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Source: *The Classical Quarterly*, 1981, Vol. 31, No. 1 (1981), pp. 84-105

Published by: Cambridge University Press on behalf of The Classical Association

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/638462>

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## SPARTAN WIVES: LIBERATION OR LICENCE?\*

## I

The neologism 'sexist' has gained entry to an Oxford Dictionary, *The Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, third edition (1974), where it is defined as 'derisive of the female sex and expressive of masculine superiority'. Thus 'sexpot' and 'sex kitten', which are still defined in exclusively feminine terms in the fifth edition of *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1976), have finally met their lexicographical match.

This point about current English usage has of course a serious, and general, application. For language reflects, when it does not direct, prevailing social conceptions. Thus it is not accidental that there is no masculine counterpart to the word 'feminism'. 'Male chauvinism', the nearest we have come to coining one, is more emotive than descriptive and so involves ambiguity; while 'sexism', even when it is given an exclusively masculine connotation, is still, formally, sexually neutral. 'Feminism', by contrast, unequivocally denotes the striving to raise women to an equality of rights and status with men.<sup>1</sup>

It has been suggested, it is true, that there were inchoate feminist movements or tendencies in the ancient Greek world, for example in the Classical Athens of Aristophanes and Plato (where, as we shall see, they would certainly have been in place).<sup>2</sup> But feminism in the modern sense did not really emerge before the eighteenth century; and in Britain, for instance, it was only with the passage in 1975 of the Employment Protection, Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts that women raised themselves on to an all but equal footing with their male fellows – at any rate in the technical, juridical sense.<sup>3</sup>

Despite such advances, however, there is obviously still ample room for controversy over precisely what counts as sexual equality, and over the ideas and practices consistent with its achievement or maintenance. What is not controversial, on the other hand, is that scholarly interest in all sorts and conditions of women is currently running at an unprecedentedly high level. Not surprisingly, if somewhat belatedly, some of this interest has rubbed off on students of the ancient world. In 1970 Ste Croix could still legitimately complain that 'ancient historians, one may think, too readily forget that women are, after all, half the human race'.<sup>4</sup> But since then the steady trickle of studies on women in Graeco-Roman antiquity has turned into a small flood,<sup>5</sup> and

\* This essay is essentially a shortened and annotated version of a paper delivered before the Oxford Philological Society in November 1976. I am grateful to those who took part in the ensuing discussion, especially P. Vidal-Naquet and S. G. Pembroke, for helpful comments and criticisms.

<sup>1</sup> The *O.E.D.* Supp. i (1972) defines 'feminism' as 'advocacy of the rights of women (based on the theory of equality of the sexes)'.  
<sup>2</sup> R. Flacelière, 'D'un certain féminisme grec', *REA* 64 (1962), 109–16, reviewing J. Vogt, *Von der Gleichwertigkeit der Geschlechter in der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft der Griechen* (Abh. Akad. Mainz, 1960); idem, 'Le féminisme dans l'ancienne Athènes', *CRAI* (1971), 698–706.

<sup>3</sup> By contrast, the women of Liechtenstein voted for the first time in the history of the principality on 17 April 1977.  
<sup>4</sup> G. E. M. de Ste Croix, 'Some observations on the property rights of Athenian women', *CR* n.s. 20 (1970), 273–8, at p. 273.

<sup>5</sup> Notably in the United States: see e.g. the special issues of *Arethusa* for 1973 (which includes a bibliography by S. B. Pomeroy with D. M. Schaps) and 1978.

in 1976 there appeared a scholarly work which ventured to cover and summarize the whole field.<sup>6</sup>

It should, however, be said at the outset that the women of ancient Sparta form something of an exception to the rule of oblivion suggested by Ste Croix. The reason for this is, I think, fairly straightforward. As Winwood Reade nicely expressed it a century ago, 'In Greece a lady could only enter society by adopting a mode of life which in England usually facilitates her exit'.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the female citizen population of Sparta – or so it has seemed to non-Spartan males from at least the sixth century B.C. – enjoyed the extraordinary and perhaps unique distinction of both being 'in society' and yet behaving in a (to them) socially unacceptable manner. Naturally, the particular aspects of female Spartan behaviour which have excited hostile comment have varied according to the epoch and outlook of the individual contributors to the far from moribund 'Spartan tradition'.<sup>8</sup>

On the other side of the fence, however, from at least the late fifth century B.C. onwards there have been male 'Lakonizers', admirers of all things Spartan, who have found Spartan sexual mores and institutions worthy both of praise and of imitation.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, following the rise of modern feminism, female emancipation has joined the ranks of 'the most diverse ideas... formulated or recommended with Spartan aid'.<sup>10</sup> Thus what had seemed outrageous or at least unseemly to the sixth-century B.C. Sicilian poet Ibykos and his like-minded successors in the behaviour of the Spartan 'fair' or 'gentle' sex has also been portrayed in recent times as a shining example of women's liberation in practice.<sup>11</sup> The main aim of this paper will be to try to strike a balance between these extreme attitudes – so far, that is, as this is possible for a male ancient historian dependent in the end on exclusively male literary sources.<sup>12</sup>

My secondary aim is to provide, space permitting, a complete and accurate account of what we can (and cannot) know, or reasonably assert, about the social and economic position of adult Spartan women of citizen status in the sixth to fourth centuries B.C. – or, what comes to the same thing, about the position of those of them who entered the estate of matrimony.<sup>13</sup> For although they have earned a regular place in the scholarly literature on Greek women as a whole and on Spartan history in general, justice has yet to be done, it seems to me, either to the importance of the subject<sup>14</sup> or to the complexity, variety and, not least, the fragility of the evidence.

One final preliminary point should perhaps be made before the substantive discussion is begun. A few years ago in a stimulating Inaugural Lecture delivered before Oxford University Degler asked whether there was a 'history of women'.<sup>15</sup> By

<sup>6</sup> Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (London, 1976) (hereafter Pomeroy).

<sup>7</sup> W. Reade, *The Martyrdom of Man* (1872, repr. London, 1934), p. 57.

<sup>8</sup> E. Rawson, *The Spartan Tradition in European Thought* (Oxford, 1969).

<sup>9</sup> Two contrasting eighteenth-century representatives of this tradition, Helvétius and Rousseau, may raise a smile: Rawson, *op. cit.* pp. 241, 243.

<sup>10</sup> Rawson, p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> e.g. Pomeroy, p. 42: 'Dorian women, in contrast to Ionian women, enjoyed many freedoms, and among Dorians the Spartans were the most liberated of all'; cf. below, n. 112.

<sup>12</sup> cf. the opening remarks of R. Just, 'Conceptions of women in Classical Athens', *Journal Anthropological Soc. of Oxford* 6 (1975), 153–70.

<sup>13</sup> Greek *gynē*, like *femme*, meant both woman and wife: cf. S. C. Humphreys, *JHS* 93 (1973), 258, reviewing C. Vatin, *Recherches sur le mariage et la condition de la femme mariée à l'époque hellénistique* (Paris, 1970).

<sup>14</sup> J. Redfield, 'The women of Sparta', *CJ* 73 (1978), 146–61, in fact says very little on its ostensible subject.

<sup>15</sup> C. N. Degler, *Is there a History of Women?* (Oxford Inaugural Lecture, 14 March 1974).

this he meant: is there a history of women in the same sense that there is a history of, say, blacks in America or of any other 'minority' group?<sup>16</sup> That is, can a purely sexual difference be regarded as in and of itself historically significant, or are women, for all important purposes, so inextricably tied to men that 'women's history' cannot be conceived of as a separate and autonomous subject of study? Degler's own answer was as follows (p. 31):

Women are different from men, both in the roles they have been assigned or have assumed historically and in their biological make-up. History, in short, affects them differently from men, just as they affect history differently. Their past cannot be subsumed under the history of men. What we need to recognize is not that women and men are the same – as certain political and polemical goals might suggest – but that they are different. For it is that difference that justifies, indeed requires, a history of women.

The evidence for the women of ancient Sparta regrettably does not allow us to consider in detail the factor of 'biological make-up' on which Degler rightly places great emphasis. However, although I think I agree in principle that there is a history of women such as Degler delineates, I am far more concerned than perhaps he would be to show that the real significance of the Spartan women under study here flows from their integral place within the structure of Spartan society as a whole.

## II

In order to provide some orientation I shall begin by outlining, with the minimum of necessary annotation, the views on Spartan women expressed in the second half of the fourth century B.C. by Aristotle in the *Politics* (II. 9, 1269a 29–1271 b 19). This passage has been selected as a map and compass for three main reasons. First, Aristotle was unquestionably the greatest sociological thinker of antiquity.<sup>17</sup> Secondly, despite his attendance at Plato's Academy, he was singularly free from that 'Lakonomania' which infected certain upper-class circles in democratic Athens.<sup>18</sup> Thirdly, however, he fully shared the dominant male conception of women as inferior in his society; and, as Theodore Besterman has remarked of Voltaire in a different connection, his language 'was the language of his time, and we must not expect even the greatest of men always to rise above their environment'.<sup>19</sup>

Following an examination of the ideal states proposed by Plato and two others, Aristotle turns to the three polities which had generally been accounted the best of those actually existing – Sparta, Crete (treated as a political unit for theoretical purposes) and Carthage. He prefaces his discussion of Sparta with the observation that all polities must be evaluated in accordance with two different kinds of criterion. According to the first, any positive law shall be adjudged good or bad in the light of the laws of the ideal state – Aristotle's own version of which is exposed later, in the seventh Book. According to the second, a law shall be adjudged good or bad

<sup>16</sup> By 'minority' Degler understands 'any group that is differentiated from the majority by some recognizable characteristics, be they physical or social... In the case of women... the group has less power than the majority even though it is numerically larger' (p. 20 n. 15); cf. S. de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Paris, 1949; Eng. edn Harmondsworth, 1972), *passim*, esp. pp. 608–39 (hereafter de Beauvoir).

<sup>17</sup> This point will be developed by G. E. M. de Ste Croix in his forthcoming book *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World*.

