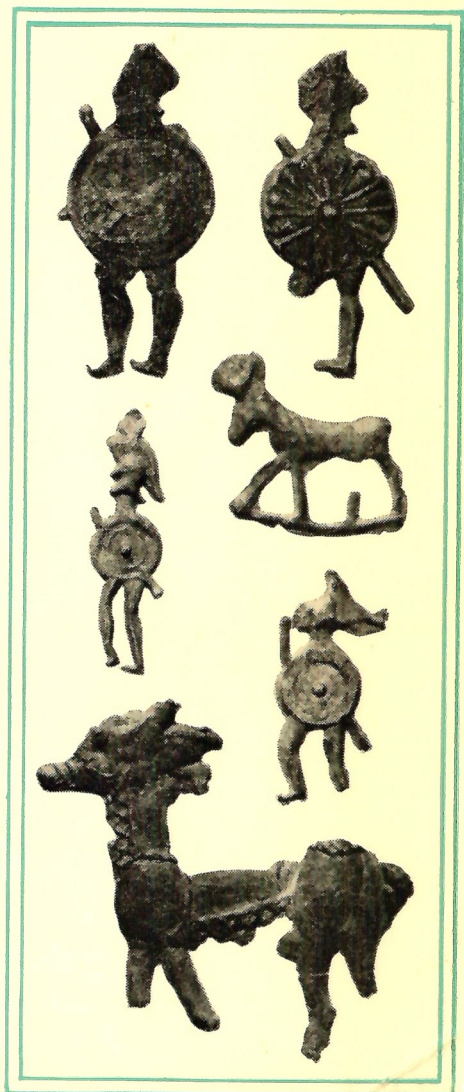


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A History of Sparta 950-192 BC



EXCURSUS I

THE LYKOURGAN REFORMS

Classical Sparta was renowned for the skill and courage of her army and for the stability and excellence of her constitution. Both, it was thought, she owed to the genius of one man, Lykourgos, who, far back in her history, had created all those institutions which made Sparta and the Spartans what they were. There was a large element of myth in this simple picture: Lykourgos adapted as much as he created and much of what he produced had been altered or even superseded long before fifth- or fourth-century scholars began to study their contemporary 'Lykourgan' Sparta; Lykourgos himself is a shadowy, possibly even a mythical figure—those same scholars found less evidence for his life than for his works; and the antiquity of his system has been grossly exaggerated. And yet the picture has substantial elements of truth in it: at some stage the Spartan state was drastically overhauled; this overhaul did come as early as if not earlier than similar changes elsewhere and Sparta for the most part did avoid those upheavals which later destroyed the work of other early constitution-mongers; and in a world where individual law-givers abounded but revolution by committee is unknown the chances are that Sparta too owed her new look to a single hand.

But the attempt to separate truth from myth leaves such a wide area of doubt and the dating of the changes is so uncertain that it would be misleading to discuss them in the course of a narrative history. This excursus is therefore designed to set out the problems as fairly as I can, to show where the narrative of the following chapters can be justified

and to indicate how it would have to be altered if we gave different answers.

(A) THE NATURE OF THE REFORMS

In a chapter of his *Life of Lykourgos* which probably derives from Aristotle, Plutarch quotes 'an oracle which the Spartans call a *rhetra* (an enactment)'. The language of the text which follows has poetic, even oracular, touches; on the other hand its provisions were undoubtedly observed in the later Spartan constitution. So, we suppose, a law based on an oracle or, as I should prefer, an oracle which was acted on; either way, a vital part of the Lykourgan legislation and by far the most authoritative evidence for it.

Its text, translated with, I hope, a minimum of prejudice and dogma, is as follows:

- I (a) When a sanctuary of Zeus Sullanios and Athena Sullania has been established,
- (b) the people divided into tribes and *obai*
- (c) and thirty men, including the kings, appointed as a *Gerousia* [Senate].
- II The Apellai [a feast of Apollo] shall be celebrated from time to time between Babyka and Knakion.
- III Thus questions shall be introduced and withdrawals made.
- IV To the assembly of the citizens shall also be given the final authority.
- V [according to Plutarch a later amendment] If the people speaks crookedly, the elders [*sc.* the *Gerousia*] and the kings shall be setters-aside.

In the Greek the verbs (participles in Clause I, infinitives elsewhere) are active in form but no subject is stated—a feature of early Greek documentary style best rendered in English by using passives so that each verb can be left to take its own perhaps quite separate subject from the context, readily obvious to Spartans if not to us.

