without limiting themselves by making easy assumptions about Agesilaus and the other historical figures of his time. At the same time, Plutarch seems to bind the readers to his interpretation of the facts, for, as we have repeatedly commented, the readers can reach the correct understanding of Agesilaus and the events in which he was involved by activating their previous knowledge of Spartan history and by enhancing it through

Plutarch's analysis. In this dialogue between the readers and Plutarch, Plutarch as the omniscient narrator represents a secure guide to decoding the complex – and often confused – history of Sparta, to recognising the hidden connections between causes and effects, and to drawing a moral lesson from the historical facts: the readers, that is to say, cannot but take into serious account Plutarch's perspective and, possibly, learn from it.

5.8 – The failure of the military campaign in Asia

After concluding the segment concerning the quarrel with Lysander, Plutarch narrates Agesilaus' military activities in Asia. In this section of the Life, one can notice how several topics anticipated in the early chapters are explored while observing Agesilaus in action. Plutarch's focus remains on Agesilaus' ambivalence as much as on the contradictions of Sparta.[83] As we shall see, nonetheless, in Plutarch's account Agesilaus' vicissitudes, which showed the limits of the Spartan political system, were also inextricably linked to the weakness, the faults, and the vices of the Greeks. Agesilaus becomes the symbol of the greatness that the Greeks could have achieved, but were not able to reach because of their excessive rivalry. Indeed, as Plutarch implies, the trajectory of Agesilaus and Sparta was emblematic of the trajectory of the Hellenic world.

Plutarch continues placing emphasis on Agesilaus' desire to demonstrate his valour to the Greeks through some initiative worthy of memory (ἔργον ἄξιον μνήμης). As we saw earlier, at his arrival in Asia Agesilaus could not tolerate the intimidating presence of Lysander; subsequently, he felt the weight of Xenophon's past successes, since, a few years earlier, Xenophon and his troops had won against the Persians on numerous occasions, while Agesilaus had still done nothing that could match the great expectations of his

[83] Just as in the case of the previous chapters, in *Ages.* 9 Plutarch also continues following Xenophon's *Hellenica* as his main source, although he summarises and remoulds significantly – even at the risk of generating some confusion – the information there contained. See SHIPLEY (1997) 143-55.

leadership of the Spartans, who had the hegemony on land and sea (*Ages.* 9.2). The use of the verb φαίνω and the substantive δόξα suggests that Agesilaus considered making a good impression on the Greeks a matter of utmost urgency.

The importance of longing for glory is reiterated by Agesilaus after his first military success against the satrap Tissaphernes, who had broken the truce with which he had promised to grant the Greek cities of Asia autonomy.[84] First, Agesilaus faked an attack in Caria, but waged war in Phrygia instead, subduing many cities and obtaining abundant goods (*Ages.* 9.3). As Plutarch adds, Agesilaus pointed out (ἐπιδεικνύμενος) to his friends that in misleading the enemy there was not only justice but also great repute (δόξα) and a gratifying advantage (τὸ μεθ' ἡδονῆς κερδαίνειν), whereas violating treaties (τὸ σπεισάμενον ἀδικεῖν) meant despising the gods (*Ages.* 9.4). Interestingly, by underlining his differences to Tissaphernes, Agesilaus indirectly introduced a drastic change from Lysander's style of fighting. For Lysander too had often made use of lies, deceit, and perjury to gain an advantage over his adversaries, a method that in the *Life of Lysander* Plutarch harshly criticises as tyrannical, un-Spartan, and morally wrong (*Lys.* 7.5-6, 8.4-5).[85] This may indicate that, just as in several other cases in the past (the examples of Brasidas and Callicratidas were also emblematic in this respect), in this phase of its history Sparta generated very different types of leaders.

Plutarch, however, does not merely portray Agesilaus as the 'champion' of the Spartan tradition in contrast with an anomalous Spartan such as Lysander. Agesilaus also compromised the purity of Spartan ideals. As in the case of Lysander, money was a key factor for Agesilaus as well. On the one hand, Agesilaus repeatedly declared his personal indifference towards money and the Spartans' complete disregard for wealth. On the other

[84] More details on the first truce between Tissaphernes and Agesilaus can be read at Xen. *Ages.* 1.10-11, *Hell.* 3.4.5-6. Diodorus Siculus, conversely, records only the treaties between the Persian satraps Pharnabazus and Tissaphernes and the Spartan commander Dercyllidas (14.38.3 and 14.39.6).

[85] One can notice that Plutarch attributes to Agesilaus the phrase ἀπάτη δικαία (just deception) (*Ages.* 9.3), while Lysander used ἀπάται (deceits) (*Lys.* 7.5).

hand, despite its corrupting seduction, money was indispensable for conducting military operations.

Let us examine Agesilaus' creation of a cavalry force at Ephesus. Agesilaus had to ask the wealthiest citizens, who were unwilling to fight, to supply the Greek army with a horse and a cavalryman each. Indeed, thanks to such a significant innovation, Agesilaus could gather many warlike cavalrymen instead of inadequate hoplites (*Ages.* 9.5-6).[86] The comparison with Agamemnon, who accepted a mare in exchange for sending away from the army a man rich but cowardly (cf. *Il.* 23.295-9 and Plu. *De aud. poet.* 32 F), seems to validate Agesilaus' expedient actions (*Ages.* 9.7). In fact, Agesilaus' reform of the army would initiate the increasingly greater employment of mercenary troops by Greek generals. Xenophon offers more details about the tactical reasons for Agesilaus' organisation of the cavalry and for making rich citizens pay for their substitutes (*Ages.* 1.23-24, *Hell.* 3.4.15). Plutarch, conversely, does not address these practical aspects of the recruitment of the army. Rather, he follows up this information with the narration of the sale of war prisoners, put on display naked so that buyers could make their evaluation. By adding Agesilaus' final remark ("These are the men against whom you fight, these are the things for which you fight"), Plutarch seems to stress that the war against the Persians had also significant economic implications (*Ages.* 9.8).[87] The public humiliation of the Persians' effeminate bodies, probably intended to strengthen the Greeks' sense of superiority, also showed, indirectly, that the war in Asia was a war of conquest.

Money and wealth are discussed again later in the narration, after the Greek army have defeated the Persians in the battle near Sardis in Lydia (*Ages.* 10.1-4). As Plutarch notes, the Greeks could ravage Persian territory, an action that is qualified by the adverb

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[86] At Plu. *Ages.* 9.6, the Greek text is probably interpolated, but its general sense remains clear; see SHIPLEY (1997) 149-50.

[87] Plu. *Ages.* 9.8: (οὗτοι μέν…οἷς μάχεσθε, ταῦτα δὲ ὑπὲρ ὧν μάχεσθε). Cf. an analogous sale of prisoners at Plu. *Cim.* 9.

ἀδεῶς, which means not only 'with confidence' but also 'with a sense of impunity', demonstrating a slight criticism of the Greeks' behaviour (*Ages.* 10.5). Even more revelatory of Agesilaus' contradictory relationship with money is the conclusion of the negotiation with Tithraustes, the Persian dignitary who was sent by king Artaxerses to replace Tissaphernes. After being forced to reach an agreement with Agesilaus because of Tissaphernes' failure, Tithraustes offered money to the Greeks, asking them to go back to Sparta. First, Agesilaus refused categorically, arguing that only his city had the power to make peace (τῆς εἰρήνης κυρίαν εἶναι), but then he accepted thirty talents and moved to Phrygia (*Ages.* 10.6-8). The act of giving a provision for travelling (ἐφόδιον) was a measure usually adopted to induce the enemy to pull out of a region or area. Interestingly, in his account, Xenophon narrates that Agesilaus explicitly requested provisions (ἐπιτήδεια) from Tithraustes in order to leave Lydia (*Hell.* 3.4.26). The difference between the two versions may seem to be of marginal importance; by emphasising that Agesilaus gave his consent to Tithraustes' proposal, however, Plutarch may have tried to lay greater stress on the seductive power of money. Plutarch also points out that Agesilaus wished to gratify (χαρίζεσθαι βουλόμενος) Tithraustes for killing Tissaphernes. On this occasion, then, as anticipated in the first part of the Life, Agesilaus confirmed his very respectful attitude towards the enemy, even at the risk of compromising one of the most important Spartan values.