<sup>18</sup> F. Ollier, *Le mirage spartiate*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1933–43), i, chaps. 5–6, esp. pp. 164–88; E. N. Tigerstedt, *The Legend of Sparta in Classical Antiquity*, 3 vols. (Stockholm etc., 1965–78), i, 155 f. For Aristotle's treatment of Sparta in general see *ibid.* pp. 280–304; R. A. de Laix, 'Aristotle's conception of the Spartan constitution', *Journal Hist. Philosophy* 12 (1974), 21–30.

<sup>19</sup> T. Besterman, *Voltaire*<sup>3</sup> (Oxford, 1976), p. 9

according as it is, or is not, consonant with the idea or postulate (*hypothesis*) and character of the constitution (*politeia*) set before the citizens (or, following a variant MS. reading, himself) by the lawgiver.

As for the first type of criterion, Aristotle self-confessedly follows the Plato of the *Laws* (I. 625C–638B; contrast *Rep.* VIII. 544C) in adjudging the *hypothesis* of the Spartan lawgiver reprehensible on the grounds that it is one-dimensional and deals with only a part of virtue, the military part (1271a41–71b10).<sup>20</sup> How, then, does Sparta measure up when evaluated according to the second kind of criterion? Poorly, is Aristotle's categorical answer – a judgement he seeks to substantiate by discussing in turn the seven main areas in which he finds it especially faulty, viz. the Helots, the women, the Ephorate, the Gerousia, the common meals, the system of naval command, and public finance. (His aspersions on the joint monarchy seem to me to fall rather under the first type of criterion.) I shall restrict myself to the second item, whose placing cannot be coincidental, and scrutinize Aristotle's seven specific criticisms of the Spartan women.

The first of these is addressed to ἡ περὶ τὰς γυναῖκας ἀνεσις, either 'the licence permitted to the women' or 'the licentiousness of the women' (the Greek is formally ambiguous). Such licence or indiscipline (*anesis*) is deleterious both to the general intention of the constitution and to the happiness or well-being of the state. Since women constitute half the citizen population of any state (cf. *Rhet.* I. 5, 1361a10–12), in *politeiai* where their condition is degenerate half the state must be considered unregulated by law – an exaggerated conclusion hardly entailed by the premisses, but one which, again, accords with the Plato of the *Laws* (I. 637C, VI. 781A, VII. 806C). In what, then, does this degeneracy consist? Whereas the state is hardy as far as the male citizens are concerned, the women abandon themselves utterly to every sort of intemperance and luxury:<sup>21</sup> once more, this is at the very least a sweeping generalization, perhaps to be explained by the fact that 'fear is always mixed with the blame attached to woman's licentious conduct'.<sup>22</sup>

The consequence of the women's intemperate luxury affords Aristotle his second ground for criticism, that in Sparta wealth is highly valued.<sup>23</sup> The damage this caused was aggravated by the third ground of complaint, the circumstance that the Spartan men were ruled by their women. Aristotle takes this state of affairs to be typical of all military and warlike peoples, with the exception of the Celts and a few others who openly place a high value on male homosexual intercourse. Then, after some further general remarks, Aristotle comments vaguely that at the time of Sparta's domination – that is, before 370 B.C. and perhaps specifically from 404 to 371 – many things were managed by the women.<sup>24</sup>

Another consequence of the women's intemperance (*akolasia*), and Aristotle's fourth ground for criticism, is that they exercised an extremely harmful influence even over the audaciousness of the state. For example, during the Theban invasion of

<sup>20</sup> This adverse judgement is restated, with further supporting arguments, at *Pol.* VII. 14, 1333b5–34a10. We might add that Sparta's one-dimensional military ideal, which equated success in war with virtue itself, goes back at least to the time of the Spartan poet Tyrtaios in the mid-seventh century.

<sup>21</sup> The MS. reading ἀκολάστως has been questioned, but it is retained in the Oxford Classical Text (ed. W. D. Ross), to whose numeration all my citations refer.

<sup>22</sup> de Beauvoir, p. 222.

<sup>23</sup> cf. Plato, *Rep.* VIII. 548B, where this defect is said to be characteristic of a timocracy; clearly Plato has Sparta in mind.

<sup>24</sup> The translation of Redfield, op. cit. (n. 14) – 'much is managed by women in their regime' – seems indefensible.

Lakonia (370 B.C.) they were not merely useless, like women in other states,<sup>25</sup> but actually produced more confusion than the enemy – yet again, somewhat of an overstatement, although their poor showing is demonstrated by the well-informed and usually pro-Spartan Xenophon (*Hell.* VI. 5. 28; cf. *Plut., Ages.* 31. 5 f.).

Aristotle now pauses to consider how the indiscipline of the women came about. It was, he says, only to be expected. For during a series of wars against their Peloponnesian neighbours the men were away from home for long periods and were made ready for the lawgiver, Lykourgos, by their military mode of life. The women, by contrast, traditionally succeeded in resisting the attempt of Lykourgos to submit them to the laws.<sup>26</sup>

It is the women themselves, therefore, according to Aristotle, who are responsible for their indiscipline. Aristotle, however, being less concerned to assign responsibility than to establish the facts, quickly resumes the thread of his critique. Apparently recapitulating what he has just said, he states that the degenerate condition of the women not only gives the constitution an air of indecorum but also engenders material avarice. In reality, though, that is by no means a straightforward résumé of his immediately preceding remarks. The charge of avarice may indeed be regarded as specifying the general statement that wealth is highly valued in Sparta. But the accusation of indecorum is only entailed if a crucial hidden premiss is interpolated. This premiss is the view expressed earlier in the *Politics* (I. 5, 1254b13–16; cf. *Poet.* 1454a20–2), that women as a sex are by nature inferior to men and marked out from birth for subjection to them, as slaves are to their masters.<sup>27</sup> Hence the indecorum of the Spartan constitution follows from the fact that the men are ruled by the women (*gynaikokratoumenoi*), since the latter have, literally, stolen the men's birthright. For in Aristotle's conventional opinion, as expressed in his *Rhetoric* (I. 5, 1361a6–8), female excellence consisted merely in bodily beauty and physique, sexual self-control and modesty, and liberal industriousness.

Mention of avarice leads Aristotle naturally to his fifth ground for criticism: the unevenness of the distribution of private landed property in Sparta. The women's contribution to this was that by the time Aristotle was composing the *Politics*, around the 330s,<sup>28</sup> almost two-fifths of the whole country (Lakonia) was in their control. In fact, for three reasons ownership of real property was concentrated in a few Spartan hands (cf. V. 7, 1307a34–6): first, the laws did not prevent the gift or bequest of land; secondly, there were many heiresses (*epiklēroi*), who might be married off at the discretion of their father or his nearest male relative; finally, dowries were large.

This apparently dominant position of rich women in Spartan land-tenure occasioned Aristotle's sixth criticism, directed against the shortage of male Spartan military

<sup>25</sup> Some (e.g. Redfield) have taken Aristotle to have meant 'unlike women in other states'; but the prevailing male Greek view since Homer (*Il.* VI. 490–3 = *Od.* I. 356–9) was that war was a man's business; cf. e.g. *Thuc.* III. 74. 2; *Aristoph. Lys.* 520; and generally *Plato, Alc.* I. 126E–127A.

<sup>26</sup> The doubt registered by Aristotle's *φασί* (rendered here by 'traditionally') presumably concerns the manner whereby the women evaded the laws of Lykourgos. (The latter, if he ever existed, cannot be dated.) Translated into modern historical language, this would amount to asking how the Spartan women became an exception to the rule that 'the segregation and legal and administrative subordination of women received their original impetus from the fragmentation of the early Greek world into small, continuously warring states': K. J. Dover, 'Classical Greek attitudes to sexual behaviour', *Arethusa* 6 (1973), 59–73, at p. 65.

<sup>27</sup> For an apologetic account of Aristotle's view see W. W. Fortenbaugh, 'Aristotle on slaves and women', in J. Barnes, M. Schofield, R. Sorabji (eds.), *Articles on Aristotle*, 4 vols. (London, 1977), ii. 135–9.

<sup>28</sup> cf. J. J. Keaney, 'The date of Aristotle's *Athenaion Politeia*', *Historia* 19 (1970), 326–36.

manpower (*oliganthrōpia*). In a country capable of supporting 1,500 cavalrymen and 30,000 hoplites – he must now be thinking not only of Lakonia but also of adjacent Messenia, which the Spartans had controlled from c. 650 to 370 B.C. – the citizen body sank to less than one thousand. As a result the state could not withstand a single blow, the defeat by the Thebans at Leuktra in 371. Sparta, in short, was destroyed through *oliganthrōpia*.

Aristotle next reports a tradition that in the days of ‘the ancient kings’ male citizen numbers had been maintained by extending the citizenship to foreigners: allegedly, the citizen body had once numbered as many as 10,000. But in his view the correct way to have ensured adequate manpower would have been to keep landed property more evenly distributed. Instead – and this is Aristotle’s seventh and final criticism of the women, although he does not spell out what their active role in this may have been – the Spartans had a law designed to stimulate the production of (male) children (*teknopoiia*). Under its provisions the father of three sons was exempted from military service, the father of four<sup>29</sup> from all state burdens. However, given the unequal distribution of landed property and – what Aristotle tacitly assumes – the normal Greek system of equal patrimonial inheritance by sons, many sons inevitably fell into poverty. That is, they became too poor to fulfil the condition of full Spartan citizenship which Aristotle faults a little later on (1271a26–37), the contribution of a minimum quantity of natural produce to a common mess.

### III

Just how accurate or apposite these criticisms are, and to what period (if any) in the development of Spartan society they are peculiarly applicable – these are perhaps the two most important questions under consideration here. First, however, it must in fairness be pointed out that Aristotle’s seemingly devastating critique would not have, or did not in fact, cut much ice with two authors on whose work, *faute de mieux*, we are bound to lean heavily.