- I (a) Although the epithets of Zeus and Athena, if properly transmitted, are not otherwise known, the attempt to guarantee the

approval of heaven for the new order is common Greek practice and need not delay us. *BA dx 'Hpoδ. 3. 142. 2*

I (b) Here there are two problems, what were the tribes and *obai* and how were they related? The tribes were almost certainly the original Dorian three, the Hylleis, Pamphyloi and Dymanes; the word *oba*, whatever its origin, meant in practice those 'villages' which, as Thucydides said, made up the Spartan state. Four of these, Limnai, Konnooura, Pitana and Mesoa, were enclosed by the Hellenistic city-wall, and with a fifth whose members were called *Neopolitai* ('new-citizens'—no doubt a later creation) these were probably all that were left to the truncated Sparta of the Roman occupation, all therefore that were likely to earn a mention in what is the main body of our evidence for Sparta's internal structure, inscriptions of the Roman period. But one random stone from Amyklai shows that it too had once had obal status, and the garbled text of another (the stone itself is lost) seems to name one more, the Arkaloi or Argaloi. Other names could be guessed from chance references to mythical figures who might have been eponymous obal heroes or to places around Sparta which might have been *obai* and there are traces on the ground of three or four substantial villages within a mile or two of the city, villages too close to have had the independent life of a perioikic community, which might therefore have been obal centres. But all these are guesses. The original number of the *obai* cannot be recovered. It was not less than five (the central four with Amyklai), probably not less than six (adding the Arkaloi), and may well have been more.

The figure five did figure in some areas of Spartan organisation—most strikingly the chief magistrates, the ephors, were five in number and a fragment of Aristotle's *Constitution* may have asserted that the Spartan army at some stage fought in five *lochoi* (companies)—and this has led many scholars to accept the smallest figure.

But although the Spartan army was indeed based on the *obai* after the reforms and the word *lochos* is once used of an obal contingent (Herodotos mentions a *lochos* of Pitana at Plataia in 479), there were drastic changes before Aristotle's day and from one brief sentence out of context there is no way of telling either to what period Aristotle referred his *lochoi* or whether he was writing of an army made up of five units or of five particular units in a larger force. Moreover he names his

lochoi and only one of them bears any resemblance to those of the five certain *obai*. As for the ephors, in Sparta's colony, Thera, and Thera's colony, Kyrene, their number for long was three, matching the three Dorian tribes, but this might indicate either a correlation with the main social unit at any time, i.e. that in Sparta five ephors implied five units, five *obai*, or a correlation with the three Dorian tribes, i.e. that in origin there were three ephors in Sparta whose number was raised at some later date for some special reason, for example at the unknown moment when it was ruled that two ephors should always accompany the king on campaign.

There is besides one positive argument against the theory of five *obai*. The Spartan citizen body numbered some 9,000 men, nearly 2,000 for each of five *obai*, with a minimum of slaves and family, a population of not less than 10,000 per *oba*. But the total area inside the city wall was roughly half a mile square and if we allow for the Akropolis and the Agora, for public buildings and for the open space needed to give each of the four urban units its 'village' look, 100,000 square yards would seem to be a fair figure for each, for its own temples, public places and its population. Ten square yards per soul is not a very generous allowance. Greeks did not live in tenements.

The next question is the relationship of tribe and *oba*. The latter had existed before the reform; for all we know it may even have had some formal recognition as part of the state organisation. But whereas the primitive Spartan army had fought in three tribal units (this is asserted by Tyrtaios) her later army was drawn up by *obai*. Lykourgos then must either have recognised the *obai* for the first time or have given them a far greater prominence than they had before. To do so he must either have accepted two independent classifications of the citizen body, one by birth, the other by residence, or he must somehow have integrated the two.

Pointing to an apparent parallel in Attika where the old Ionian tribes were left intact when new local tribes were created in 508, many have opted for two registers. But this is unlikely. In Attika the old tribes survived as religious associations, they played no part in public life; here, mentioned in an organisational document alongside the all-important *obai*, they must mean something more than a sentimental reverence for a tribal past. But, if so, the double classification is quite

unparalleled elsewhere in Greece and the 'something more' which they represented defies speculation.

Integration then. But how? An *oba* could not be a subdivision of a tribe unless the whole population of, say, Pitana was prepared to be rechristened, say, Dymanes overnight, a drastic and one would think unwelcome move (sentiment does count for something). Nor with three tribes and at least five *obai* could a tribe be a subdivision of an *oba*. Somehow the classifications must cut across each other and when we remember the physical pattern of early Dorian settlement and the peculiarities of Dorian society the method that must have been used is easily seen.

Even after the conquest of Messenia the Spartan lived in his village, his *oba*, not on his estates; the early family or 'phratry' in Pitana would tend to remain a family or 'phratry' in Pitana, its stability further reinforced by those communal institutions of primitive Dorians for which the phratry acted as a focus (below p. 51 ff.). But each phratry in turn belonged as a unit to one of the three tribes, and, given a mixed bag of settlers for each village at the start, chances are that one or more 'phratries' of Hylleis, Pamphyloi and Dymanes would be found in every village. To ignore these existing units in a reorganisation of the army would be pointless; simply to reallocate them to new local regiments would make excellent sense. Why should a phratry of Dymanes in Amyklai march several miles to train with other Dymanes in Pitana when it could so easily cross the road and train with Hylleis and Pamphyloi in its own Amyklai? A Spartan already belonged to a group which had both tribal and local affiliations. Why waste the material that lay to hand when shifting the emphasis from one to the other?