After the first successes, the Spartans also gave Agesilaus the command of the navy in addition to that of the army, an exceptional joint appointment that no one had held before at Sparta. As Plutarch remarks, borrowing Theopompus' words, "by common consent Agesilaus was the greatest and the most distinguished man of his generation".[88] As we have repeatedly noticed, Agesilaus' good qualities are constantly related to the

[88] Plu. *Ages.* 10.10: μέγιστος μὲν ἦν ὁμολογουμένως καὶ τῶν τότε ζώντων ἐπιφανέστατος.

impression conveyed to external observers, especially the Spartans. This episode, in which Plutarch employs the adverb ὁμολογουμένως and the adjective ἐπιφανέστατος (connected to the idea of appearance), is no exception. Plutarch, however, illustrates again how so positive an impression could not hide Agesilaus' ambiguity with respect to the use of money and the relationship with enemies and friends. The assertion that Agesilaus was more proud of his virtue (ἀρετή) than his leadership (ἡγεμονία) would seem to confirm Agesilaus' faithfulness to the Spartan value system (*Ages.* 10.10). Yet his decision to entrust the command of the navy to his brother-in-law Pisander, putting kinship and private interests before the interest of the state, constituted a transgression of the Spartan moral code (*Ages.* 10.11). In this respect, Agesilaus did not behave very differently from Lysander, who constantly favoured his friends and acquaintances in the government of the Greek cities in Asia Minor.

Agesilaus also expressed moral ambivalence in dealing with Spithridates, a rich Persian man who had joined the Greek cause. Attacking Phrygia, Agesilaus forced the satrap Pharnabazus to flee from one part of the country to another, bringing most of his valuables (τίμια) and precious things (ἀγαπητά) with him (*Ages.* 11.1-3). The alliance with Cotys, the king of Paphlagonia, and the support of Spithridates proved extremely helpful for the Greeks: Agesilaus obtained a thousand cavalrymen and two thousand peltasts from Cotys.[89] Political and military pacts were cemented by personal relationships: Cotys married Spithridates' daughter and Agesilaus fell in love with Megabates, Spithridates' son. Agesilaus' pragmatic leadership was successful and the Greeks could take control over Phrygia. Once again, nonetheless, Agesilaus' conduct led to some negative consequences. Spithridates and Herippidas, one of the Spartiates who was following Agesilaus, managed to take possession of Pharnabazus' treasures (*Ages.* 11.3). Herrippidas, however, whom

[89] Xenophon clarifies that Spithridates persuaded Cotys to supply these troops (*Hell.* 4.1.3).

Plutarch defines as "a relentless inquirer into the riches stolen" (πικρὸς ἐξεταστὴς τῶν κλαπέντων), forced the barbarians to give them back, causing the irritation of Spithridates, who decided to abandon the Greek army (*Ages.* 11.4). Plutarch discusses in detail Agesilaus' reaction to Spithridates' departure (*Ages.* 11.5):

> τοῦτο λέγεται τῷ Ἀγησιλάῳ γενέσθαι πάντων ἀνιαρότατον. ἤχθετο μὲν γὰρ ἄνδρα γενναῖον ἀποβεβληκὼς τὸν Σπιθριδάτην καί σὺν αὐτῷ δύναμιν οὐκ ὀλίγην, ἠσχύνετο δὲ τῇ διαβολῇ τῆς μικρολογίας καί ἀνελευθερίας, ἧς οὐ μόνον αὑτόν, ἀλλὰ καί τὴν πατρίδα καθαρεύουσαν ἀεὶ παρέχειν ἐφιλοτιμεῖτο.
>
> This event, they say, was the most distressing of all for Agesilaus. For, on the one hand, he was very upset at loosing Spithridates, as he was a noble man, and with him a considerable force; on the other hand, he felt ashamed about the unenviable reputation of stinginess and illiberality, from which he was always having the ambition to render not only himself but also the fatherland clean.

Plutarch's extradiegetic comment as much as the secondary focalisation through Agesilaus attribute equal relevance to the practical aspects connected with Spithridates' departure and to Agesilaus' personal ambition to change the reputation of Sparta. Indeed, Herippidas' behaviour damaged the Greek army. Yet, although his conduct might appear excessive, it was consistent with the Spartan virtues taught by the Lycurgan ἀγωγή, for which Agesilaus himself had celebrated the moral distinction of the Spartans. Perhaps, a more flexible and moderate approach, which did not pretend to adopt Spartan criteria for judging the actions of non-Greek people like Spithridates, would have been more appropriate. Occasionally, the necessities of war might have allowed the Spartans to loosen their habits. Agesilaus, however, appears to have criticised openly one of the most characteristic features of Spartan culture: the complete disregard for money. His words contradicted what he had asserted earlier in the military campaign. Agesilaus' ambition (φιλοτιμία), moreover, was to promote an image of Sparta that did not correspond to the Sparta designed by Lycurgus. One can reasonably infer, then, that it was extremely difficult for the Spartans to assume the leadership of the Greeks against the Persians without

spoiling their cultural identity. This can indirectly offer a further proof that the Lycurgan constitution never envisaged preparing the Spartans for such a task, as Plutarch argues in the *Life of Lycurgus* (31.1).

There were, however, also more personal motives behind Agesilaus' sorrow about Spithridates' decision to leave the Greeks. Plutarch comments: "Apart from these manifest reasons, he was irritated beyond measure by his love for the boy, which was now instilled into his heart, even if, when the boy was present, he vigorously tried to battle against his desire having recourse to his contentiousness".[90] Losing Megabates, then, was another major cause of distress for Agesilaus. Plutarch's choice of words to describe Agesilaus' state is particularly telling. The adjective ἐμφανής seems to highlight again the dichotomy between Agesilaus' exterior impression and his true feelings. More importantly, the phrase οὐ μετρίως and the verb κνίζω (a very rare term that Plutarch employs only three more times at *De prof. virt.* 78 B, 78 E, and 84 E, where he describes the negative interference of external factors in the process of philosophical improvement) refer to Agesilaus' extreme difficulty in keeping his passions in a harmonious balance. Agesilaus even had to employ his contentiousness (τὸ φιλόνεικον) in order to face so daunting a challenge. The subsequent analysis of Agesilaus' struggle to resist his erotic impulse and the temptation of indulging in improper physical contacts when Megabates tried to kiss him, hints that Agesilaus was not in full control of his emotions (*Ages.* 11.7-10).[91]

Remarkably, Agesilaus established a similar relationship with Pharnabazus and his son. Pharnabazus too tried to negotiate a truce with the Greeks. Plutarch's account of the meeting between the Persians and the Greeks confirms that Agesilaus displayed a typically Spartan attitude, characterised by simplicity, as is exemplified by his sitting in a shady place

[90] Plu. *Ages.* 11.6: χωρὶς δὲ τῶν ἐμφανῶν τούτων ἔκνιζεν αὐτὸν οὐ μετρίως ὁ τοῦ παιδὸς ἔρως ἐνεσταγμένος, εἰ καί πάνυ παρόντος αὐτοῦ τῷ φιλονείκῳ χρώμενος ἐπειρᾶτο νεανικῶς ἀπομάχεσθαι πρὸς τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν.
[91] On Plutarch's rewriting of Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.10 and 4.1.26-8, see SHIPLEY (1997) 175-80. Cf. also Xen. *Ages.* 5.4-5.

on the grass, while Pharnabazus used soft cushions and rugs, and wore a beautiful and delicate raiment, a clear sign of effeminacy (*Ages.* 12.2-3). The tension between the two leaders, however, seemed to fade away as they began to discuss their positions and presented their requests. First, Pharnabazus recalled that he had helped the Spartans during the Peloponnesian War, and yet he was being plundered (πορθούμενος) by them, a wrongdoing that the Spartans present at the talk acknowledged with embarrassment and shame (ὁρῶν τοὺς σὺν αὐτῷ Σπαρτιάτας ὑπ᾽ αἰσχύνης κύπτοντας εἰς τὴν γῆν καὶ διαποροῦντας) (*Ages.* 12.4-5). In response, Agesilaus affirmed that the Spartans' friendship or enmity depended on their relationship with the Persian king, since, when the Spartans were friends (φίλοι) of the king, they dealt with the king's belongings in a friendly way (φιλικῶς), but, on becoming his enemies, their approach changed and they started treating his possessions with hostility (πολεμικῶς) (*Ages.* 12.6). Such a change inevitably affected their relationship with Pharnabazus too: as Agesilaus added, through Pharnabazus the Greeks were damaging the king (διὰ σοῦ βλάπτομεν ἐκεῖνον); should, however, Pharnabazus decide to join the Greek side as a friend and an ally (φίλος καὶ σύμμαχος), the Greeks would protect him and his goods (*Ages.* 12.7).