Aristotle need not have read Xenophon’s selective and mistitled, though probably authentic, essay on the Spartan constitution, the *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia*.<sup>30</sup> But Xenophon, if hardly objective, was at least a ‘participant observer’ of Spartan society in the first half of the fourth century, and his essay probably offers a representative sample of the kind of pro-Spartan arguments Aristotle may have been seeking to rebut. On the other hand, the indefatigable Plutarch, who follows Xenophon’s general ‘line’ on Sparta, at least as he conceived Sparta to have been down to c. 400 B.C., was writing about A.D. 100. He had certainly read not only the *Politics* but also the Aristotelian *Constitution of the Spartans*:<sup>31</sup> and in his biography – or rather hagiography – of Lykourgos Plutarch felt constrained to reply explicitly to what he regarded as Aristotle’s unfair or misplaced criticisms.<sup>32</sup> Clearly, the moralizing apologists Xeno-

<sup>29</sup> The unreliable Aelian (*V.H.* VI. 6), writing in the second/third century A.D., says *five* or more.

<sup>30</sup> On the *Lak. Pol.* see now W. E. Higgins, *Xenophon the Athenian* (Albany, 1977), pp. 65–75, who dates the whole work to the 350s. The essay was written for a non-Spartan audience and is restricted to those points of contrast between Sparta and other states which in the author’s view most accounted for Spartan supremacy.

<sup>31</sup> The surviving fragments of this, one of the 158 *Constitutions* compiled by Aristotle and his pupils, are collected by V. Rose in his Teubner edition of Aristotelian fragments (fr. 532–45) and by M. R. Dilts in his edition of Herakleides Lembos, *Excerpta Politiarum* (372. 9–373. 13).

<sup>32</sup> For a source-critical examination of the *Life* see E. Kessler, *Plutarchs Leben des Lykurgos* (Berlin, 1910). On Plutarch as an interpreter of Sparta see Ollier, op. cit. (n. 18), ii. 165–215; Tigerstedt, op. cit. (n. 18), ii. 226–64.

phon and Plutarch are hardly unimpeachable witnesses to the truth about Spartan women but, as will be seen, their testimony can at least be used to modify and supplement that of the (in some respects) more scientific Aristotle.

#### IV

I propose now to discuss the many controversial issues developmentally, that is, by tracing the lives of Spartan women in the sixth to fourth centuries B.C. from the cradle to (in some cases) the grave. I use the vague term 'Spartan women' advisedly. The available evidence does not permit inferences of a statistical nature about the experience of a 'typical' Spartan woman, although in some contexts it will be necessary and possible to distinguish that of rich women. Besides, as I hope has already been made clear, the literary sources who provide the fullest pictures are highly, and consciously, selective, and they are all non-Spartan and male. Their selectivity and bias may, however, be offset to some extent by tapping sources of evidence, in particular inscriptions and material objects, which they themselves did not see fit, or had not devised the techniques, to utilize.

The evidence for the weaning and rearing of Spartan girls is scanty and not worth discussing in detail.<sup>33</sup> But an objection must at least be lodged against an inference drawn from an anecdote in Plutarch's *Lykourgos* (3. 1–6), that all girl-babies in Sparta were normally reared.<sup>34</sup> This would have been extraordinary, I think, in terms of general Greek practice at all periods,<sup>35</sup> quite apart from the evidence suggesting that in Sparta the exposure of neonates was fairly frequent and that women were, if anything, in relatively short supply.<sup>36</sup> But we are not in any case bound to attribute a universal validity to the passage in question nor indeed to accept the construction placed upon it by Lacey and Pomeroy.<sup>37</sup>

It is necessary, however, to dwell rather longer on two cardinal aspects of the childhood and adolescence of Spartan women. First, whereas the Spartan boy left the parental home for good at the age of seven to embark upon the gruelling system of state education known as the *agōgē*, the Spartan girl – like her counterparts in other Greek states (cf. Hesiod, *Op.* 520) – resided with her parents until marriage. Specifically, she continued to reside with her mother, for the matricentral character of a Spartan girl's home-life was heavily accentuated by the fact that her father was expected to

<sup>33</sup> We do not know whether newborn girls were subjected to the ritualistic and/or hygienic wine-baths endured by their brothers (Plut. *Lyk.* 16. 3). Nor do we know if the Spartan wet-nurses who acquired something of a cachet outside Sparta (Plut. *Alk.* 1. 3, *Lyk.* 16. 5) were of citizen status. The nannies praised by Plutarch (*Lyk.* 16. 4) were perhaps unfree.

<sup>34</sup> W. K. Lacey, *The Family in Classical Greece* (London, 1968), p. 197 (hereafter Lacey); Pomeroy, 36. The passage in question also contains a reference to the possibility of abortion (cf. *Mor.* 242C; [Hippokr.], *On the Nature of the Child*, 13. 2); but direct evidence for this (as opposed to infanticide) is non-existent for our period.

<sup>35</sup> However, L. R. F. Germain, 'Aspects du droit d'exposition en Grèce', *RD*, 4th ser. 47 (1969), 177–97, at pp. 179 f., doubts whether exposure was frequent in our period.

<sup>36</sup> Exposure in Sparta (esp. Plut. *Lyk.* 16. 2): G. Glotz, 'L'exposition des enfants', *Etudes sociales et juridiques sur l'antiquité grecque* (Paris, 1906), pp. 187–27, at pp. 188, 192, and esp. pp. 217–19; P. Roussel, 'L'exposition des enfants à Sparte', *REA* 45 (1943), 5–17. Shortage of women in Sparta: the direct evidence is weak – no spinsters *versus* attested polyandry and only one known instance of bigamy (below) – but see generally Pomeroy, pp. 227 f. Possibly too infant mortality, which was no doubt high in ancient Greece, affected girls more than boys.

<sup>37</sup> Such anecdotes may of course legitimately be construed as retrojections of later practice; but it can be rash to generalize from *royal* practice and, secondly, Lykourgos' injunction – that his brother's posthumous offspring, if born female, should be handed over to the women – does not entail that she would then be reared, since she might be born deformed or feeble.

spend most of his time living communally and in public with his male peers – indeed, all of his time, should he have become a father before the age of thirty (below, section VII). This may help to explain the incidence of female homosexuality involving an older woman and an adolescent girl reported by Plutarch (*Lyk.* 18. 9).<sup>38</sup>

Secondly, however, unlike girls in all other Greek states, Spartan girls were also given some form of public education. Whether or not we accept the attractive suggestion of Nilsson<sup>39</sup> that they underwent a course of training parallel to the *agōgē*, Spartan girls undoubtedly were educated in a sense other than trained to perform sedentary, and in ancient Greece exclusively feminine, tasks like weaving (Xen. *L.P.* 1. 3 f.; Plato, *Laws* VII. 806A) and baking (Herakl. *Lemb.* 373. 13).<sup>40</sup> The running races mentioned in Xenophon (*L.P.* 1. 4) and Plutarch (*Lyk.* 14. 3; *Mor.* 227D) and paralleled in other sources (Theokr. 18. 22; Paus. III. 13. 7; Hesych. s.v. ‘*en Driōnas*’) very likely had a ritual significance,<sup>41</sup> as certainly did the choral dancing in which Spartan maidens participated both in Sparta and at sanctuaries elsewhere in Lakonia and Messenia.<sup>42</sup> But the throwing of the discus and javelin and the trials of strength or wrestling also attested by Xenophon and Plutarch presumably had a mainly secular character. It is, however, a little hard to credit the evidence of Euripides (*Andr.* 597–600) that the girls wrestled naked with the boys.<sup>43</sup> For this looks like a deliberate travesty in line with the view of Euripides – or strictly Peleus, father of Achilles – that it was impossible for a Spartan maiden to be sexually modest (*sōphrōn*: *Andr.* 595 f.).<sup>44</sup>

Such an accusation, on the other hand, does appear to have some basis in Spartan actuality. For both total nudity in public (at religious processions: Plut. *Lyk.* 14.4–7) and the wearing of a revealingly slit mini-chiton (Pollux VII. 54 f.)<sup>45</sup> – hence the

<sup>38</sup> D. L. Page, *Alcman. The Partheneion* (Oxford, 1951), pp. 66 f., tentatively attributed this homosexuality to the close association between women and girls in cult and in the gymnasia. C. Calame, *Les choeurs de jeunes filles en Grèce archaïque*, 2 vols. (Rome, 1977), i. 433–6, argues that it had an educative function. K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (London, 1978), p. 181, speaks in this connection (following J. Hallett) of ‘an overt “sub-culture”, or rather “counter-culture” in which women and girls received from their own sex what segregation and monogamy denied them from men’. However, according to Pomeroy, p. 55, ‘the most important factor, both at Sparta and at Lesbos, in fostering female homoerotic attachments was that women in both societies were highly valued’.

<sup>39</sup> M. P. Nilsson, ‘Die Grundlagen des Spartanischen Lebens’, *Klio* 12 (1908), 308–40, reprinted in *Opera Selecta*, 3 vols. (Lund, 1951–60), ii. 826–69, at p. 848. See also below, n. 63.

<sup>40</sup> Clothesmaking: P. Herfst, *Le travail de la femme dans la Grèce ancienne* (Paris, 1922), pp. 18–24. Cooking: *ibid.* pp. 24–32. Exemption of Spartan women: *ibid.* pp. 112 f. But it was Spartan women who wove the tunic (*chiton*) for Apollo of Amyklai each year (Paus. III. 16. 2).

<sup>41</sup> The sixth-century bronze figurines of girl runners from Sparta (Inv. 3305), Delphi (Inv. 3072), Albania (London, B.M. 208) and Dodona (Athens, N.M. Carapanos 24) are very possibly all of Spartan make. The dress of the third, leaving one breast bare, vividly recalls Paus. V. 16. 3 (race between virgins at Olympia in honour of Hera).

<sup>42</sup> Calame, *op. cit.* (n. 38), esp. i. 350–7, has ingeniously reconstructed a Spartan cycle of female initiation conforming to the model of Van Gennep. Hypothetically, this consisted of a complex series of *rites de passage* designed ultimately to confer on the girls full adult status within the civic community, the primary emphasis being placed on their sexuality, marriage and maternity. However, although his case for the initiatory function of at least some aspects of the cults discussed seems well grounded, the reconstruction as a whole remains far from demonstrated.

<sup>43</sup> We do, however, learn from Athenaios (XIII. 566 E) of mixed wrestling between adolescents on the island of Chios.

<sup>44</sup> This idea may lie behind the *ben trovato* apophthegm (Plut. *Mor.* 232C) purporting to explain why Spartan virgins did not wear veils in public, whereas the wives did. For the topic in general see H. North, *Sophrosyne. Self-knowledge and Self-restraint in Greek Literature* (Ithaca, 1966), esp. pp. 68–84 (Euripides), 95 f. (Kritias), 128 and n. 17 (Xenophon), 197–211 (Aristotle).