Some readjustment would no doubt be necessary but in principle there could have been three tribal units inside each *oba*. There is some slender evidence that there were. In a very fragmentary commentary on the poet Alkman, who, I shall argue, wrote after the reform, the words Pitana and Dymainai (feminine of Dymanes) occur in the same context, as if, for example, a chorus of the Dymainai of Pitana had been mentioned by the poet, and elsewhere the commentator seems to assert that there existed something called a *patra* of Dymanes—and *patra* is a word closely akin to phratry (though usually applied to a smaller unit). More explicitly, a Hellenistic scholar, Demetrios of

Skepsis, described the organisation of the Karneian games at Sparta as 'a reflection of the military training system', a system which we should expect after the reforms as it was still in Roman times to be based on the *oba*. In this 'reflection', Demetrios says, each major unit (each *oba*?) was made up of three 'phratries' (one for each of the Dorian tribes?) and there were nine major units in all (nine *obai*?—a plausible number).

My hypothesis then is this—nine local *obai* so constructed from twenty-seven tribal phratries that the Spartan in his assembly could stand, as the *rhētra* seems to imply he stood, both with his fellow tribesmen and with his fellow obesman, to his left and his right the other Hylleis, in front and behind the other Amyklaians. According to later tradition Lykourgos created a citizen body of 9,000 men (an active army, therefore, of something over 6,000) and since Herodotos gives 8,000 for the citizen population in 480 the tradition may well be correct—1,000 men per *oba* (about 700 for its regiment), 330 men per phratry (230 for its company).

But other elements too, social and military, would have to be fitted into any final picture, the *lochos*, the *mora* and three military institutions ascribed by Herodotos to Lykourgos—the *enomotia*, the *triakas* and the *sussition*. The *mora*, the *lochos* and the *enomotia* all existed in the reorganised army of the late fifth century (below p. 132 ff.), with paper strengths of 640, of 320 and of forty respectively, the *enomotia* being made up of one member from each of the forty year-classes eligible for military service. For the earlier army the *mora* is not attested at all but may none the less have existed, the *enomotia* is mentioned only by Herodotos and the same author writes of a *lochos* based on the *oba* of Pitana at Plataia in 479. Thucydides on the other hand denies the existence of such a unit. The Herodotean *Triakas*, a word which could mean thirty men, thirty families, or a thirtieth of something, is not otherwise attested for Sparta, but as a social unit it occurs in Kos where it numbered something between 100 and 500 men.

Finally the *sussitia*, the famous common-messes at which all Spartans had to eat. A social institution of course, but also, as Herodotos says, a part of the military system and as such surely each *sussition* must have been the basis of one military unit. But although the habits of a *sussition* are well enough attested (below p. 52 ff.) its size is not. According to Plutarch it had a mere fifteen members but when Agis IV set out to recreate the 'Lykourgan' system in the third century B.C. he

proposed *sussitia* of an average of 300. The former figure is impossibly small, the latter surprisingly but not outrageously large and, since the similar messes of Dorian Krete were common to a whole phratry, I am inclined to think that the same may have been true of Sparta; on my hypothesis of a phratry's size, it seems that on this point Agis had not lost touch with the past.

If we can accept that a *sussition* was the mess of such a phratry; if further we can explain the quarrel between Herodotos and Thucydides about the *lochos* of Pitana as a misunderstanding by supposing that Herodotos meant not the one and only *lochos* but 'the *lochos* of which I am speaking, in fact one of three *lochoi* of Pitana', we get the equation: phratry=*sussition* (when eating)=*lochos* (when fighting), and, without violating any of the evidence, could offer the following table:

SOCIAL UNIT	STRENGTH	MILITARY UNIT	STRENGTH
The <i>damos</i> (the people)	9,000	the <i>stratos</i> (the army)	6,500
<i>Oba</i>	1,000	? <i>mora</i>	720
Phratry (? <i>patra</i>)			
= <i>sussition</i>	330	<i>lochos</i>	240
? <i>triakas</i> (one thirtieth of			
a tribe of 3,000)	110	? <i>triakas</i>	80
?	55	<i>enomotia</i>	40

But this is intended only to illustrate the sort of structure we may imagine; it must not be taken as any more than the guess that it is.

I (c) No foundation of the *Gerousia* is in question. There must always have been a Royal Council of a sort in Sparta; at most it is to be reorganised, at least it is to have its number fixed by rule—thirty including the two kings. There was a tradition that Lykourgos chose the first members himself but later, if not in fact from the start, there was election, limited to candidates over sixty years of age from a prescribed group of aristocratic families, election by a method which seemed to Aristotle childish and to us either ludicrous or crooked (a hidden panel of judges tried to estimate the volume of applause given to each contestant by the assembly). The senator, once chosen, served for life and was not responsible for his acts to any outside authority. Given this irresponsibility, the prestige of the individual members and the accumulated prestige of the institution, the authority of this body—like

that of any similar aristocratic council elsewhere, the Roman Senate, for example—was enormous, quite apart from any specific powers it may have had. But even its specific powers were wide enough. Judicially it seems to have controlled all the more important of what we should call criminal cases; politically, as the rest of the *rhetra* will show, it controlled virtually everything.

II Thus a regular popular assembly is guaranteed, the most striking provision of the whole document. The frequency of its meetings will depend on the frequency of the *Apellai* which is unknown, perhaps once a month with one more important celebration annually in the month which carried Apollo's name, *Apellaios*, the occasion for elections and the like. Similarly the place of assembly escapes us but Spartans would not have needed Aristotle's unhelpful comment that Babyka was a bridge and Knakion a river.