The first part of the dialogue between Agesilaus and Pharnabazus then appears to have reflected the 'help the friends, harm the enemies' code. Just as in the case of Spithridates, however, the necessities of war prevented Agesilaus from applying such a principle too rigorously, for Pharnabazus did not fully accept Agesilaus' implicit offer of alliance against the Persian king. He simply replied that he would join the Spartans only if the king chose someone else for the command (ἡγεμονία) of the Persian army; otherwise, he would remain faithful to his country, a compromise that Agesilaus gladly accepted (*Ages.* 12.8). Indeed, the fight against the Persian king in Asia required such a flexible and pragmatic method of establishing strategic partnerships that they were inevitably unstable,

even if still potentially useful in creating a broader coalition. In the *Hellenica*, Xenophon places emphasis on Agesilaus' diplomatic ability in this regard (*Hell.* 4.1.29-38). Yet Agesilaus' conduct also had serious moral implications, which the tactical advantages could not conceal. In this respect, the details about Agesilaus' friendship with Pharnabazus' son show that the distinction between enmity and friendship could even disappear. Not only did Agesilaus accept the boy as his guest, but he also helped him move to Sparta (*Ages.* 13.1-3). The love affair of Pharnabazus' son with an athlete, moreover, offered Plutarch again the opportunity to remark upon Agesilaus' excessive loyalty to his friends, for, in order to favour him, Agesilaus was on the verge of changing laws and regulations, a pattern already identified earlier in the Life, especially with regard to the relationship between Lysander and Agesilaus (*Ages.* 13.4-5).

With the episode of Pharnabazus' son and with that of another anonymous lover, who was wounded so that Agesilaus was forced to leave him behind after a battle, Plutarch concludes the broad thematic section about the first year of Agesilaus' reign and his behaviour towards enemies and friends, which began at *Ages.* 5.1. In the next section, which focuses on the second year of Agesilaus' rule, Plutarch continues to follow the military campaign in Asia. Thanks to his style of command, Agesilaus enjoyed great repute (πολὺς λόγος) and wonderful fame (δόξα θαυμαστή) for his self-restraint, thrift, and moderation (σωφροσύνης, εὐτέλεια, and μετριότης) (*Ages.* 14.1): Agesilaus, that is, was seen as a true Spartan, who embodied all the main virtues of the Lycurgan education system, as shown by his profound veneration of the gods, modesty in coping with the difficulties of war life, and strength in enduring heat and cold (*Ages.* 14.2-3). In the eyes of the Greeks, such virtuous conduct made lieutenants and commanders change too (*Ages.* 14.4):

> ἥδιστον δὲ θέαμα τοῖς κατοικοῦσι τὴν Ἀσίαν Ἕλλησιν ἦσαν οἱ πάλαι βαρεῖς καὶ ἀφόρητοι καὶ διαρρέοντες ὑπὸ πλούτου καὶ τρυφῆς ὕπαρχοι καὶ στρατηγοὶ δεδιότες καὶ θεραπεύοντες ἄνθρωπον ἐν τρίβωνι περιϊόντα λιτῷ, καὶ πρὸς ἓν ῥῆμα βραχὺ καὶ

> Λακωνικὸν ἁρμόζοντες ἑαυτοὺς καὶ μετασχηματίζοντες, ὥστε πολλοῖς ἐπῆει τὰ τοῦ Τιμοθέου λέγειν,
>
> Ἄρης τύραννος· χρυσὸν δὲ Ἕλλας οὐ δέδοικε.
>
> For the Greeks who dwelt in Asia, it was most pleasing to see that lieutenants and generals, who had long been oppressive, unendurable, and loosened by wealth and luxury, were fearful and obsequious before a man who went around in a paltry cloak. At one brief and laconic saying of his, they were adapting and transforming themselves to his manners, so that it occurred to many to cite the words of Timotheus:
>
> "Ares is Lord; of gold Greece hath no fear."

Agesilaus, then, apparently started to have a positive influence on the Greeks of Asia. Was that, however, a real transformation? In the passage quoted above, the terms employed by Plutarch cast doubt on the real effects of Agesilaus' example. Fear and adulation, for instance, cannot be considered the fruits of philosophical training, which aims to teach moral virtue. The verb θεραπεύω, moreover, has already been used to describe the attitude of the Greeks towards Lysander and Agesilaus at Ephesus (*Ages.* 7-8). It would be difficult, therefore, to assume that lieutenants and commanders adopted a radically different approach towards power. Their efforts to conform to Agesilaus' customs also appear to have been superficial. In this regard, both the verbs ἁρμόζω and μετασχηματίζω are very significant. The first one is the same verb that characterises Agesilaus' problematic behaviour towards his subjects, as we saw at the beginning of the Life (*Ages.* 1.5). The second one entails a change of the σχῆμα, a word that means 'form' or 'figure', that is, the external characteristic of something. Thus it does not suggest that ὕπαρχοι and στρατηγοὶ experienced a substantial improvement in their characters. Finally, the effects of Agesilaus' leadership are seen through the eyes of the Greeks. In fact, the substantive θέαμα suggests again the idea of impression, which Plutarch has repeatedly associated with Agesilaus. Ultimately, what the Greek generals really felt remains unknown.

Following a deeper analysis, therefore, the breadth and the depth of Agesilaus' actions proved to be rather limited. The same can be said for the results of his military strategy. Indeed, Agesilaus managed to establish the political stability of the Greek cities without imposing repressive measures such as exile or the death sentence (*Ages.* 15.1). Yet, when he was ready to attack the Persians far from the Aegean Sea at the heart of the king's empire, he received orders from the ephors to return to the Peloponnese, since the other Greeks had declared war on Sparta (*Ages.* 15.2). Plutarch treats the event as a historical catastrophe. The verse from Euripides' *Troades* ("Oh Greeks, who seek out barbarous ills", ὦ βάρβαρ᾽ ἐξευρόντες Ἕλληνες κακά, v. 764) sets the tone of what Plutarch considers a national tragedy (*Ages.* 15.3). His subsequent comment, in which he openly criticises the Greeks, confirms this interpretation (*Ages.* 15.3-4):

> τί γὰρ ἄν τις ἄλλο τὸν φθόνον ἐκεῖνον προσείποι καὶ τὴν τότε σύστασιν καὶ σύνταξιν ἐφ᾽ ἑαυτοὺς τῶν Ἑλλήνων; οἳ τῆς τύχης ἄνω φερομένης ἐπελάβοντο, καὶ τὰ ὅπλα πρὸς τοὺς βαρβάρους βλέποντα καὶ τὸν πόλεμον ἤδη τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἐξῳκισμένον αὖθις εἰς ἑαυτοὺς ἔτρεψαν. οὐ γὰρ ἔγωγε συμφέρομαι τῷ Κορινθίῳ Δημαράτῳ μεγάλης ἡδονῆς ἀπολελεῖφθαι φήσαντι τοὺς μὴ θεασαμένους Ἕλληνας Ἀλέξανδρον ἐν τῷ Δαρείου θρόνῳ καθήμενον, ἀλλ᾽ εἰκότως ἄν οἶμαι δακρῦσαι, συννοήσαντας ὅτι ταῦτ᾽ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ καὶ Μακεδόσιν ἀπέλιπον οἳ τότε τοὺς τῶν Ἑλλήνων στρατηγοὺς περὶ Λεῦκτρα καὶ Κορώνειαν καὶ Κόρινθον καὶ Ἀρκαδίαν κατανήλωσαν.
>
> How else can one speak of that jealousy, conspiracy, and arrangement of the Greeks against themselves at that time? They seized fortune while it was rising high and turned again upon themselves the weapons, which were in sight of the barbarians, and war, which had already been banished from Greece. I certainly do not agree with Demaratus of Corinth, who said that the Greeks who did not behold Alexander seated on the throne of Darius were deprived of a great pleasure. Conversely, I think that they would have likely shed tears, if they had thought that those who had squandered the generals of the Greeks at Leuctra, Coronea, Corinth, and in Arcadia had left this triumph for Alexander and Macedonians.