<sup>45</sup> The dress of the women seems to have been no more inhibiting than that of the girls: Plut. *Mor.* 241 B; Teles *ap. Stob.*, *Flor.* 108. 83 (*anasyramenē* could be translated colloquially as ‘flashing’).

opprobrious epithet 'thigh-showers' first known from Ibykos (fr. 58 Page)<sup>46</sup> – are strikingly confirmed by a series of Spartan bronzes, mostly of the sixth century.<sup>47</sup> These free-standing figurines and mirror-handles portray girls or young women with underdeveloped or de-emphasized secondary sex characteristics. It is not, I think, fanciful to associate this feature with the strongly homosexual orientation of the average Spartan male.<sup>48</sup> But what is most significant is that the nude female figure is not at all frequent in Greek art before the fifth century and then is normally reserved for women of low social status. The shock felt by non-Spartan, and especially perhaps Athenian, males at such uninhibited – indeed, indecent because masculine – exposure may be the more readily be comprehended if, as I believe possible, Spartan girls appeared publicly in the nude (or at least scantily clad) after puberty.<sup>49</sup>

According to Xenophon and Plutarch, the Spartan girl's education was confined to physical exertions and designed to serve exclusively eugenic ends, that is, to produce strong mothers of healthy infants and to alleviate the pangs of childbirth (in which, we infer, maternal mortality was not infrequent).<sup>50</sup> No doubt eugenic considerations were important, particularly perhaps after c. 500 when, as we shall see, official steps were taken to further procreation. But there is also evidence to suggest that the things of the mind were not entirely neglected.

According to Plato in the *Protagoras* (342D), there were Spartan women who prided themselves on their learning and culture (*paideusis*). He refers specifically to their attainment in speech (*logoi*) – notoriously, Spartan women did have something to say and were reputedly not afraid to say it<sup>51</sup> – and singles out their contribution to quintessentially Spartan brachylogy. But he also mentions their *philosophia* in this passage and, in the *Laws* (VII. 806A; cf. *Rep.* V. 452A), their participation in high culture (*mousikē*). Not much weight can be placed on the testimony of Plato, the philo-Lakonian or at least unorthodox Greek educationist.<sup>52</sup> But Aristophanes (*Lys.* 1237; cf. *Vesp.* 1245–7) apparently refers to a Spartan poetess called Kleitagora,<sup>53</sup> and

<sup>46</sup> cf. Eur. *Andr.* 597 f., *Hec.* 933 f.; Soph. fr. 788N; Pollux II. 187, VII. 54 f.; Clement, *Paed.* II. 10. 114. 1. For thighs as an erotogenic feature see Athen. XIII. 602E (though perhaps 'thighs' was a conventional euphemism for a part of the female anatomy which it was literally shameful to reveal). For the way that female clothing has often been deliberately designed to hinder activity see de Beauvoir, p. 190; cf. *ibid.* pp. 323, 429, 442.

<sup>47</sup> The series includes the four items cited above (n. 41), together with Athens, N.M. 15897, 15900; Berlin (Charlottenburg) 10820, 31084; New York, Met. 38.11.3, 06.11.04; Paris, Louvre; Sparta Mus. 594, 3302; Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Mus. VI 2925, 4979. Th. Karageorgha, *AD* 20. 1 (1965), 96–109, publishes Sparta 3302 with further comparanda; all are discussed in U. Häfner, 'Das Kunstschaffen Lakoniens in archaischer Zeit' (Diss. Münster, 1965); cf. Cl. Rolley, 'Le problème de l'art laconien', *Ktēma* 2 (1977), 125–40, at p. 130. They were almost certainly made by men, some of whom could have been Spartan citizens. But the mirrors at least could have been commissioned and/or dedicated by women; cf. below, n. 54. We may add a unique sixth-century Spartan clay *kylix* (cup) on whose interior are depicted three nude and long-haired girls disporting themselves by a river: C. M. Stibbe, *Lakonische Vasenmaler des sechsten Jahrhunderts v. Chr.* (Amsterdam, 1972), pp. 133, 280, no. 209.

<sup>48</sup> The chief sources are Aristoph. fr. 338, *Lys.* 1105, 1148, 1174, with V. Ehrenberg, *The People of Aristophanes*<sup>3</sup> (New York, 1962), p. 180 and n. 7; Xen. *L.P.* 2. 12–14; Plato, *Laws* VIII 836A–C; Plut. *Lyk.* 18. 8 f., *Agēs.* 2. 1, *Mor.* 761D; Cic. *de rep.* IV. 4. 4; Hesychius, Suda, Photius s.v. 'Lakōnikon tropon'. Dover, *op. cit.* (n. 38), pp. 185 ff., seems to me somewhat to understate this feature of Spartan society.

<sup>49</sup> I suspect, however, that the alleged Spartan practice of stripping virgins in front of foreigners or guest-friends (*xenoi*: Athen. XIII. 566E) is pure invention.

<sup>50</sup> See below, n. 72.

<sup>51</sup> On the apophthegms – those attributed to Spartan women are Plut. *Mor.* 240C–242D – see Tigerstedt, *op. cit.* ii. 16–30. Contrast the conventional male Athenian attitude to free public speech for women: Soph. *Ajax* 293; Eur. *Her.* 476 f., fr. 61; Thuc. II. 45. 2, 46.

<sup>52</sup> D. Wender, 'Plato: misogynist, paedophile and feminist', *Arethusa* 6 (1973), 75–90.

<sup>53</sup> But see D. M. MacDowell's edition of *Wasps* (Oxford, 1971) ad loc.

Iamblichos (*Vita Pyth.* 267) names several female Spartan Pythagoreans. Finally, the epigraphical evidence, though slight and formally ambiguous, at least does not contradict the view that at any rate some Spartan women were basically literate.<sup>54</sup> Basic literacy, after all, was the most that the ordinary Spartan man was expected to acquire.<sup>55</sup>

The real significance of this education, in both its physical and intellectual aspects, is that it reflects an official attempt to maintain some form or degree of parity between the sexes. The chief function of this apparent equality of treatment, however, was not one a modern feminist would necessarily approve, but rather to socialize the non-military half of the citizen population.<sup>56</sup> At all events, it was certainly not designed to promote companionship or partnership in marriage; as we have seen, Aristotle attributed what he took to be the indiscipline of the women, not to the equality of their education, but to the separateness of Spartan married life. On balance, therefore, I incline to think that the introduction or general enforcement of the male *agōgē*, in the course of the seventh and sixth centuries, diminished the status of women in Sparta.<sup>57</sup> Thereafter, much as elsewhere in Greece though in a peculiarly singleminded way, the primary emphasis in their upbringing was on preparing them for their future subordinate role as wives and mothers of warriors.

## V

The ostensible purpose of the physical side of a Spartan girl's education may, then, have been to cultivate eugenic strength. It might, however, also be argued that a by-product of her vigorous open-air existence in the demanding Spartan climate was the far-famed beauty of Spartan women.<sup>58</sup> Lysistrata, in Aristophanes' play of the same name (*Lys.* 79–83), marvels with considerable comic hyperbole at Lampito's muscular virility. But the Athenian woman also praises the Spartan woman's skin and marvellous breasts.<sup>59</sup> The other facets of Spartan feminine beauty singled out for example by the Spartan poet Alkman in his maiden-songs of c. 600 B.C.<sup>60</sup> are less recondite, indeed conventionally aristocratic: above-average height, slim, well-turned

<sup>54</sup> From the late seventh century onwards we have ex-votos from Sparta inscribed with the name of a dedicatrix. Since the recipient deities were also female and a fair proportion of the unscripted offerings have feminine associations, many of the dedications were probably offered by women. However, the names of only about a dozen Spartan women are attested epigraphically in our period (the corresponding figure for men is about a hundred), as against about fifty in the literary sources.

<sup>55</sup> See my 'Literacy in the Spartan oligarchy', *JHS* 98 (1978), 25–37, where I also discuss brachylogy.

<sup>56</sup> The position of Roman women, at least those of the highest social class, seems to me parallel in this respect: cf. D. Daube, *Civil Disobedience in Antiquity* (Edinburgh, 1972), pp. 23 ff.

<sup>57</sup> For a succinct exposition of the structure of Spartan society as it had been remodelled by the fifth century see M. I. Finley, 'Sparta', in *The Use and Abuse of History* (London, 1975), pp. 161–77.

<sup>58</sup> Esp. *Od.* XIII. 412 (the only use of the adjective *kalligynaika* in the *Odyssey*); and the probably seventh-century oracle discussed in H. W. Parke and D. E. W. Wormell, *The Delphic Oracle*<sup>2</sup>, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1956), i. 82 f., ii, no. 1; also Theopompos, *FGH Hist* 115F240; Herakl. Lembos *ap.* Athen. XIII. 566A. Such internal estimation and praise by outsiders are remarkable given the universal Greek 'cult of beauty': E. J. Bickerman, 'Love story in the Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite', *Athenaeum* n.s. 54 (1976), 229–54, at p. 231.

<sup>59</sup> We are not told whether Lampito had suckled children, but it is a fair assumption that she had. The Athenian Lysistrata might therefore have been envious that Lampito's breasts had not lost their shape.

<sup>60</sup> The best discussion, with full modern bibliography, of Alkman's maiden-songs is Calame, *op. cit.*

ankles, and long, flowing, fair hair.<sup>61</sup> But even the latter has a special reference in the Spartan context (below, section VII). In fact, feminine beauty *per se* may have had an important function to perform in my next pair of topics, the timing and purposes of marriage.

We are quite well informed about the precise though diverse ideas held by the Greeks on the proper age for a girl to get married.<sup>62</sup> This diversity is of course only to be expected. Marriage was the most crucial *rite de passage* in any Greek girl's life,<sup>63</sup> and different states and thinkers enjoined or advocated different norms in accordance with their evaluation of the status and functions of women. As far as Sparta is concerned, however, our information is disappointingly imprecise.