III In the standard constitution of the developed Greek state there was a sovereign assembly, whether oligarchically or democratically constituted; there was also, invariably, a smaller body, again chosen in a variety of ways, which acted partly as an executive, partly as an independent administrator in matters too small for the assembly's attention, and partly as what the Greeks called a 'probouleutic' body for the assembly, i.e. as a forum for the preparation of an agenda, for preliminary discussion of the issues, often for the formulation of positive proposals to be put to the larger body. In Sparta these functions belonged to the *Gerousia* which must therefore be understood as the agent in the first part of this clause. 'Subjects shall be introduced to the assembly by the *Gerousia*.' But what can be meant by 'withdrawals shall be made'?

The verb used can mean either 'stand aside' or 'set aside' and from the same root comes the noun 'setters-aside' in the amendment (clause V). The two processes must then be closely related if not identical, but if identical the *Gerousia* cannot be the understood subject in clause III since it is the stated subject in clause V and in that case the amendment would not amend. Either the subject or the process implied must change.

This rules out several popular translations, for example, 'The *Gerousia* shall introduce proposals and *adjourn proceedings* [i.e. set the

assembly aside] . . . the *Gerousia* shall ^{διαχωρησάτω} *adjourn proceedings*. For if what looks like an identical right of adjournment was in fact different the difference should be made clear in the Greek. Other translations avoid this objection; for example, 'Proposals shall be introduced (by the *Gerousia*) and decisions reached (by the people who *stand aside* from a question because they have settled it) . . . the *Gerousia* shall reach a decision (without the people)'. But none of these is entirely satisfactory. In the example quoted the sense is admirable but it gives a meaning to the verb ('reach a decision') which is unparalleled and a long way from the basic 'stand (or set) aside'.

Recorded procedure at two later meetings of the Spartan assembly, however, point the way to a different interpretation. In these, one just after the Persian Wars, the other in the third century, the *Gerousia* seems to meet twice, once before, once after the assembly, and to formulate its decision in the light of (in neither case in accordance with) the assembly's wishes. Its decision reached, in one case the assembly meets again to ratify it, in the other it is not consulted. Could these second meetings of the *Gerousia* be the 'withdrawals' of the *rhētra*? 'Questions [rather than proposals] shall be introduced by the *Gerousia* and after discussion the *Gerousia* shall *stand aside* to reconsider the question in the light of the discussion and subsequently, if it sees fit, submit a proposal to a reconvened assembly for ratification'. . . but if the assembly speaks crookedly the *Gerousia* shall *set it aside* and reach a decision on its own.' The four stages here posited, introduction of an issue, discussion, formulation, decision, are of course implicit in any legislative process, even if in practice the first and third are often combined and, when they are not, the formulation is usually left to emerge in the course of the discussion. The assumption that they were originally distinct at Sparta is not a difficult one.

IV This clause might well have settled the problem, had its text been sound. As it is, the first few words are garbled nonsense and some surgery is needed. Most modern scholars have agreed that two rights are being given to the citizen body, the right of meeting (and/or of speaking) and of decision. But there are difficulties. The right to meet is already explicit in clauses II and III, perhaps the right of discussion as well, and the document is not on the whole repetitious. Besides Aristotle in the *Politics* denies that the Spartan assembly could discuss a

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1273a 9-13. 2nd ed. 32. Wade-Gery, Essays

proposal (N.B. a proposal) put to it by the *Gerousia*, they could but listen and vote. Both difficulties can be avoided by following up my suggestion for clause III with a slightly different cure to the corruption of clause IV. 'To the assembly of the citizen-body shall also be given the final decision' i.e. after the withdrawal the *Gerousia* shall announce a proposal to the assembly and take a vote. At this second meeting there is to be no discussion.

V The ban on discussion, to be more precise the ban on discussion which might lead to an alteration of the proposal rather than simple rejection, could be the result of this clause. 'If the people speaks crookedly . . .', literally 'if it utters a crooked *rhētra* . . .'. 'Crooked' is often understood to mean simply 'wrong in the eyes of the *Gerousia*'. In other words if the *Gerousia* does not like the popular decision it ignores it. But politically meek though the Spartans were, they cannot have been as meek as this, and 'crooked' is much better taken as 'distorted', by amendment or counter-proposal from the floor—I should like to add, after the *Gerousia* has presented a formal motion.

The legislative process which clause V completes may well have been modified in later practice but no further legislation is recorded. The behaviour of any later assembly, and any other evidence there may be, should be explicable in terms of the *rhētra*'s rules. As we have seen two such assemblies are, others do not conflict; other evidence is limited to Plutarch's brief and incomplete commentary on the text which the above interpretation follows closely, and to the passage of Aristotle's *Politics* already cited.