This extremely important passage places the story of Agesilaus into a broader Panhellenic perspective. By observing that Agesilaus' plans were being supported by

fortune (τύχη), which would have continued helping the Greeks against the Persians, if Agesilaus had not interrupted his expedition, Plutarch invites the readers to consider Agesilaus' life as part of the global history of Greece. Particularly significant is the idea that Agesilaus could have played a major part in imposing Hellenic rule over the Persians, whatever impact he may have had on the Greeks of Asia Minor. Indeed, by offering such a consideration, Plutarch makes different temporal layers and dimensions – Agesilaus' present and future; various periods of Greek history preceding and following Agesilaus; more implicitly, the past and the present of Plutarch and his readers as witnesses of Greek history under the Roman empire – coalesce into a moment of suspended time. The result is a deeper evaluation of the facts concerning Agesilaus in light of later events such as the battles of Leuctra, Coronea, Corinth, and Arcadia, which are anticipated in Plutarch's comment, but will be narrated in detail later in the Life. Furthermore, by mentioning only the names of geographical locations, without adding any detail, Plutarch may have made particularly attentive readers evoke the memory of further fights between Greeks. That is the case of Coronea, theatre of the combat between the Delian League and the Boeotian League in 447 BC, or Mantinea in Arcadia, where the Spartans defeated the Athenians and the Argives in 418 BC: Plutarch, that is, traces a central thread that runs through Greek history – the enmity between the Greeks – and highlights the conquests of Alexander the Great as a fundamental turning point. Agesilaus' existence cannot be fully understood without taking into account these elements, something that the readers are called to do by activating their previous historical knowledge.

In his extradiegetic comment, moreover, Plutarch applies religious beliefs and moral criteria to judge historical facts. The reference to the intervention of the τύχη helping Agesilaus and the condemnation of internal Greek rivalry seem to imply the active involvement in history of a principle of moral causality, just as we saw in the *De sera numinis*

vindicta.[92] Accordingly, the Spartan expedition in Asia was unsuccessful, but all the Greeks should be held responsible for this failure. Plutarch's analysis, however, also seems to involve an implicit evaluation of Sparta. Agesilaus' response to the events and his moral conduct are not easy to judge, considering the general trajectory of Greek history. Agesilaus is explicitly praised for obeying the orders of the Ephors and for returning to Sparta. Plutarch's words in this regard are unequivocal (*Ages*. 15.5-6 *passim*):

> Ἀγησιλάῳ μέντοι οὐδὲν κρεῖσσον ἢ μεῖζόν ἐστι τῆς ἀναχωρήσεως ἐκείνης διαπεπραγμένον, οὐδὲ γέγονε παράδειγμα πειθαρχίας καὶ δικαιοσύνης ἕτερον κάλλιον. […] πῶς οὐκ ἦν ἄξιον τὴν Σπάρτην μακαρίσαι τῆς Ἀγησιλάου τιμῆς πρὸς ταύτην καὶ πρὸς τοὺς νόμους τῆς εὐλαβείας;
>
> Certainly, nothing nobler or greater than that return has been accomplished by Agesilaus, nor does another more beautiful example of obedience to authority and justice exist. […] How was it not fit to deem Sparta blessed for Agesilaus' honour towards her and for his reverence for the laws?

Agesilaus, then, is commended for having renounced his great fortune, power, and high hopes, leaving his enterprise unfinished. Yet his decision is contrasted with the analogous situations in which Hannibal and Alexander the Great were involved. When Carthage was already threatened by Scipio, Hannibal had to go back to Africa, reluctantly (μόλις) obeying the orders that he received and aborting his mission in Italy (203 BC). Alexander the Great, conversely, refused to let the conflict between Agis III and Antipater in Greece interfere with his expedition against Darius: he continued his campaign (331 BC) (*Ages*. 15.6).

These two cases were very different from one another. Both Hannibal and Alexander, nonetheless, did not passively accept returning to their motherland. Plutarch's words reveal that even Hannibal, who no longer had a genuine chance to conquer Italy (cf. *Fab*. 26.3), put up some resistance. On the one hand, then, as we saw in the passages

[92] See Chapter 1.

quoted above, Agesilaus' loyalty to Sparta was an extraordinary example of justice; on the other hand, his choice, despite being perfectly coherent with the Spartan constitution, was not in the best interest of the Greeks in the long term: the comparison with Hannibal and Alexander the Great, that is, may implicitly confirm that acting according to Spartan values made it impossible to guide Greece. In fact, as we saw in Chapter 3, the Spartan leaders were not supposed to play such a role in Greek history.[93]

A further tangible proof of the difficulty of reconciling Spartan values with the task of steering the Greeks against the Persians is shown again in their problematic relationship with money. As we have repeatedly pointed out, the Spartan constitution did not allow the use of money at Sparta; the Spartan way of life was characterised by complete disregard for wealth. Yet money was an indispensable means not only for fighting a war, in that it covered the unavoidable expenses, but also for attacking the enemy through corruption. Agesilaus was perfectly aware that the Great King could pay the demagogues of many Greek cities to foment hostility in the people towards the Spartans (*Ages.* 15.1). Ultimately, he considered money and corruption the causes for his expulsion from Asia (*Ages.* 15.8). This may indirectly signify that Agesilaus' pragmatic, ambiguous, and, to some extent, unscrupulous use of money – which, as we saw earlier in this Chapter, did not fully conform to the Spartan moral code – could have made the Greeks win the war, even if this meant that Agesilaus must betray his cultural identity. Agesilaus, that is, was successful inasmuch as he was an anomalous Spartan leader. Yet, when he was faithful to his city and its values, he was defeated with his own weapons (money and alliances with former adversaries or potential enemies), showing that pure Spartan virtues were insufficient to grant the Greeks victory against their common enemy.

[93] See Plu. *Lyc.* 31.1. Cf. also p. 7.

5.9 – War in Greece and decadence of Sparta

Agesilaus' journey towards Sparta was similar to the tormented return home (νόστος) of an epic hero, in that it was full of accidents and obstacles. In the various legs of the march, Agesilaus' main concern was to establish whether the various populations, whom the Spartans met along the way, were enemies or friends. While in Thrace – with the exception of the Trallians, who demanded a price for the passage – and in Macedon he was greeted as a friend and received help from the local kings, in Thessaly he encountered the opposition of the Larissans and the Pharsalians (*Ages.* 16). Nonetheless, the hardest part was going through Boeotia, which Agesilaus was ordered to invade (*Ages.* 17.1). After camping near Chaeronea, the Spartans, together with the Orchomenians, gave battle against the Thebans and the Argives near Coronea (395 BC). As Plutarch explains, after the first assault the Spartans could have obtained a victory without danger (νίκη ἀκίνδυνος), if they had avoided attacking the Thebans frontally. Agesilaus, however, made a different choice and decided to advance directly upon them. Despite their great effort, the Spartans were not able to succeed; the Thebans managed to withdraw to Mount Helicon and there was no clear winner (*Ages.* 18).

The battle of Coronea had a special historical importance because more troops were deployed there than in any other battle of Greeks against Greeks. As usually happens, Plutarch focuses his attention on Agesilaus' behaviour rather than on the logistic details of the fight. Indeed, as is emphasised in the narration, Agesilaus was very courageous, putting his own life at risk. Similarly, the fifty young Spartiates, who voluntarily joined the army and accompanied Agesilaus on this occasion, bravely tried to protect him, since he was seriously wounded. Just as in numerous other chapters of the Life, here too Plutarch refers to φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία, the traditional Spartan values that Agesilaus and his soldiers displayed in combat. Interestingly, however, Plutarch does not seem to judge Agesilaus'

conduct as positively as that of the Spartiates, since the Spartiates' φιλοτιμία certainly saved Agesilaus from death.[94] Agesilaus' φιλονικία and θυμός (spirit), conversely, made him launch the ill-considered frontal assault on the Thebans (*Ages.* 18.4). As Plutarch comments, this proved to be the wrong decision, considering that towards the end of the battle the Spartans were forced to allow the Thebans through their lines, so as to be able to follow them and hit them from the side: that is to say, the Spartans did "what they did not want to do at the beginning of the struggle" (ὅπερ ἐξ ἀρχῆς οὐκ ἐβούλοντο ποιῆσαι) (*Ages.* 18.7-8). So, once again the results of Agesilaus' φιλονικία were ambivalent.