Lykourgos, according to Plutarch (*Mor.* 228 A) set limits to the age of marriage. The existence of an upper age-limit is apparently confirmed by references to a Spartan law against late marriage (Plut. *Lys.* 30. 7; Pollux III. 48, VIII. 40); and Plutarch (*Kleom.* 1) provides evidence for a minimum age too. But these regulations, like the law enforcing marriage itself (below), almost certainly applied only to the men.<sup>64</sup> No source gives an absolute figure for the age when a Spartan girl 'reached the season of marriage' (Hdt. VI. 61. 5), and Plutarch (*Lyk.* 15. 4) merely says she would not marry before her body had reached its acme. Did her diet, which was allegedly superior, presumably in quantity, to that of other Greek girls (Xen. *L.P.* 1. 3 f.; cf. Plato, *Rep.* V. 451 E), ensure that she attained puberty earlier than the age of thirteen or fourteen, which seems to have been the norm in Greece?<sup>65</sup> Or alternatively did her vigorously athletic childhood delay the onset of menstruation?<sup>66</sup>

To give Plutarch his due, however, he does at least make it clear that Spartan girls married relatively late; and, besides adducing the inevitable eugenic motive also proposed irrelevantly for the men by Xenophon (*L.P.* 1. 6; cf. *Mem.* IV. 4. 23), he reasonably claims that older brides made for happier marriages. If we tentatively adopt Nilsson's hypothesis of a female educational curriculum running in tandem with the male *agōgē*, then the lower age-limit for a girl's marriage might be set at eighteen.<sup>67</sup> If we also take account of what may have been the normal Spartan male practice of marriage at about twenty-five<sup>68</sup> and the general Greek view that the husband should

<sup>61</sup> For the latter cf. Aristoph. *Lys.* 1312 and the cup (above, n. 47).

<sup>62</sup> e.g. Hesiod, *Op.* 695–8; [Hippokr.], *Peri Parthenōn* I. 16; Plato, *Rep.* V. 460E–461A, *Laws* VI. 785B; Arist. *Pol.* VII. 16, 1334b29 ff.; cf. Aristoph. *Lys.* 595–7; Xen. *Oec.* 7. 4 f. For comparative Roman evidence cf. M. K. Hopkins, 'The age of Roman girls at marriage', *Population Studies* 18 (1965), 309–27; idem, 'On the probable age structure of the Roman population', *ibid.* 20 (1966), 245–64, esp. pp. 260–4 (important methodologically).

<sup>63</sup> However, as is correctly observed by P. Vidal-Naquet, 'Les jeunes. Le cru, l'enfant grec et le cuit', in J. Le Goff and P. Nora (eds.), *Faire de l'histoire*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1974), iii. 137–68, at p. 160, 'what we know of [the Spartan girl's] infancy and adolescence looks less like a preparation, punctuated by rituals, for marriage than a carbon copy of masculine institutions'.

<sup>64</sup> D. Daube, *The Duty of Procreation* (Edinburgh, 1977), p. 11, suggests that they were introduced c. 500 B.C. to strengthen the male citizen population in the face of the growing Persian threat. If the dating is correct, this was no doubt part of their motivation; but a greater one may have been fear of the size of the native Greek serf population, the Helots.

<sup>65</sup> D. W. Amundsen and C. J. Diers, 'The age of menarche in classical Greece', *Human Biology* 41 (1969), 125–32; cf. J. L. Angel, 'Ecology and population in the eastern Mediterranean', *World Archaeology* 4 (1972), 88–105, at p. 97.

<sup>66</sup> C. T. Seltman, *Women in Antiquity* (London, 1956), p. 80.

<sup>67</sup> See e.g. C. M. Tazelaar, 'Ἰταίδες καὶ Ἐφήβοι: some notes on the Spartan stages of youth', *Mnemosyne*, 4th ser. 20 (1967), 127–53.

<sup>68</sup> Lacey, p. 318 n. 50. This figure is at least not contradicted by the evidence mustered in M. E. White, 'Some Agiad dates: Pausanias and his sons', *JHS* 84 (1964), 140–52, although Professor White herself thinks the men married at thirty. For a range of overlapping ideas on the proper age for a Greek man to marry see Solon fr. 27. 9 f. West; Plato, *Laws* VI. 772DE; Arist. *Pol.* VII. 16, 1335a28–30.

be older than his wife, the upper limit should float around the twenty mark. Indeed, if we were to press the suggested parallel between male and female education, we might argue that girls normally married at the age when their brothers became fully adult warriors, probably at twenty.

One fact, however, is not in doubt. At least after *c.* 500 B.C. all Spartan men were obliged by law to marry (Plut. *Lys.* 30. 7; cf. *Lyk.* 15. 1; Stob. *Flor.* 67. 16 Meineke; Pollux III. 48, VIII. 40);<sup>69</sup> and the sanctions of the law were reinforced by an elaborate ritual and customary apparatus (Xen. *L.P.* 9. 4 f.; Klearchos fr. 73 Wehrli; Plut. *Lyk.* 15. 2 f.; *Mor.* 227 EF). On the one hand, there was nothing peculiarly Spartan about this. The 'making of children' (*teknopoiia*) in marriage could be accounted a form of state liturgy or public service in ancient Greece.<sup>70</sup> Thus there need not be anything out of the ordinary in, for instance, the Spartan marble statue of *c.* 600 and the terracottas of the sixth century which celebrate fertility and childbirth.<sup>71</sup> On the other hand, however, the *de facto* exemption by *c.* 500 of women who died in childbirth from the Spartan prohibition on named tombstones;<sup>72</sup> the celebrity of the Spartan mother; and the eye-catching insistence of Kritias (88F32D–K) in the late fifth century, followed by Xenophon (*L.P.* 1. 3) in the fourth, on the primacy of *teknopoiia* in Sparta – all these seem to betoken exceptional Spartan preoccupation with reproduction, an impression amply confirmed by Spartan marital practices (below, section VIII).

It could be argued that this preoccupation was an inevitable function of the special position the Spartans had placed themselves in since the mid-seventh century vis-à-vis their subordinate but vastly more numerous serf population, the Helots. We might compare the practice in the Mani peninsula of southern Lakonia in more recent times of referring to male infants as 'guns'.<sup>73</sup> But the emphasis of Kritias and Xenophon at least could also be a reflection of the extraordinary and critical decline in the male citizen population during the fifth and early fourth centuries (the *oliganthrōpia* criticized by Aristotle, above, section II). In other words, what deserves particular attention, and requires careful handling, is the question how far, for whom, and at what periods, other reasons than *teknopoiia* for entering upon a marriage were affectively significant.

The sources do not allow us to discuss personal sentiment with confidence, although Bickerman has rightly noted that our evidence concerning sexual affection in Greece begins with the *Hymn to Aphrodite* (probably seventh century).<sup>74</sup> But they do suggest

<sup>69</sup> This seems to me to contradict the view of Bickerman, 'La conception du mariage à Athènes', *Boll. Ist. Diritto rom.*, 3rd ser. 17 (1976), 1–28, at p. 2, that 'the Athenians, and doubtless all the civilized peoples around the Mediterranean, regarded marriage, in the age of Plato, simply as a family affair in which the State was not involved'. But I agree with the main thesis of this article, that the chief purpose of Greek marriage was to establish legitimacy of offspring and so rights of succession to hereditary private property. For the Roman conception of marriage see G. Williams, 'Some aspects of Roman marriage ceremonies and ideals', *JRS* 48 (1958), 16–30.

<sup>70</sup> Plato, *Laws* VII. 804D, XI. 923A; Arist., *Pol.* VII. 16, 1334b29 ff., 1335b28 f. For Sparta see Plut. *Lyk.* 15. 14, *Pyrrhus* 28. 6, *Mor.* 223A.

<sup>71</sup> Statue (Sparta Inv. 364): J. Boardman, *Greek Sculpture: the Archaic period* (London, 1978), p. 62, fig. 80. Terracottas: R. M. Dawkins (ed.), *Artemis Orthia* (*JHS* Supp. V, London, 1929), p. 51 and fig. 29.

<sup>72</sup> In the light of epigraphical evidence (*IG* V. 1. 713–14, and perhaps 824), Plut. *Lyk.* 27. 2 ('priestesses in office') has been emended by K. Latte to read 'women in childbed'. Pomeroy, p. 36 and n. 8 adopts this reading, but it should be pointed out that it has no MS. support.

<sup>73</sup> P. Leigh Fermor, *Mani* (London, 1958), p. 69. Rawson, op. cit. (n. 8), pp. 292, 321, 358, cites sources representing the Maniotes as Spartans *redivivos*.

<sup>74</sup> op. cit. (n. 58), esp. pp. 237, 244, 247.

that other motives besides *teknopoiia* may sometimes have been paramount. There is, first of all, the feminine beauty discussed above, whose role is most colourfully conspicuous in the Herodotean story (VI. 61–3) of the deceitful third marriage of Ariston (reigned c. 550–15) to which we shall return. The difficulty of interpretation here is that, apart from a dubious Plutarchan apophthegm (*Mor.* 232C), the evidence concerns only kings or the *roi manqué* Lysander (Hermippos fr. 87 Wehrli). What we cannot judge is whether feminine beauty was as it were the icing on the matrimonial cake or one of its essential ingredients – unless of course ‘beauty’ may also be interpreted figuratively as equivalent to ripeness for marriage, as some of Alkman’s poems suggest.<sup>75</sup>

We do, however, know of two other ingredients which in some cases at least certainly were essential. The first of these is specific to the inner core of Spartan families distinguished from the rest by birth. This core embraced above all the two royal houses, the Agiadai and Eurypontidai. But it also included the wider category of ‘the descendants of Herakles’, from whom alone the royals were permitted to select their consorts (Plut. *Agis* 11. 2); and I suspect that it extended to other ‘privileged families’ too.<sup>76</sup> What these upper-class Spartans had in common was the desire to contract marriages amongst themselves from considerations of high politics (e.g. *Hdt.* V. 39–41; Plut. *Kleom.* 1). Parallels from the Homeric epics or the real world of Archaic Greek dynasts are not inapposite.<sup>77</sup>

The second ingredient, on the other hand, was not necessarily thus restricted in its operation, although its connection with the first was intimate. I refer of course to wealth which, as the saying goes, marries wealth. In ancient Greece generally, political power and privilege connoted the possession of considerable hereditary landed property. But this does not seem necessarily to have been the case in Sparta, where manly virtue (*andragathia*) displayed in the *agōgē*, the training-ground and the battlefield, provided it was backed by the minimum of wealth needed to ensure citizen rights, could take a man like Lysander to the top.<sup>78</sup> Lysander, however, was the exception that proved the validity in Sparta of the general Greek rule about political power and privilege.<sup>79</sup> And that rich Spartans behaved like rich Greeks generally in the matrimonial field, indeed aggressively so, is strongly suggested by the existence of a Spartan law against ‘bad’ marriage (Pollux III. 48, VIII. 40), which Plutarch (*Lys.* 30. 7) tells us was principally designed to deter them from contracting marriages for reasons of economic gain.