There, as well as denying the assembly any right of counter-proposal, Aristotle implies that it could not even challenge the agenda initially prepared by the *Gerousia* if the *Gerousia* itself was unanimous, and altogether paints a much more docile gathering than the assembly of the *rhētra* or of later fact would seem to be. But with both of these bars to popular freedom everything would depend on the spirit in which they were interpreted—armed with them, unscrupulous chairmanship could easily turn the assembly into a farcical nonentity; but how unscrupulous was the *Gerousia*? On the other hand, while it retained the right of discussion at the earlier stage (which Aristotle omits but certainly existed), an excited and determined assembly could just as easily make its opinion felt; but how often was the assembly

excited? The surviving evidence is for moments of crisis, of excitement; Aristotle's evidence, presumably, included much of the day-to-day routine where even discussion may have been scarcely noticeable. We simply cannot grasp the real atmosphere of later political life under the *rhetra*'s rules.

For the time of its formulation things are clearer. There would always have been an assembly at Sparta, an assembly not unlike the gathering of the Greek army before Troy as Homer describes it in the *Iliad*, summoned to hear the sometimes far from united views of its princes, able perhaps to influence those princes by its reactions. The assembly envisaged by the men who framed the *rhetra* will have been of much the same type with two vital differences. Its meetings were to be regular and, after the *Gerousia* had reached a decision in the light of the 'debate', this decision had to be announced to and approved by the same assembly. But we may suppose, as Plutarch following Aristotle does, that the assembly proved more enterprising than had been expected, that either in the preliminary discussion or in the final vote it managed on occasions to thwart its princes' views, to make the enactments 'crooked'. And so a right, the right of counter-proposal, which had not been explicitly denied in the terms of the *rhetra* (because it had not been imagined) was formally withdrawn.

The *rhetra* is a constitutional document, incidentally relevant to the military organisation. For the rest of Lykourgos' work we have to turn to more detailed but less reliable evidence, the mass of tradition which hung around the reformer's name and of which Plutarch's *Life* probably gives a fair sample. It was claimed, for example, that Lykourgos banned the use of coined money, remarkable prescience in a statesman who at the latest of the many dates proposed for him lived half a century before any Spartan would have dreamed of coinage. Other 'Lykourgan' prescriptions are no less suspicious but less easy to check—did he forbid the use of any tools but an axe and a saw in the building of a house?—and common sense is usually the only guide to what Lykourgos himself is likely to have done in creating the three great Spartan characteristics of which tradition saw him as the deliberate author—equality among Spartans, military fitness and efficiency, and austerity.

The citizens of Sparta were known as *Homoioi*—'Equals', a word which clearly implies an earlier state of inequality and a deliberate act

of creation. Two possible areas of inequality suggest themselves and two appropriate acts are recorded; the *rhetra* by implication guarantees equal political rights as members of the assembly; and secondly the tradition unanimously ascribed to Lykourgos the introduction of equal allotments of land (*kleroi*) to all citizens. Much about this land allotment is obscure but the principal feature of later practice, the official grant of a *kleros*, Plutarch says by the elders of the phratry to a child at birth, to be held inalienably for life, is not likely to be the result of random development—for one thing it would require the setting aside of something like a quarter of a million acres of public land. Such things smack of revolution and Lykourgos is by far the most likely revolutionary.

But in both these respects the equality was unreal. Only a few were even eligible for the *Gerousia*; everyone had his public *kleros* but there was also private land in Sparta where private enterprise produced its usual consequences—there may have been no paupers among the *Homoioi* but there were some wealthy men, some very wealthy. 'Equality' therefore is an odd word to use when in fact it means no more than 'not falling below a certain minimum in two respects' and we must look for a wider area and a more genuine content. There is no need to look far. Lykourgos vastly enlarged, if he did not create, for Spartans the idea of being a citizen and an essential element in this idea was the equality of all citizens, not as human beings but as citizens. As a citizen the Spartan had an equal *kleros* from which he supported what was in many respects a standard way of life, he had an equal standing in the eyes of the law, an equal claim to any right the state might choose to give; in return an equal duty to submit to the laws and to serve the state as it might require. In this context the private fortune of a few is irrelevant and against this wider background of political equality even the public political privilege of a few aristocrats would seem unimportant.

By far the most important duty imposed by the state was submission to Lykourgos' second great invention, the *agoge* or system of military training. The baby whom the elders of the phratry rejected at birth was abandoned to die; some might think him lucky, for after six years with his mother, the child who had been accepted was taken from home and enrolled in a group of his contemporaries under the leadership of an older boy. Details of the organisation are even harder to un-

ravel than those of the army but are not very important. What we know for sure is that with his group the boy lived for the next fourteen years as he worked his way up through the increasingly brutal and brutalising training schedules which passed for education among the Spartans. Music and dancing he would learn, for both had their military uses, but reading and writing, as Plutarch remarks, 'only because they were unavoidable'. For the rest everything was designed to produce toughness, endurance and discipline, and all these of a kind which even the least sensitive champion of the English public school would hesitate to defend as likely to 'make a man of' the victim.

So schooled, at the age of twenty or thereabouts, the young man graduated to another class, that of the so-called *eirenes*, in which he remained for a part, perhaps even the whole of, his twenties, not yet a full citizen but liable for military service and for the time being occupied in doing to others as he had been done by, acting as leader of a younger group, wielding the whips rather than feeling them, and, a nice touch, allotted to one of two large teams to encourage rivalry in bravery, such rivalry that 'members of each team fall to fighting each other whenever they meet'.