Moral ambiguity continued to characterise Agesilaus' actions in the following period, during which he stayed at Sparta; in his contradictory conduct, he alternated virtues and vices, noble and questionable decisions. Indeed, Agesilaus became immediately beloved (προσφιλής) and admired (περίβλεπτος) by the citizens because of his way of life (ἀπὸ τοῦ βίου καὶ τῆς διαίτης), for he remained unchanged and unaffected by foreign customs (ἔθη), and respected Spartan habits as much as those Spartans who had never left the Peloponnese. His table, his baths, his attention to his wife, the ornament of his armour, and the furniture of his house: there was no difference in comparison to before he went to Asia (*Ages.* 19.5-6). Agesilaus also began to correct the misbehaviour of other citizens, assuming the role of moral guide of the Spartans, which Lycurgus had played in his time. For instance, seeing that some Spartans had high self-esteem because they bred horses, he tried to demonstrate that victories at races simply depended on wealth and expenditure (πλοῦτος καὶ δαπάνη) rather than virtue (ἀρετή) (*Ages.* 20.1). He also embellished dances and contests, which he always attended full of ambition (φιλοτιμία) and zeal (σπουδή) (*Ages.* 21.7). Conversely, he seemed to ignore completely other cultural manifestations such as tragedies or mimes, which other Spartans admired (*Ages.* 21.8-9).

[94] Plu. *Ages.* 18.5: "their [i.e. of the fifty volunteers] love of honour seemed to be opportune, saving the king" (ὧν εἰς καιρὸν ἔοικεν ἡ φιλοτιμία τῷ βασιλεῖ γενέσθαι καὶ σωτήριος).

In many respects, however, Agesilaus' behaviour transgressed the traditional Spartan code of conduct. For example, he invited Xenophon to send his children to Sparta in order to let them learn to be ruled and to rule (ἄρχεσθαι καὶ ἄρχειν) (*Ages.* 20.2). As we saw at the beginning of the Life, the Spartan ἀγωγή only prepared the young to obey the laws: in this regard, Agesilaus was an anomaly. The offer to Xenophon, then, appears to have been problematic, inasmuch as from Agesilaus' words one can deduce that Xenophon's children would not be raised according to the traditional values of Sparta, but rather by Agesilaus' example. Equally contradictory was Agesilaus' reaction to Lysander's conspiracy, which was discovered after Lysander's death (*Ages.* 20.3-5). First, Agesilaus decided to reveal Lysander's plans so as to destroy posthumously the public image of the traitor; then, at the suggestion of one of the Gerontes, Agesilaus changed his mind and kept silent.

As we saw in numerous other cases, moreover, Agesilaus maintained an ambivalent relationship with his political enemies, whose friendship he often tried to buy by designating them as generals and commanders. After they revealed their inadequacy and arrogance, and were brought to trial, he used to help them, so that they would switch sides, becoming his allies (*Ages.* 20.6). Agesilaus employed an analogous strategy in his relationship with the other Spartan king Agesipolis, who, according to Plutarch, was not very involved in political affairs (*Ages.* 20.7-9). Once again, Agesilaus' conduct towards a young boy (Agesipolis is defined as ἡλικίᾳ παντάπασι μειράκιον) centred on love, a theme that, as we saw earlier, assumed crucial importance in the episodes concerning the sons of Spithridates and Pharnabazus. In their conversations, knowing that Agesipolis was subject to erotic passions (ἔνοχος τοῖς ἐρωτικοῖς), Agesilaus always introduced some discourse about young boys. He also took an interest in Agesipolis' love affairs and helped him with them. In this regard, Plutarch reminds the readers that Spartan homoerotic relationships

were nothing shameful, since they were intended to make the young acquire a sense of reverence (αἰδώς), love of honour (φιλοτιμία), and desire for virtue (ζῆλος ἀρετῆς). Indeed, Plutarch's comment and cross-reference to the *Life of Lycurgus* (18.4) seem to suggest that, formally, Agesilaus' behaviour was not incompatible with one of the most characteristic Spartan institutions. Yet his purpose was eminently political rather than educative, as Plutarch implies by writing that Agesilaus made Agesipolis submissive to his influence (τοῦτον ἐποιεῖτο χειροήθη).

The analysis of Spartan domestic affairs under Agesilaus' rule, then, reveals that after his return to Sparta Agesilaus re-adopted his typically pragmatic approach to government, which conflicted with the 'help the friends, harm the enemies' principle: that is to say, Agesilaus' leadership was consistent during the first year of his reign before leaving Sparta, in his stay in Asia Minor, and during his journey back through Greece. The authentic spirit of the Lycurgan constitution was not fully respected and Agesilaus' moral ambiguity was not resolved.

The consequences of so ambivalent and unclear an attitude could not but have deleterious effects on foreign affairs too. Plutarch argues that Spartan hegemony over Greece had been compromised by major defeats such as those in the naval battle of Cnidus (394 BC) and at the battle of Lechaeum near Corinth (391 BC). Particularly serious was the loss of the thalassocracy – as Plutarch puts it – to Conon and Pharnabazus.[95] Such a difficult condition made the Spartans decide to make peace with the Great King: so, they sent the navarch Antalcidas to negotiate with the satrap of Sardis, Tiribazus (387 BC). Plutarch points out that Agesilaus, on the one hand, opposed the treaty, since because of it the Greek cities of Asia came again under Persian control (*Ages.* 23.1-3). Yet, seeing the possibility of weakening the Thebans by forcing them to grant Boeotia autonomy, he

[95] Cf. Isoc. *Paneg.* 14.119, Xen. *Hell.* 4.8.9-10.

menaced or declared war against all the states that resisted the Peace of Antalcidas (*Ages.* 23.5).

Regarding the Peace of Antalcidas, while Xenophon (*Hell.* 5.1.28-34) and Diodorus Siculus (14.110.2-4) place emphasis on the difficulties of all the Greek states in continuing the war, Plutarch concentrates his attention on Sparta. Contrary to Xenophon (*Hell.* 5.1.36), however, he omits to add that the peace treaty made the Spartans even more powerful, because, despite having lost naval supremacy, they achieved the dominant position of 'guarantors' of the agreements. Agesilaus' hatred of the Thebans, conversely, which conditioned his behaviour in the events following the peace, is a topic common to all the literary sources. As we have repeatedly highlighted, Plutarch's main interest concerned the moral implications of Agesilaus' incoherence. The episode of Phoebidas was emblematic in this sense. Plutarch informs us that the Spartan general Phoebidas violated the terms of the armistice, occupying Cadmeia with the support of the Thebans Archias and Leontidas (*Ages.* 23.11). It is difficult to think that simply from Plutarch's concise narration an uninformed audience could fully understand the reasons for Phoebidas' military intervention at Thebes and its political implications. Plutarch offers more information in the *Life of Pelopidas*, where he explains in greater detail the relationship between Sparta and Thebes, and the complex dynamics between the various Theban factions (*Pel.* 5). In the *Life of Agesilaus*, conversely, Plutarch merely narrates that, instead of sanctioning Phoebidas for his transgression, Agesilaus defended him, justifying so unpopular an act on the grounds that it was useful (χρήσιμος) for Sparta (*Ages.* 23.7). Thus, although in public Agesilaus used to declare that justice was the first of all virtues (τὴν δικαιοσύνην πρωτεύειν τῶν ἀρετῶν) (*Ages.* 23.8), in his actions he was driven by excessive φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία (*Ages.* 23.11).