By the time of Aristotle, however, and I suspect for at least a century before, this law was a dead letter; and, as we saw, a crucial part of Aristotle’s critique of Spartan

<sup>75</sup> The connection between beauty and marriage, at least royal marriage, at Sparta was so strong that Plutarch (*Mor.* 1D) misrepresents a story told by Theophrastos about Archidamos II (reigned c. 469–27) being fined for marrying a small woman (Plut. *Ages.* 2. 6). In the former passage the ground of guilt has become the wife’s ugliness.

<sup>76</sup> For the existence of a true Spartan aristocracy see P. Oliva, *Sparta and her Social Problems* (Amsterdam and Prague, 1971), pp. 118–22, 136; on ‘privileged families’ at Sparta see G. E. M. de Ste Croix, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (London, 1972), pp. 137 f., 353 f., following K. M. T. Chrymes, *Ancient Sparta* (Manchester, 1949), esp. chaps. 3–6, 10–11.

<sup>77</sup> M. I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus*<sup>2</sup> (London, 1977), p. 103; L. Gernet, ‘Mariages de tyrans’, in *Anthropologie de la Grèce antique* (Paris, 1968), pp. 344–59.

<sup>78</sup> Although a ‘descendant of Herakles’ by birth (Plut. *Lys.* 2. 1), Lysander seems to have risen to political prominence from a lowly economic station.

<sup>79</sup> We should not be deceived either by Xenophon’s rhetorical question (*L.P.* 7. 3) – ‘what need was there to worry about wealth in a society where equal contributions to the mess and a uniform standard of living excluded the search for wealth in order to obtain luxury?’ – or by Plutarch’s assertion (*Lyk.* 10. 4) that under the ‘Lykourgan’ regime wealth was deprived of its very being and became as it were blind.

women was also a critique of the Spartan property-regime as a whole. Since the latter is a problem of massive proportions, it is impossible to broach it usefully here beyond stating dogmatically my belief that all the land of which Spartan citizens had the usufruct was possessed in the form of private and alienable property from at least the mid-seventh century.<sup>80</sup> It is, however, necessary to attempt to assess the active role of the Spartan women in a property system whose defectiveness in Aristotle's view was ultimately responsible for the downfall of Sparta as a great power.

## VI

By Aristotle's day the distribution of land in Lakonia was massively unequal. In itself this was not very remarkable: the situation could be paralleled in many other Greek states. What was remarkable, however, or so it struck Aristotle, was that almost two-fifths of the whole country – by which can only be meant the land in Lakonia owned by Spartan citizens – was in the hands of women. We do not know how Aristotle came by this figure, but undoubtedly to his (sexist) eyes it was in itself reprehensible. Certainly, too, it presupposed a stark contrast between the property laws of Sparta and those of Athens, in which he spent a considerable amount of his adult life as a resident alien (and so, incidentally, as one technically debarred from owning real property). It becomes less extraordinary, however, in a comparative perspective.

As Ste Croix has emphasized,<sup>81</sup> Athenian women of post-Classical times eventually became considerably better off in respect of property ownership than their oppressed forebears of the fifth and fourth centuries (below). But if a more direct comparison and contrast be sought, then we may point to the fact that in Aristotle's own day there were maternal inheritances (*matrōia*) as well as patrimonies (*patrōia*) in, for example, Arkadian (and so non-Dorian) Tegea<sup>82</sup> and, most relevantly, Dorian Gortyn on Crete. Cretan parallels have been too often used as a substitute for the evidence we lack for Sparta. But a case can be made for, if not a direct relationship, at least a parallelism of development between some aspects of the Cretan and Spartan social systems.<sup>83</sup> And in the case of women's property rights the comparative material from Gortyn does seem peculiarly informative, even though it relates to conditions in force c. 450 B.C., a century or more before Aristotle was composing the *Politics*.<sup>84</sup>

Aristotle, in the passage considered in section II, noted that there were many *epiklēroi* in Sparta and that *proikes* (dowries) were large. I believe he was seriously mistaken or at least misleading on both counts. In the first place, he was almost certainly technically incorrect to use the Athenian term *epiklēros* to describe the Spartan heiress.<sup>85</sup> His error, however, may be more than merely one of vocabulary.

<sup>80</sup> For a fuller discussion of the Spartan property-regime see my *Sparta and Lakonia* (London, 1979), chap. 10; and for the catastrophic decline in male citizen numbers between 480 and 371, *ibid.* chap. 14. I cannot agree with many of the conclusions of J. Christien, 'La loi d'Épitaudeus: un aspect de l'histoire économique et sociale à Sparte', *RD*, 4th ser. 52 (1974), 197–221.

<sup>81</sup> *op. cit.* (n. 4), 273 f.

<sup>82</sup> *SIG*<sup>3</sup>, 306. 4–9, 48–57; cf. *IG* V. 2. 159 (fifth century B.C.).

<sup>83</sup> A. J. Toynbee, *Some Problems of Greek History* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 329–37; G. L. Huxley, 'Crete in Aristotle's *Politics*', *GRBS* 12 (1971), 505–15, at pp. 513 f.

<sup>84</sup> The standard edition, with translation, of the Gortyn Code is R. F. Willetts, *The Law Code of Gortyn* (Berlin, 1967); cf. U. Paoli, 'L'antico diritto di Gortina', in *Altri studi di diritto greco e romano* (Milan, 1976), pp. 481–507.

<sup>85</sup> H. J. Wolff, *RE* XXIII, s.v. *προίξ* (1957), cols. 133–70, at cols. 166 f. Contrast D. M. Schaps, *Economic Rights of Women in Ancient Greece* (Edinburgh, 1979), pp. 43 f., 88. However, as Schaps himself observes, 'our other evidence seems to support the conclusion that Spartan women were

For in Classical Athens women could not hold and dispose of more than a trifling amount of property in their own right, and the heiress, who literally 'went with the estate', was bound to marry her nearest male relative in order to keep the estate within the descent-group of her father. Herodotus (VI. 57. 4), by contrast, refers to the Spartan heiress as *patrouchos* (literally 'holder of the patrimony'), and this apparently corresponds to the Gortynian *patrōiōkos*. Now in Gortyn, unlike Athens, women could own property in their own right (*Lex Gort.* II. 46 f., 49 f., III. 25, 32 f., 36, 42 f., IV. 26 f., V. 1–9, 17–22, VII. 52–VIII. 30, IX. 8 f.), and daughters automatically inherited a (smaller) portion of the family estate alongside their brothers (IV. 46–V. 9). So it seems that here Herodotus is the witness to the truth and that in Sparta *patrouchos* meant something like what we understand by 'heiress'.

As to dowries, the Gortynian evidence suggests that Aristotle is guilty of a similar terminological and semantic confusion. For there is no trace of the dowry at Gortyn, and there is a compelling consensus among our sources other than Aristotle and a rogue passage in the Plutarchan *Moralia* (775C–E) that there was no dowry at Sparta either.<sup>86</sup> One of these sources, the third-century B.C. grammarian Hermippos, paints a fantastic picture of Spartan men and girls of marriageable age being shut up together in a dark room for the men to take pot luck and grab a wife. This flatly contradicts our more sober evidence for the manner in which a Spartan maiden was taken for a wife (below, section VII). But the kernel of fact could be Hermippos' unequivocal statement that the captive girl was led away by her prospective husband without a dowry (*aproikos*).

In other words, what Aristotle calls 'large dowries' were really, I suggest, marriage-settlements consisting of landed property together with any moveables that a rich father (or mother) saw fit to bestow on a daughter. If a daughter had no father, or brother of the same father, then she would inherit in her own right as *patrouchos* and as such was a particularly desirable catch. It is thus not difficult to see how, given a decreasing number of legitimate male heirs of full citizen status, landed property could have become concentrated in the hands of women.

Daughter-inheritance, incidentally, would also give particular point to the information conveyed only by Philo, the Jewish scholar of the first century A.D. (*De leg. spec.* III. 4. 22), that in Sparta uterine siblings (*homomatritioi*) were permitted to marry.<sup>87</sup> We know of no actual examples of such a marriage, but we know of no specific Spartan incest-taboo against them either;<sup>88</sup> and there is evidence that the Spartans, like so many other peoples before the nineteenth century, attributed the active role in reproduction solely to the 'childmaking seed' (Hdt. VI. 68. 3, with 61. 2) of the father.<sup>89</sup> If we tentatively accept Philo's evidence, we have another, though small, contributory cause of the concentration of landed property in a few hands.

indeed possessors of wealth in their own right' (p. 88; cf. 6, 7, 12 f.); and he appositely cites Xen. *Agas.* 9. 6 (the wealth in racehorses owned by Kyniska, sister of Agesilaos II; cf. p. 117 n. 87).

<sup>86</sup> Hermippos fr. 87; Plut. *Mor.* 227F; cf. 242B; Aelian *V.H.* VI. 6; Justin III.3.8.

<sup>87</sup> Philo's evidence is doubted, though without adequate reason, by W. Erdmann, *Die Ehe im alten Griechenland* (Munich, 1934), pp. 183–5. C. Jannet, *Les institutions sociales et le droit civile à Sparte*<sup>2</sup> (Paris, 1880), p. 95, argued that such marriages would have been excluded in practice, but his argument rested on two false assumptions exemplifying the tendency to regard 'Greek law' as a unitary system: first, that the Athenian *anchisteia* rule, whereby an heiress was bound to marry her nearest male kin, 'existed in Sparta in all its rigour' (p. 91); secondly, that daughters had no share in the paternal inheritance.