At the age of thirty the Spartan was admitted to the assembly. Whether he had already received the other mark of manhood, admission to a *sussition*, either on becoming an *eiren* or on ceasing to be one, is unknown. Equally uncertain are the mechanics of admission. According to Plutarch the existing members had a right of veto on the candidate and, if each phratry had its own single *sussition*, the rejected candidate could not simply turn away and apply elsewhere—he had only one chance. On the other hand, if *kleroi* were in fact allotted at birth by the phratry authorities the potential 'Equals' were already marked out when they reached manhood, and, given that the number of *kleroi* roughly matched the desired number of 'Equals', there could be no great wastage at this stage.

At any rate, this was the last formal test the Spartan had to pass. Beyond it lay freedom, freedom to marry, to lead something like a normal life. His duties were light—he had to dine with his fellows, to train with them and to fight with them; and from his *kleros* he had to provide the stipulated contribution to maintain the mess. But it is easy to underestimate the effect even of this amount of communal living in a society where there was no other focus for a man's interests. The

Spartan did not work—he trained, with his *sussittoi*, he fought, with his *sussittoi*, or he was idle, again for the most part one would imagine with his *sussittoi*.

The Spartans boasted that they were the only soldiers in Greece who, when their line was broken, could reform and fight just as well at the side of a stranger. But this is not as one might think a mark of adaptability, far from it. It merely shows that as the individual was submerged in the little world of the *sussition*, so the *sussition* was forced into the same pattern as all other *sussitia*, identical components in a rigid military machine. As Aristotle shrewdly judged:

It is the standards of civilised men not of beasts that must be kept in mind, for it is good men not beasts who are capable of real courage. Those like the Spartans who concentrate on the one and ignore the other in their education turn men into machines and in devoting themselves to one single aspect of a city's life, end up by making them inferior even in that.

But how much of all this did Lykourgos intend? The rigid uniformity must have been imposed at some time by the state; a state magistrate, the *paidonomos*, was appointed to oversee the *agoge*, state festivals saw the performance of some of the nastier games of endurance, the *sussitia* were part of a social and military system which the state had created. All this and more can be given to Lykourgos. But he cannot have invented the institutions out of which the system was built up.

A similar *agoge* was found in Dorian Krete; so too were *sussitia* (though of a looser and more civilised kind), and, in spite of the tradition that Lykourgos made use of Kretan models, it is far more likely that both Spartan and Kretan customs were inherited from their common tribal past than that one borrowed an alien régime from the other. Indeed most Greek states preserved some vestiges of comparable habits in the easy-going but still ritually and practically important training that they gave to their young men between the ages of eighteen and twenty, while almost every aspect of the full Spartan practice can be paralleled among backward warrior tribes today. The age-groups, the communal life, the initiation ceremonies, all these had been handed down through generations as have similar institutions among the Masai in Kenya, the Zulus or the Red Indians. They were not the

once for all invention of a single legislator in a comparatively civilised society.

It was Sparta's misfortune that they were formalised at a time when military efficiency was the only concern of a state education; it was Sparta's (but not Lykourgos') fault that they were then maintained, more or less unchanged, when other Greeks were discovering that there were other virtues besides the military. Aristotle was right to point out that the Spartan of his day had lost even his physical superiority, that real courage belonged to civilised men not beasts, but he was not wholly fair to Lykourgos when he concluded, 'We must judge Spartan education by the present not the past.' It was devised for a Lykourgan past, not an Aristotelian present.

Much the same is true of the third Spartan characteristic, austerity. The tradition is full of moralising stories—the ban on coinage, the simplicity of domestic architecture are only two. The Spartan youth was allowed only one cloak a year, he slept on a bed of rushes torn by his own hands from the river bank, he had to steal his food and stole it from a *sussition* where the greatest luxury was black broth—and so on. Much of this must be true and some of it must have been intended from the start, but much of it is no more than the survival of what was normal when the rules were made into a time when the good sense and the economic development of the rest of Greece were turning Greek society at large into one of the most open and flexible that has ever been known. Lykourgos himself may have worn rough clothes and washed in cold water but he would not have scorned a hot bath or a soft Milesian cloak had he known them.

Lykourgos, then, took what he found and, partly by accident, partly by design, made a system of it. He found 9,000 men who would have called themselves Spartans and he made them citizens; he found Kings, a *Gerousia* and a *demos* and he turned them into a constitutional government; he found tribes, *obai*, an *agoge* and *sussitia* and out of them made an army and a fixed way of life; he found no coins, no cakes and no Milesian cloaks, so he did not bargain for them.

This is not to say that he did not innovate. Haphazard growths do not fall into a formal place without some surgery, even if surgery is unwanted. It may be wanted and institutions can be drastically reshaped without leaving any trace on a tradition as incomplete as ours. But whatever changes, whatever new emphasis Lykourgos introduced,

there is no doubt that the greatest innovation of all was the mere fact of definition, of laying down a set of rules for the first time in Sparta's history, perhaps for the first time in Greece.

(B) THE DATE OF THE REFORMS

Just how great the innovation was depends on the answer to one of the most debated problems in Greek history—the date of Lykourgos.