Agesilaus' unrestrained passions and hostility against the Thebans caused the beginning of a new conflict against Thebes, after Archias and Leontidas were killed (*Ages.* 24.1-4).[96] Paradoxically, then, after fighting in Asia Minor to free the Greeks oppressed by the Persians, Agesilaus and the Spartans defended the faction close to the two polemarchs, who were nominally magistrates but de facto tyrants of Thebes (ἔργῳ μὲν τυράννους, λόγῳ δὲ πολεμάρχους ὄντας) (*Ages.* 24.3).[97] Even more problematic was the case of the Spartan harmost Sphodrias, a man full of courage and ambition (οὐκ ἄτολμος οὐδ᾽ ἀφιλότιμος ἀνήρ), who desired to obtain great fame (*Ages.* 24.5). One can observe that such characteristics made Sphodrias very similar to Agesilaus. As in the case of Agesilaus, love of glory produced negative effects. For Sphodrias tried to seize the Piraeus in order to wrest naval supremacy from the Athenians. This unjust and illegal action, which apparently was suggested to Sphodrias by the Theban Boeotarchs Pelopidas and Melon through deceit, praises, and flatteries, had an unsuccessful conclusion (*Ages.* 24.7-9). The Athenians foiled the attack at the Piraeus and Sphodrias had to retreat to Thespiae.

In this case, too, Agesilaus' involvement did not seem to promote justice nor the public good of Sparta. Rather, just as happened on other occasions, Agesilaus defended his private interests, which were related again to a homoerotic relationship. For the Athenians as much as the Spartans moved formal accusations against Sphodrias, who had to face a trial at Sparta, which he decided not to attend (*Ages.* 24.9). Although Sphodrias was one of Agesilaus' political opponents, Agesilaus gave him his help, so that Sphodrias was acquitted and avoided the death penalty. As Plutarch writes, the real motive for aiding Sphodrias was that Archidamus, Agesilaus' son, was in love with Cleonymus, Sphodrias' son. Thus even if Agesilaus never promised his son that he would be benevolent to or supportive of Sphodrias, every time he talked about the trial he publicly praised Sphodrias, claiming that

[96] The Boeotic War lasted from 378 BC until the peace conference in 371 BC.
[97] Agesilaus had also helped the exiles of Phlius against their tyrants (*Ages.* 24.3).

Sparta needed soldiers like him. In this way, Agesilaus tried to gratify his son (*Ages.* 25.1-10). The private and the public spheres, therefore, collided and their boundaries became indistinguishable.

Since Sphodrias was not punished, the Athenians decided to wage war on Sparta. Interestingly, Plutarch notes that the Sphodrias affair attracted general hostility towards Agesilaus, who seemed to oppose the course of justice, making Sparta an accessory to great crimes against the Greeks (τὴν πόλιν παραίτιον ἀπειργάσθαι παρανομημάτων τηλικούτων εἰς τοὺς Ἕλληνας) (*Ages.* 26.1). The allies of Sparta, too, were offended by Agesilaus, since they believed that the conflict with the Thebans did not occur because of some public charge (δι᾽ οὐδὲν ἔγκλημα δημόσιον), but because of some fit of passion and contentiousness (θυμῷ τινι καὶ φιλονεικίᾳ) on the part of Agesilaus (*Ages.* 26.6). Agesilaus, then, after being the potential saviour of the Greeks and, subsequently, the victim of their conspiracy, appears to have become the common enemy of Greece. His new condition was not very different from that of the Persians, whom he had previously fought. His qualities (θυμός, φιλοτιμία, φιλονικία), which Plutarch presents at the beginning of the Life and discusses in several other passages, were not viewed as virtues, since their effects were negative. One can suppose that Agesilaus did not represent the virtuous leader that the Spartan education system aimed to form. Yet he was criticised for those character traits that the ἀγωγή developed most. Indirectly, just as in the case of the expedition in Asia, this could be considered to confirm that the Spartan rulers and, by implication, Sparta itself were intrinsically unsuitable for assuming the leadership of Greece. In this regard, as we saw in Chapter 4, one should not forget that the moral decay of Sparta started with the conquests of Lysander, that is, with the beginning of Spartan hegemony at the end of the Peloponnesian War. In the course of the fourth century BC, the more acute the moral

decadence of Sparta became, the more unfit for ruling Greece Sparta and its leaders were perceived to be and, from Plutarch's perspective, really were.

This interpretation seems to be supported by the development of the war against Thebes. Agesilaus conducted several successful attacks against Thebes, but at Megara he felt an intense pain in his sound leg, which immediately swelled up because of an inflammation. He was cured by a physician from Syracuse, but the incision made under the ankle left him very weak and forced him to rest for a long period (*Ages.* 27.1-3). His prolonged absence from military combat constituted a serious handicap for the Spartans, as they were repeatedly defeated by land and sea. Particularly important was the battle of Tegyra, where the Thebans overpowered the Spartans for the first time in a pitched battle (*Ages.* 27.4).[98] In his account, Plutarch connects Spartan weakness with the renewed desire of the Greeks for a general peace. Ambassadors from all Greek states gathered at Sparta for a peace conference (371 BC). On this occasion, Epaminondas made his triumphant appearance on the international arena. Plutarch describes him as a man famous for his culture and philosophy (ἀνὴρ ἔνδοξος ἐπὶ παιδείᾳ καὶ φιλοσοφίᾳ) (*Ages.* 27.6). These few words underline a profound distinction compared to Agesilaus, whose reputation was based exclusively on military actions. Epaminondas spoke on behalf of all Greece:

> τὸν μὲν πόλεμον ἀποδεικνύων αὔξοντα τὴν Σπάρτην ἐξ ὧν ἅπαντες οἱ λοιποὶ κακῶς πάσχουσι, τὴν δὲ εἰρήνην ἰσότητι καὶ τῷ δικαίῳ κτᾶσθαι κελεύων· οὕτω γὰρ αὐτὴν διαμενεῖν, ἴσων ἁπάντων γενομένων.
>
> declaring that war increased the power of Sparta in consequence of those things from which all the others were suffering badly, and urging to make peace on terms of equality and justice; for it would endure only if all parties were equal.[99]

The Greeks reacted to Epaminondas' words with extraordinary admiration and attention, something that caused Agesilaus irritation. The quarrel between the two leaders

[98] On the battle of Tegyra, which can be dated to 375 BC, cf. Plu. *Pel.* 16-17.
[99] Plu. *Ages.* 27.7.

focused on whether Sparta and Thebes had the right (δίκαιον καὶ ἴσον) to deprive the other cities of Laconia and Boeotia of their autonomy (*Ages.* 28.1-2): Epaminondas, that is, called into question the unique status of Sparta and the arrogance of the Spartans in imposing arbitrarily on the other Greeks measures that they would not adopt for themselves. Epaminondas, moreover, unmasked the imperialistic nature of Sparta, even if its empire was limited to a small region, proving the inconsistency of Agesilaus, who had pretended to restore the freedom of the Greeks in Asia Minor, while he would not grant the same right to other Greeks in the Peloponnese.

The new conflict between Sparta and Thebes is narrated very concisely (*Ages.* 28.5-8). Once again, Plutarch gives more details – especially with regard to the military operations – in the *Life of Pelopidas*, where the events are presented from the perspective of the Thebans (*Pel.* 20-23). Conversely, it is impossible to establish how the *Life of Epaminondas* – which is now lost, but is explicitly mentioned by Plutarch at *Ages.* 28.6 – could illuminate the information contained in the *Life of Agesilaus*. As already mentioned earlier in this Chapter, we should admit the possibility that readers had already read these two Theban Lives and, therefore, were able to interpret the *Life of Agesilaus* in light of them. Regardless of the familiarity with Plutarch's earlier Lives, however, one can safely assume that the readers had to activate their previous historical knowledge in order to decode Plutarch's brief account at *Ages.* 28. Plutarch mainly concentrates his attention on Agesilaus' irrational desire to take revenge against the Thebans despite the negative omens and the opposition of Prothous, which should have persuaded Agesilaus to use a more cautious approach. As Plutarch comments, the war was made from anger rather than thoughtful calculation (σὺν ὀργῇ μᾶλλον ἢ λογισμῷ) (*Ages.* 28.7). To a certain extent, then, the sudden and unexpected debacle of the Spartans at Leuctra was caused by Agesilaus' arrogant thoughtlessness.