<sup>88</sup> On incest generally see e.g. R. Fox, *Kinship and Marriage* (Harmondsworth, 1967), pp. 54–76.

<sup>89</sup> cf. Ste Croix, 'Athenian family law', *CR* n.s. 20 (1970), 307–10, at p. 309, reviewing A. R. W. Harrison, *The Law of Athens: the Family and Property* (Oxford, 1968); also de Beauvoir, pp. 40, 111.

According to Herodotus (VI. 57. 4), however, the Spartan kings in his day, the mid-fifth century, had jurisdiction over the allocation of *patrouchoi*, in cases where the father had not made express provision for their marriage before his death. A second royal prerogative was to witness adoptions, which it is not irrelevant to note in view of the alleged Spartan hostility to what we call 'the family', are 'characteristic of a... society which thinks in terms of inheritance through the family'.<sup>90</sup> Yet by the second half of the fourth century both of these prerogatives had been forfeited to the discretion of private individuals, and Aristotle was either unaware of their former existence or perfectly aware that they had not served, even if they had been designed, to even out the distribution of private landed property and maintain male citizen numbers.

Indeed, the kings themselves, despite their monthly oath to obey the laws (Xen. *L.P.* 15. 7), did not a little to help along the process of property-concentration. (Here we recall those motives for marriage other than *teknopoiia* considered in section V.) Anaxandridas II (reigned c. 560–20), Leonidas I (c. 491–80) and Archidamos II (c. 469–27) all married close consanguineous kin (Hdt. V. 39, VII. 239, VI. 71); while Kleomenes III (236–22) was married off to the widow of Agis IV (c. 244–1) precisely because she was a *patrouchos* (Plut. *Kleom.* 1: Plutarch, however, naturally calls Agiatis an *epiklēros*). What endows these royal marriages with special significance is that in the mid-third century the mother and grandmother of Agis were accounted the richest of all Spartans. In fact, by the time of Agis' accession the proportion of land owned by women in Sparta had reportedly increased from almost two-fifths to an absolute majority (Plut. *Agis* 7. 4).

However, whether the ownership of property by rich women automatically entailed property-power exercised in the political sphere or (if they are distinct) the 'gynocracy' criticized by Aristotle is of course a different question. If we are to judge of this and so of the responsibility of the women themselves for the concentration of property in their hands, we must now turn from the theory to the praxis of Spartan marriage.<sup>91</sup>

## VII

Herodotus, we suggested, was probably precise in his use of the term *patrouchos*. But was he also technically correct to employ the normal Athenian word for 'betroth', *engyō*, in the Spartan context, and were all daughters (whether *patrouchoi* or not) 'betrothed' by their father or his male heir acting in the capacity of legal guardian (*kyrios*), as Aristotle apparently believed?<sup>92</sup> In other words, did a Spartan daughter have no more say in the choice of husband or the terms of the marriage contract than an Athenian girl, or did she have the room for manoeuvre (to put it no higher) enjoyed by her counterpart at Gortyn, where the *kyrieia* (legal guardianship of a female by

<sup>90</sup> Lacey, p. 201.

<sup>91</sup> The topics considered in the foregoing section may usefully be reviewed in the light of comparative evidence from J. Goody, J. Thirsk, E. P. Thompson (eds.), *Family and Inheritance. Rural society in Western Europe 1200–1800* (Cambridge, 1976), esp. J. Goody, 'Inheritance, property and women: some comparative considerations', pp. 10–36.

<sup>92</sup> The fundamental study of *engyē* is now Bickerman, op. cit. (n. 69): 'it is the institution of *engyē* which gives Athenian marriage its peculiar character' (p. 8). The usage of Herodotus is ambiguous: either he believed (wrongly) that Athenian *engyē* existed at Sparta; or, as Bickerman, *ibid.* pp. 19 f., suggests, he meant that an 'affianced' heiress could not be married against her wishes to another man. The latter seems the more likely. Since *engyē* was specifically Athenian, Bickerman speaks of *accordailles* at Sparta, to convey that such arrangements did not necessarily imply legitimacy for any future offspring. Such *accordailles*, however, were apparently legally binding (Plut. *Lys.* 30. 6).

her nearest male relative, usually her father in the first instance and then her husband) did not obtain? The evidence is slight and not clearcut.<sup>93</sup> However, a passage in Xenophon's *Lak. Pol.* (9. 5), apparently to the effect that no one would ask a legally adjudged coward (*tresas*) for the hand of any unmarried female in his household, seems to me to tilt the balance firmly in favour of the existence of the *kyrieia*.<sup>94</sup> If that is so, then we cannot automatically infer that ownership of property conferred on Spartan women personal independence, let alone political power.

However that may be, another well-known Herodotean story (VI. 65. 2) provides less equivocal evidence for the next stage of the nuptial process. Damaratos (reigned c. 515–491) is said to have frustrated the marriage plans of his relative (second cousin?) and royal successor, Latychidas II (c. 491–469), by (literally) anticipating him in seizing the girl to whom Latychidas was 'engaged' and 'having' her as a wife.<sup>95</sup> Not surprisingly, perhaps, it is at this juncture that the already powerful temptation to introduce comparative anthropological evidence from 'primitive' societies is often found irresistible.<sup>96</sup> It is therefore necessary to state briefly why comparison of this kind involves additional dangers here, over and above those attendant on the use of any form of comparative material.

In the case even of Archaic Greece, we are dealing with societies sensibly more complex than most of those studied by social anthropologists. Thus it is simply begging the question to label each seemingly 'primitive' feature of the historical Greek world a 'survival' from an earlier stage of culture. The correct principle, it seems to me, was well expressed long ago by Starcke:<sup>97</sup> 'If we are able to trace the cause of a custom in existing circumstances, we must abide by that cause, and nothing but a definite historical account of the prior existence of the custom can induce us to seek for another explanation.'<sup>98</sup>

As to 'marriage by capture' in Sparta, we lack the evidence to construct a 'definite historical account' of its prior existence. All we can say for certain is that a capture like that effected by Damaratos is not incompatible either with a previous 'engagement' or with the non-existence of the dowry and that, at least in Plutarch's version (*Lyk.* 15. 4 f.), the capture had a purely symbolic significance.<sup>99</sup> None the less, the symbolism is in itself not insignificant – quite apart from its being peculiarly appropriate to a military society.<sup>100</sup> For, if the sources can be believed, the girl who was 'seized' played very much the passive role. And, furthermore, although marriage at Sparta began, as at Athens, when the bride entered the house of the groom (or his parents), a Spartan marriage seems to have been conceived, not as the bilateral 'living together' of Athens,

<sup>93</sup> The existence of the *kyrieia* at Sparta is denied by Bickerman, *ibid.*, who rightly observed (p. 20) that 'the position of the woman at Sparta was quite different from that of the Athenian woman'. A *non liquet* is registered by T. W. Beasley, 'The *kyrios* in Greek states other than Athens', *CR* 20 (1906), 210–13, at pp. 212 f.

<sup>94</sup> The difficulty of meaning in the passage of Xenophon stems from the ambiguity of *ἀνανδρία*: see J. M. Moore, *Aristotle and Xenophon on Democracy and Oligarchy* (London, 1975), p. 85. I do not think my interpretation in the text is contradicted by Xenophon's omission of women from the list of items controlled by a man (*L.P.* 6. 1). See also below, nn. 112, 117.

<sup>95</sup> I put 'engaged' in inverted commas because *ἀρμολόγητος* should technically mean 'having got married but not yet having consummated the marriage'.

<sup>96</sup> On 'marriage by capture' see e.g. L. Mair, *Marriage* (Harmondsworth, 1970), pp. 110 ff. (chiefly African).

<sup>97</sup> C. N. Starcke, *The Primitive Family in its Origin and Development* (London, 1889), p. 19.

<sup>98</sup> cf. Finley, 'Anthropology and the Classics', in *op. cit.* (n. 57), pp. 102–19, esp. pp. 116 f.: 'what anthropology illuminates about Sparta, paradoxically, are certain aspects of her lost early history rather than the Sparta from which the fossilized evidence comes'.

<sup>99</sup> Erdmann, *op. cit.* (n. 87), pp. 199 f., with the review by H. J. Rose, *JHS* 55 (1935), 256 f.

<sup>100</sup> cf. de Beauvoir, pp. 106, 394, 396.

but as a one-sided 'having' of the wife by the husband (Hdt. V. 39. 2; VI. 57. 4, 65. 2; Xen. *L.P.* 1. 8; Plut. *Kleom.* 29. 3).

The wedding-night itself involved a strikingly bleak ritual.<sup>101</sup> First, the bride's hair was cropped by a (presumably married) female bridal attendant (Plut. *Lyk.* 15. 5). This haircut was, I am sure, intended to signal her irrevocable transition from the status of virgin (*parthenos*) or girl (*korē*) to that of woman and wife (*gynē*), since she was not again permitted to wear her hair long.<sup>102</sup> Thus the capillary experience of the new bride offers a perfectly symmetrical antithesis to that of the newly adult male warrior, who on achieving manhood was encouraged to grow his hair long.<sup>103</sup>

To reinforce the inverted quality of the ritual, the bride was then dressed in a man's cloak and sandals and laid on a pallet in an unlit room to await the nocturnal attentions of her 'captor' (Plut. *Lyk.* 15. 5–7). This masculine get-up, which is somewhat paralleled by the donning of a false beard by brides at Argos (Plut. *Mor.* 245 F), has been explained as apotropaic cross-dressing.<sup>104</sup> But also worth pondering is the suggestion of Devereux that the bride's appearance was designed to ease the transition for the groom from his all-male and actively homosexual *agōgē* and common mess to full heterosexual intercourse.<sup>105</sup> Let us, however, also consider the feelings of the bride. Even if we should prefer not to believe that Spartan maidens enjoyed tutelary homosexual relations with older women (Plut. *Lyk.* 18. 9), the bride had undoubtedly been reared and raised in an almost exclusively female home environment. The shock of sexual violation by an older and probably already battle-scarred man cannot have been greatly diminished by the chill and unfamiliar scenario into which she had been forcibly thrust.