Greeks argued for absolute dates which in our terms work out at 1100, 1000, 885, about 810, or 776. Some modern scholars have been prepared to accept the lowest of these, others cannot imagine a defined constitution so early and on various grounds have found a plausible context around 600, others more recently have argued for a compromise around 675. What follows is only the briefest sketch of the main arguments involved.

To reject the tradition is a serious step for it is less confused than it appears. Apart from Herodotos who associated Lykourgos with King Leobotes (for him c. 1000 B.C.) and the Sicilian Timaios who lost heart and postulated two Lykourgoi, almost all respectable Greek historians were trying in their different ways (above p. 19 ff.) to say that Lykourgos was a contemporary of King Charillos who reigned about 776. If a *rhētra*-type constitution is conceivable in 776 we have no right to disbelieve them.

But I do not think that it is conceivable. Certainly, on my story, there was no Spartan *demos* of 9,000 to agitate for recognition nor was there land available to satisfy them before the conquest of Laconia and perhaps Messenia as well. Certainly if the *rhētra* was a written document, it did not pre-date the rediscovery of writing in Greece c. 750. Certainly if the Delphic oracle had any hand in blessing the new order, there was no new order before the oracle began to function seriously c. 750, probably not before it won international recognition c. 725.

And there are greater difficulties. Constitutional definition came to Athens in 594, to some other states perhaps half a century sooner. Could Sparta have been more than a century earlier still? As a result of the definition the Spartan *demos* won a kind of recognition which is startling at any time before 600 and such privileges are not usually won without a fight. Either, then, the Spartan *demos* was strong enough to fight and win, or some powerful Spartans were prepared for their own

ends to encourage a *demos* which already seemed a useful ally to fight and win. In either case, where did the *demos* get its strength?

The survival of primitive communal customs might maintain a bond between ordinary Spartans which could make them more class-conscious than their fellows elsewhere; their political position too as an invading élite (for they may have thought of themselves as such) might encourage a desire for homogeneity inside the élite. But these are only arguments for setting the Spartan revolution rather earlier than those of the rest of Greece, not for raising it by more than a century. In other cities the expansion of trade and manufacture during the eighth century produced the decisive change in the basic structure of society, the economic revolution which is needed to explain the political revolutions of the seventh, the earliest of them not long before the middle of the century. The annexation of Messenia doubled Sparta's wealth at one stroke and might therefore have produced a more sudden development, earlier political consequences. But there was no comparable change in the ninth century which could produce comparable conditions in the early eighth. Then too there was political trouble, power was shifting from kings to aristocracies, but even if tensions in the higher levels of society did much to create the Spartan crisis, as they did (below p. 63) the *demos* is involved as well and a *demos* which is discontented enough to make demands, strong enough to ask for and be given recognition, is certainly unexplained and, I think, inexplicable before about 700 B.C.

Regrettably, then, the association of Lykourgos with Charillos must be abandoned, and 700 becomes the upper limit. The lower is given by a fragment of Tyrtaios which seems to paraphrase the Lykourgan *rhetra*. But when did Tyrtaios write the poem? He fought in the second Messenian War but various exact dates that are given for that war are all chronographers' calculations based on Tyrtaios' own assertion that it came two generations after the first, an assertion which must leave it floating fairly freely around the middle, preferably just before the middle of the century. A man who was fairly young in about 650 could still have been writing even as late as 600. In another fragment Tyrtaios mentions an army brigaded in its three Dorian tribes, i.e. the pre-obal army, this in a poem which probably deals with the second war. But in the vital line the verb is missing. Earlier editors restored 'We shall go into battle in tribal formation' and argued, therefore, that

the changes must have followed the war. But we may just as well write 'They, *sc.* our fathers, used to go into battle . . .' and reverse the order. In yet another poem, Aristotle says, Tyrtaios spoke of political trouble in Sparta 'after the Messenian War', but did Aristotle mean the first or second war? Again Herodotos, although dating Lykourgos about 1000 B.C., seems to make his work the direct cause of Sparta's aggressive ambition which led to the Arkadian wars in the early sixth century. But even if we ignore the confusion and accept the connection, this is hardly a pointer to, say, 600 rather than 670. When did the Arkadian wars begin?

In different ways all these scraps of evidence may strengthen our confidence in seventh-century trouble and a seventh-century solution to it, but none helps to fix a precise date. It was once believed that archaeology provided one. The first interpretations of the excavations at Sparta and at the temple of Artemis Orthia presented historians with a sudden break in imports of luxury goods very soon after 600, followed by a dramatic collapse in the standard of native art. It was tempting to associate this with the imposition of a stern Lykourgan *agoge* not long before. But later reflection has shown that native art was a long time a-dying and did not even begin to wither until about 550 when the superlative inspiration of Attic black-figure pottery is quite enough to explain why Laconian potters, like others elsewhere, should lose their hearts and their markets. The magnificent bronze bowl from Vix alone is enough to prove that Laconian bronze-workers did not follow their example at once. The break in imports has also been moved down a little, to about 570, somewhat out of reach of the latest conceivable Lykourgos, and, in any case, does not demand an *agoge* to explain it. Indeed, if the archaeological evidence must be related to Lykourgos, it is much better to argue that the liberating aspect of his reforms could have helped to produce the first real flowering of Spartan art from about the middle of the seventh century onwards.