Interestingly, after mentioning the number of the Spartan dead, Plutarch continues the narration by discussing the Spartans' reaction to so stunning a defeat. In particular, Plutarch acknowledges the great virtue (ἀρετή) of the Spartans, who maintained their decorum (διευσχημονοῦντες) in such adverse circumstances (*Ages.* 29.2). The fathers, the relatives, and the friends of the dead were full of pride and joy (φρονήματος μεστοὶ καὶ γήθους); the mothers, too, walked towards one another cheerfully and with love of honour (ἱλαρῶς καὶ φιλοτίμως); the families and the relatives of the survivors, conversely, felt sad and humiliated (*Ages.* 29.5-7): Sparta, that is, responded to the tragic news from Leuctra by remaining faithful to its traditional code of conduct.

Many Spartans, however, remembered the oracle about Agesilaus and the limping kingship, and were filled with a deep pessimism and apprehension about the god (δυσθυμία πολλὴ καὶ πτοία πρὸς τὸ θεῖον) (*Ages.* 30.1). After all, it would not have been difficult for them to connect the beginning of the reversal of Spartan fortune with the inflammation of Agesilaus' sound leg at Megara, which forced him to rest for a long time, during which the Spartan army was often overpowered, as we saw earlier. As Plutarch points out, Agesilaus was considered again a lame and maimed king (χωλὸς καὶ πεπηρωμένος), although – one may notice – his sudden physical infirmity should have made it evident that, by contrast, the congenital deformity did not represent a serious impediment to Agesilaus. Such a delicate phase of Agesilaus' life, nonetheless, was again characterised by remarkable contradictions. In this regard, the Spartans' attitude towards their king was not entirely hostile (*Ages.* 30.2):

> διὰ δὲ τὴν ἄλλην δύναμιν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀρετὴν καὶ δόξαν οὐ μόνον ἐχρῶντο βασιλεῖ καὶ στρατηγῷ τῶν κατὰ πόλεμον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν πολιτικῶν ἀποριῶν ἰατρῷ καὶ διαιτητῇ.
>
> On the other hand, because of his other power, virtue, and glory, they [the Spartans] made use of him not only as king and commander in military matters but also as physician and arbitrator in difficult political controversies.

One may believe that the Spartans, continuing to put trust in Agesilaus, were guilty of committing again the same mistake as in the past. Yet Agesilaus' qualities that Plutarch mentions in his extradiegetic remark, focalising through the Spartans, recall the virtues that Lycurgus advised Spartan rulers to cultivate by following the constitution. In particular, by mentioning that Agesilaus was regarded as a physician of the city, Plutarch seems to use the same metaphor that had been employed for Lycurgus:[100] Agesilaus, that is, appears to have eventually become a true 'Lycurgan' king of Sparta.

The situation of extreme danger, to which Sparta was exposed, required extraordinary measures. For instance, the soldiers who showed cowardice in battle were usually deprived of their civil rights (ἀτιμία), as provided for by the law. In the aftermath of the battle of Leuctra, however, it would have been necessary to inflict so harsh a punishment on too many citizens, while Sparta was in need of many soldiers, something that might even have led to the risk of a revolution (νεωτερισμός) (*Ages.* 30.4-5). Agesilaus, being chosen as lawgiver (νομοθέτης) by the Spartans, gave dispositions to "let the laws sleep for that day, while from that day on the laws would have validity on the remaining matters".[101] Thus without adding to, subtracting from, or changing any law, he saved both the constitution and the dignity of those men. Paradoxically, however, assuming the same role that Lycurgus had in the past, Agesilaus adopted a 'un-Lycurgan' solution.

Analogously, in order to remove the discouragement from the hearts of the young and bring some hope to the citizens, Agesilaus made an incursion into Arcadia. He did not engage in battle with the enemy, however, but only took a small town of the Mantineans and overran their territory – that is, he led his soldiers in a military operation whose purpose was not to win glory or fight bravely, something unusual for the Spartans. Agesilaus had to maintain the same pragmatic and cautious attitude when the Thebans and

[100] Cf. Plu. *Lyc.* 5.3.
[101] Plu. *Ages.* 30.6: φήσας ὅτι τούς νόμους δεῖ σήμερον ἐᾶν καθεύδειν, ἐκ δὲ τῆς σήμερον ἡμέρας κυρίους εἶναι πρὸς τὸ λοιπόν.

their allies entered Laconia by order of Epaminondas. It was a historical event, as Plutarch remarks, since Laconia had not been touched by foreigners after the Dorians occupied it six hundred years earlier (*Ages.* 31.1-3). Despite the territory being set on fire and ravaged, Agesilaus decided not to fight back, but simply deployed hoplites to defend the most central parts of the city, because the enemy numbers were too large. He had to endure the offences of the Thebans, who tried to force him to give battle. It was also excruciating for Agesilaus to see the tumults of old men and women, incapable of accepting the tragic situation that Sparta was facing. Worse for him, however, was to think about his fame (δόξα), since Sparta, which he had started to rule when it was greatest and most powerful, was deprived of its honour (ἀξίωμα) and pride (αὔχημα): Agesilaus, that is, was even forced to resist the impulse to follow his love of honour, the natural quality that had been influencing his decisions during his entire life (*Ages.* 31.5-6).

In the end, Agesilaus' strategy was successful: Epaminondas could not break the resistance of the Spartans, as he would have done fighting in the open field, and abandoned his plan to conquer Sparta (*Ages.* 32.5). Similarly, using the same method and avoiding frontal assaults, Agesilaus thwarted two conspiracies. The first one was organised by two hundred men, who occupied Issorium, a promontory whose control Agesilaus managed to retake after being able to disperse the conspirators with a stratagem (*Ages.* 32.6-9). The second one involved more people and was guided by some Spartiates, who were plotting a revolution (*Ages.* 32.10). In both cases, Agesilaus decided to put to death the men found guilty without proper trial, an unprecedented act against the law that was justified by the growing instability of Sparta (*Ages.* 32.11).

Whether the Thebans decided to leave Laconia after three months because winter was coming and the Arcadians started to disband, as many historians argue, or whether, in addition, the Spartan Phrixus paid the Boeotarchs ten talents for their withdrawal, as

written by Theopompus alone (*Ages.* 31.13-14), Agesilaus was indisputably the saviour of Sparta. As Plutarch explains, the fact that Agesilaus renounced φιλοτιμία and φιλονικία, pursuing policies of safety, was the main reason for his success (*Ages.* 32.2). Such a radical change of behaviour, nonetheless, was not sufficient to restore the greatness of Sparta (*Ages.* 32.3-4):

> οὐ μέντοι τήν γε δύναμιν καὶ τήν δόξαν ἐδυνήθη τῆς πόλεως ἀναλαβεῖν ἐκ τοῦ πταίσματος, ἀλλ᾽ ὥσπερ σώματος ὑγιεινοῦ, λίαν δὲ ἀκριβεῖ καὶ κατησκημένῃ κεχρημένου διαίτῃ παρὰ πάντα τὸν χρόνον, ἁμαρτία μία καὶ ῥοπὴ τήν πᾶσαν ἔκλινεν εὐτυχίαν τῆς πόλεως· οὐκ ἀλόγως. πρὸς γὰρ εἰρήνην καὶ ἀρετὴν καὶ ὁμόνοιαν ἄριστα συντεταγμένῳ πολιτεύματι προσαγαγόντες ἀρχὰς καὶ δυναστείας βιαίους, ὧν οὐδενὸς ἡγεῖτο δεῖσθαι πόλιν εὐδαιμόνως βιωσομένην ὁ Λυκοῦργος, ἐσφάλησαν.
>
> Certainly, he was not able to restore the power and glory of the city after its misfortune, but, just as in the case of a healthy body that is subject all the time to an exceedingly strict and austere regimen, one single failure and crisis made all the good fortune of the city decline. That was not illogical, for the Spartans were overthrown as they introduced into a form of government, best arranged for peace, virtue, and unanimity, sovereignties and violent dominations, none of which Lycurgus believed that a city that would live happily needed.

Plutarch then pauses the narration in order to offer not only his interpretation of Agesilaus' actions to protect Sparta but also his general view on the Spartan decline. He employs again the usual medical simile that occurs in all the Spartan Lives. After presenting the treatment administered by Agesilaus, Plutarch concentrates his attention on the diseased body politic. His diagnosis is not different from that already presented in the *Life of Lycurgus*. The moral decadence of Sparta was caused by the alteration of the nature and purpose of Spartan foreign policy. The Spartan constitution was designed by Lycurgus to make the Spartans live in peace rather than conquer new territories, subjugate people, create a political and military hegemony, or simply exert strong leadership over Greece: the Sparta reorganised by Lycurgus, that is, should not have become the imperialistic superpower into which it was converted by Lysander first and then by Agesilaus. Once the

Spartan rulers altered so crucial an aspect of the constitution, the changes in the Spartan way of life became inevitable too. This should be considered the primary reason for the moral decline of Sparta, which created the preliminary conditions for the military debacle at Leuctra, the one failure and crisis – as mentioned in the passage quoted above – after which Sparta could no longer be the same.

Plutarch, however, adds other important considerations about the Spartan constitution. By comparing it to "an exceedingly strict and austere regimen", Plutarch indirectly expresses a negative evaluation of the Spartan system as it crystallised after Lycurgus' reforms. In particular, the phrase ἀκριβὴς δίαιτα seems to suggest that both the polity and the ἀγωγή were not flexible enough to absorb the political and social transformations that occurred during the fourth century BC. This interpretation can be confirmed by two passages of the *De tuenda sanitate praecepta*, where Plutarch uses the same expression employed in the *Life of Agesilaus* and criticises an excessively strict way of living.[102] In particular, Plutarch claims that such a regimen renders the body unsecured and fearful, and mortifies the self-respect of the soul, for no activity is conducted with readiness and confidence (*De tuend. san.*128 E). Similarly, Plutarch strongly disapproves of the recourse to cold baths after exercising (*De tuend. san.* 131 B-C):

> λουτρῷ δὲ χρῆσθαι γυμνασαμένους ψυχρῷ μὲν ἐπιδεικτικὸν καὶ νεανικὸν μᾶλλον ἢ ὑγιεινόν ἐστιν. ἢν γὰρ δοκεῖ ποιεῖν δυσπάθειαν πρὸς τὰ ἔξω καὶ σκληρότητα τοῦ σώματος, αὕτη μεῖζον ἀπεργάζεται περὶ τὰ ἐντὸς κακόν, ἐνισταμένη τοῖς πόροις καὶ τὰ ὑγρὰ συνάγουσα καὶ πηγνύουσα τὰς ἀναθυμιάσεις ἀεὶ χαλᾶσθαι καὶ διαφορεῖσθαι βουλομένας. ἔτι δ᾽ ἀνάγκη τοὺς ψυχρολουτοῦντας εἰς ἐκείνην αὖθις μεταβαίνειν ἣν φεύγομεν ἀκριβῆ καὶ τεταγμένην ἀποτόμως δίαιταν, ἀεὶ προσέχοντας αὑτοῖς μὴ παραβαίνειν ταύτην, ὡς εὐθὺς ἐξελεγχομένου πικρῶς παντὸς ἁμαρτήματος.
>
> The fact that people make recourse to a cold bath after exercising is ostentatious and juvenile rather than healthy. For the resistance to external influences and the corporeal rigidity, which it seems to produce, causes a worse effect to the internal

[102] Plutarch also employs this phrase at *Alex.* 72.2, *Cat. Mi.* 3.10, *Dio* 37.7, *De cap ex inim. ut.*. 87 D, *Aet. Rom.* 274 D.

> parts of the body by obstructing the pores, bringing together the fluids, and condensing the exhalations, which are always willing to be released and dispersed. Furthermore, those who bathe in cold water necessarily change again into that strict and rigidly ordered way of living that we try to avoid, always paying heed not to transgress it, since every error is immediately brought to the test bitterly.

In both cases, Plutarch's solution consists in choosing a way of living more relaxed, so as to find the right balance and wellness for the body.

The analogies between the excessively rigid regimen described in the *De tuenda sanitate praecepta* and Sparta, autarkic and closed to the outside world, which Plutarch discusses in the *Life of Lycurgus* and in the *Life of Agesilaus*, are striking. Indeed, they may indicate that, in Plutarch's view, the Spartan system, being based on habituation and purely restrictive measures, and lacking a proper philosophical training, was destined to be ruined by external influences, as happened under the command of Lysander and Agesilaus. The comparison between these texts, however, also seems to confirm that the Lycurgan constitution, regardless of the betrayal of its original spirit, had some intrinsic weaknesses and contradictions, which would have exploded in the course of Spartan history. The battle of Leuctra, then, constituted the fatal historical episode in which they were fully revealed.

As we have already pointed out, Sparta could no longer be the same, just as Agesilaus was no longer the same. This became evident with the so-called Tearless Battle, in which the Spartans at the command of Archidamus, Agesilaus' son, defeated the Arcadians, without losing a single soldier. While before Leuctra similar military actions were considered perfectly ordinary, now the Spartans held great celebrations (*Ages.* 33). The truth, however, was very different. The Thebans constructed Messene as the capital of Messenia, whose territory was no longer under Spartan control (369 BC) (*Ages.* 34.1). A few years later, when the Mantineans revolted against Thebes and sought help from the Spartans, a new conflict erupted (*Ages.* 34.3-7). On that occasion, the Thebans came close

to occupying Sparta, but were overrun by the Spartans, who fought with desperation (ἀπόνοια) and boldness (τόλμα).

The situation became more stable after the battle of Mantinea, in which Epaminondas was killed (*Ages.* 35.1-2). The various Greek states were favourable to the idea of establishing a general peace. The only threat to the treaty came from the Spartans, who did not want to accept the presence of the Messenians at the negotiations, as this would have formally established the existence of their state, separate from Sparta. Agesilaus, in particular, was seen as aggressive (βίαιος), violent (ἀτενής), and insatiable of war (πολέμων ἄπληστος) (*Ages.* 35.3-5). Plutarch adds that, on the other hand, Agesilaus lacked the funds necessary to continue the war and was forced to ask for loans and contributions from his friends. Indeed, that was proof that his power – as much as that of Sparta – had diminished in comparison to the time of the expedition in Asia Minor. It would have been more reasonable for him – Plutarch stresses – to put an end to Spartan evils, ceasing to dream of bringing Sparta back to its past glory, since it was impossible to regain Messenia (*Ages.* 35.6).

5.10 – Conclusion

With the *Life of Agesilaus* Plutarch concludes his analysis of the first part of Spartan history. As we have seen, it was the story of a city characterised by many contradictions, which were all dramatically revealed in the period of Agesilaus' reign. In this sense, there is a perfect correspondence between the king and the city: Agesilaus' anomalies were the anomalies of Sparta; his aspirations were the aspirations of Sparta; his fall, then, could not but become also the fall of Sparta. Agesilaus and Sparta, however, are also the emblem of the Greek world, in which virtues and vices, the hope of unity and concord among the Greeks against a common enemy and a reality of internal strife and war, dreams of glory

and nightmares of defeat were inextricably linked. Indeed, the Battle of Leuctra did not change only Sparta, but all the Greeks. A new period when foreign states would conquer Greece was coming. Plutarch's Greek and Roman readers knew that well.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined the possibility of considering the *Parallel Lives* a biographical historical work, applying to them the concept of macrotext and scrutinising their linkage based on the complementarity of the Lives, especially those in which characters and episodes are repeated and recall one another. In order to verify this hypothesis, this study has explored Plutarch's idea of history as it emerges from the *De sera numinis vindicta*, a key text in which Plutarch elaborates some historiographical principles that are applied in the *Parallel Lives*. In particular, Plutarch appears to suggest a difference between pragmatic history and history of lives and cities, which complement one another. Plutarch, however, expresses a clear preference for the latter. The model of the macrotext has then been applied to the analysis of three Spartan lives – Lycurgus, Lysander, and Agesilaus – that are closely interconnected. In these biographies, then, Plutarch shows a particular interest not only for the protagonists but also for the cultural identity and the political model of Sparta, from their formation until their failure after the Battle of Leuctra.

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