Only one argument remains. From Plutarch's *Life of Lykourgos* and some other hints it is possible to reconstruct Aristotle's story of the revolution. For him the link with King Charillos was firm but like us he was struck by the apparent paraphrase of the *rhetra* in Tyrtaios. To account for it he argued that the *rhetra* belonged to Lykourgos and the reign of Charillos but that the addition of clause V, the amendment, was the work of two later kings, Theopompos and Polydoros. His

evidence for this can only have been a fragment of Tyrtaios which Plutarch quotes as if the names of the kings had actually appeared in the original poem. If they did, it is legitimate to look at the fragment again and ask if Aristotle's reasoning from it was correct, starting as he did from the false belief in an early Lykourgos. I paraphrase:

Theopompos and Polydoros brought back from Delphi the God's oracle and decision. [For from his temple Apollo spoke in these terms]: the kings shall initiate counsel, they and the elders who watch over Sparta. And then the men of the people answering with straight *rhetai* . . .

(I have inserted in square brackets an introductory couplet cited by Diodoros which I believe was part of the original poem. Diodoros also quotes two additional couplets at the end which add nothing of substance.)

The 'straight *rhetai*' here must echo the 'crooked *rhetai*' of the amendment and from this Aristotle will have persuaded himself that the kings merely reaffirmed the *rheta* when adding the new clause. But, on the face of it, Tyrtaios was ascribing to them the introduction of the *rheta* itself as well as the amendment, and so gives us at least a *terminus ante quem*, at best a fixed period for both. The reigns of Theopompos and Polydoros can only have overlapped between about 700 and 670.

The close association of the Karneian Games with the *agoge* might tempt one to think that they celebrated its institution—the games were reorganised in 676. This and a few other scraps of argument and evidence can be used to support a date towards the lower end of the period 700-670, most importantly that the lower it is the nearer the development of Sparta matches that of the rest of Greece, but to rehearse them would simply obscure the vital point. If Tyrtaios named the kings, he dated the revolution; if he did not, it may still belong to the same period but in honesty all we can do is let it drift where it will in the half-century or so around 650. There is no other anchor.

(C) THE CONSEQUENCES

The simple consequence of a date as early as 776 for the Spartan revolution would be such a totally new picture not only of Spartan history but of that of the rest of Greece as well that I cannot contemplate it.

The consequences of the choice between early and late seventh century are severe but supportable.

In 676 Sparta would have given a lead to the rest of Greece in recognising the enormous economic and social changes that followed the expansion of the eighth century. She would have achieved this by inventing the idea of a defined constitution, and choosing a definition which in essence was imitated by all other city-states we know of. At any time after about 650 the effects would be felt and the answer given derivatively, after others had had the same experience and given a similar answer.

Secondly, at an early date the revolution would come at the end of a period of success, before Sparta's defeat by Argos at Hysiai in 669 and the Messenian revolt. Later it comes in a period of defeat or difficulty. The distinction is of some importance for the psychology of Spartans at the time. Successful revolutions are made by men whose real power is increasing but are being barred from the recognition to which they feel entitled. In one case the barrier will be external and accidental, the Messenian revolt (compare perhaps the First World War and the Russian Revolution); in the other it will probably be no more than the persistent resistance of the established order to ever-mounting demands for change.

It is to be noted here that earlier studies of Spartan history, influenced by the belief in a sudden onset of austerity about 600, have over-emphasised the disciplinary side of the revolution, have seen it as a tightening of belts in a time of danger after the revolt. With austerity removed, more recent works have given proper weight to the liberating aspects of the changes, to the fact that any increase in discipline there may have been was a small price to pay for the new social and political equality. The former view demanded some external crisis, in the latter, popular feeling is enough.

Thirdly, at a different level, a late date demands the rejection of almost the whole Greek tradition; the earlier date does allow the retention of some elements in it, for example the story that Theopompos and Polydoros played an important part in Sparta's political development, and makes it easier to explain the aberration of the rest.

Fourthly, that the genuine figure of Lykourgos should be lost to memory needs no explanation if he was an earlier contemporary of Homer (about 776) or even a contemporary of Pheidon of Argos

(about 676); it is hard to credit that the life of a man who might have talked with Periander of Korinth or Solon of Athens (about 600) should be so wholly dark. Indeed it is this darkness as much as anything that has led those who accept a late date to deny his existence. Historically the question hardly matters—the Russian Revolution would have happened and might have happened much as it did without Lenin. But Lenin, like Lykourgos, adds a touch of colour which I should be sorry to lose.

Some have explained him away as an earlier reformer who was given credit for the later constitution, others have thought of him as the god or hero under whose protection the new order was placed—by the fifth century he did receive quasi-divine honours in Sparta, something, it is said, which early Greeks did not accord to mortals. But the Spartans themselves believed that they were according these honours to a mortal and I prefer to agree with them. The narrative which follows is written on the assumption that Lykourgos was a man who did, very roughly, what the Spartans thought he did. It is written on the far more important assumption that his work can be dated to the early seventh century. It will include a few other arguments for both man and date, but neither they nor the plausibility of the story, if it is plausible, should tell more than marginally in its favour.

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