If the husband was under thirty when he 'took' a wife – as he perhaps usually would be (above and n. 68) – he was not allowed to cohabit with her, and his infrequent home visits were supposed to be conducted under cover of darkness, in conspiratorial secrecy from his messmates and even from the rest of his own household.<sup>106</sup> Indeed, if we can trust Plutarch (*Lyk.* 15. 9), several children might issue from this clandestine 'affair' before a man had seen his wife in daylight. I do not, however, believe that, as some have argued, an attempt was made to keep the marriage itself secret: at any rate aristocratic brides seem to have been hymned on the morning after their wedding-night;<sup>107</sup> and Pausanias (III. 13. 9) records that mothers sacrificed to a

<sup>101</sup> M. P. Nilsson, *Griechische Feste von religiöser Bedeutung mit Ausschluß der athenischen* (Leipzig, 1906), pp. 371 f.

<sup>102</sup> This prohibition is directly attested only in the Aristotelian *Lak. Pol.* as excerpted by Herakleides Lembos (373.13 Diltz); but it is implied in Lucian, *Fugitivi* 27; and perhaps also Xenophon of Ephesus V. 1. 7 (I owe this reference to Ewen Bowie).

<sup>103</sup> See my 'Hoplites and heroes: Sparta's contribution to the technique of ancient warfare', *JHS* 97 (1977), 11–27, at p. 15 and n. 39. It is true, as is pointed out by Vidal-Naquet, *op. cit.* (n. 63), p. 159, that this does not constitute a *rite de passage* in the same sense as the dedication of severed locks; but adolescent Spartan boys, like the married women, wore their hair close-cropped.

<sup>104</sup> L. Gernet, *Le génie grec dans la religion* (Paris, 1933), p. 40; M. Delcourt, *Hermaphrodite. Mythes et rites de la bisexualité dans l'antiquité classique* (Paris, 1958), pp. 7, 11 (with bibliography on p. 132).

<sup>105</sup> G. Devereux, 'Greek pseudo-homosexuality and the "Greek Miracle"', *SO* 42 (1967), 69–92, at pp. 76, 84. For Spartan homosexuality see above, n. 48.

<sup>106</sup> As Lacey, p. 200, remarks, initial secrecy would have been facilitated if marriages in Sparta generally occurred in the winter months, as they seem to have done in the rest of Greece (Arist. *Pol.* VII. 16, 1335a37–9).

<sup>107</sup> The references are given by A. H. Griffiths, 'Alcman's *Partheneion*: the morning after the night before', *QUCC* 14 (1972), 1–30, at pp. 10 f.; but he has not convinced me that the most famous of Alcman's maiden-songs (fr. 1 Page) is really an *epithalamion*.

venerable wooden cult-image of Aphrodite–Hera on the occasion of their daughter’s marriage. But it is possible that the Spartans customarily practised a kind of ‘trial marriage’, which was not counted as official until the wife had conceived or possibly even safely given birth.<sup>108</sup> We should note, though, that Anaxandridas II for one did not repudiate a barren wife (Hdt. V. 39 f.). For him and his peers, however, *teknopoiia* could be subordinated to other considerations. It could not be so as a rule, and this has to be kept in the forefront of the mind as we turn to what appeared to some non-Spartan contemporaries to be extraordinary, and immoral, marital practices.

## VIII

It is noteworthy that Aristotle reserved his criticisms of Spartan females for those who had crossed the threshold of matrimony. But at least he austere restricted himself to disparaging their luxury-loving avarice, the power they wielded over their menfolk and their ownership of real property – and this despite his declared abhorrence of adultery (*Nic. Eth.* II. 6, 1107a10 ff.; *Pol.* VII. 16, 1335b38–36a2). Rather less self-denying were his inferior successors, who indulged in wild flights of journalistic fantasy. To cite just one of several possible examples, the late lexicographers defined ‘the Spartan way’ alternatively as buggery and pederasty or as the practice whereby the women, who were not closely guarded (cf. Cic. *de rep.* IV. 6. 6; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* II. 24. 6), offered themselves sexually to guests or strangers (*xenoi*; cf. perhaps Nik. Dam., *FGrHist* 90F103z. 6).<sup>109</sup>

The factual basis of these allegations appears to have been the various forms of what we might describe as plural marriage and polykoity attested by Herodotus, Xenophon, Polybius and Plutarch, which are paralleled somewhat in both the ancient and the modern worlds.<sup>110</sup> Herodotus, it is true, was firmly convinced that the bigamy of Anaxandridas II was ‘totally un-Spartan’ (V. 40. 2; cf. Paus. III. 3. 7), and that may be so.<sup>111</sup> However, according to Polybius (XII. 6b. 8), writing in the second century B.C., it was an ‘ancestral custom’ and a ‘current practice’ for three or four men (or more if brothers) to share one wife and for their children to be counted as belonging equally to all. Polybius then makes the apparently separate point that, when a man had produced enough children, it was both honourable and customary for him to pass his wife on to a friend.<sup>112</sup>

Now the best friend of King Ariston was at first blissfully unaware of this second custom (Hdt. VI. 62), and the adelphic polyandry may have been a temporary expedient in a crisis.<sup>113</sup> But Polybius’ evidence still seems to me valuable for two

<sup>108</sup> Nilsson, op. cit. (n. 39), p. 855; Lacey, p. 318 n. 56; Bickerman, op. cit. (n. 58), 232 f., suggests that such marriages are quite regular in agrarian societies.

<sup>109</sup> The office of Gynaikonomos (Controller of Women) is not attested in Sparta before the reign of Trajan, but the earliest references to the magistracy as such are in Aristotle’s *Politics*: see generally C. Wehrli, ‘Les gynéconomes’, *MH* 19 (1962), 33–8. I can make nothing of the ‘Lakonian key’ first attested in Aristophanes (*Thesm.* 423), which apparently worked only from the outside: I. M. Barton, ‘Tranio’s Laconian key’, *GR*, 2nd ser. 19 (1972), 25–31.

<sup>110</sup> Hdt. IV. 104; Arist. *Pol.* II. 3, 1262a20 ff.; Caesar, *B.G.* V. 14 f.; Strabo XI. 9. 1, C515, XVI. 4. 25, C783. For the modern world see Starcke, op. cit. (n. 97), pp. 128–40.

<sup>111</sup> See J. H. Thiel, ‘De feminarum apud Dores condicione. ii’, *Mnemosyne* n.s. 58 (1930), 402–9, at p. 403 (this article is devoted to plural marriage and polykoity).

<sup>112</sup> This of course could imply the existence of the *kyrieia*. Pomeroy, p. 37, however, finds it ‘easier to believe that the women also initiated their own liaisons, whether purely for pleasure or because they accepted the society’s valuation of childbearing’.

<sup>113</sup> This suggestion is borne out by the context in which the polyandry is introduced by Polybius, the mixed marriages between slave men and free women at the time of the foundation of Lokroi in southern Italy c. 700 B.C.

reasons: first, it makes explicit the notion of female passivity that we saw embedded in the marriage transactions; secondly, it serves as a reminder that 'the institutions commonly described as marriage do not all have the same legal and social concomitants'.<sup>114</sup> To put it another way, monogamy within what we call the 'nuclear family' is only one among many possible variant pairing relationships contrived for the procreation of legitimate offspring and so for the transmission of hereditary private property.<sup>115</sup>

This potential variety becomes clear from a passage in Xenophon (*L.P.* 1. 7–9), which is expanded, though with revealing divergences, by Plutarch (*Lyk.* 15. 11–18). It might happen, says Xenophon, that an old man had a young wife.<sup>116</sup> Lykourgos, therefore, in order to abolish jealousy – 'womanish' jealousy, in Plutarch – made it legal for such an elderly husband to introduce into his house a younger man whose physique and character he admired, for the latter to beget children by his wife (in a kind of anticipation of our A.I.D. system). Xenophon does not say for whom the children are to be begotten, but one assumes (with Plutarch) that it is for the older man, since Xenophon then cites the reverse situation of a man who does not wish to marry and yet does wish to discharge his procreative duty to the state. Such a man – more likely a widower than a confirmed bachelor – was permitted by Lykourgos to select a fertile and distinguished woman, by whom, if he could persuade her husband (literally 'him who had her'), he might have children.<sup>117</sup>

Xenophon's explanation of the latter arrangement is that the wives wish to possess or run (*katechein*) two households, while the husbands wish to obtain for their existing sons brothers who will have no claim on the paternal inheritance.<sup>118</sup> It is also, however, worth noting a modern suggestion that these practices are based on the idea attested elsewhere that the 'noble seed' (Plut. *Lyk.* 15. 12) of the warriors should be distributed as widely as possible throughout the community.<sup>119</sup> This suggestion is at any rate not contradicted by Xenophon's tantalizing claim to know of many similar pairing arrangements in Sparta. All these were of course in line with the seemingly concerted effort to depreciate family life in Sparta. But, to repeat, depreciation of family *life* was far from tantamount to depreciation of the family *tout court*.<sup>120</sup> And the overriding consideration behind these arrangements was reproduction, in particular of legitimate

<sup>114</sup> E. R. Leach, 'Polyandry, inheritance and the definition of marriage', reprinted in J. Goody (ed.), *Kinship* (Harmondsworth, 1971), pp. 151–62, at p. 154. The Spartan system, incidentally, does not contradict Leach's hypothesis that polyandry 'is consistently associated with systems in which women as well as men are the bearers of property-rights'.

<sup>115</sup> In addition to Leach, op. cit., see R. N. Adams, 'An inquiry into the nature of the family', in G. E. Dole and R. L. Carneiro (eds.), *Essays in the Science of Culture in honor of Leslie A. White* (New York, 1960), pp. 30–49.

<sup>116</sup> The only attested instance is Kleonymos (uncle of Areus I, who reigned 309–265) with Chilonis (Plut. *Pyrrhus* 27. 17–19, 28. 5 f.). The simplest explanation of such marriages is that the man is remarrying on the death (frequently perhaps in childbed) of his first wife.

<sup>117</sup> Plutarch (*Mor.* 242B) has the same idea that the husband must be persuaded, but here the emphasis is laid upon the wife's duty of obedience in the first instance to her father and thereafter to her husband – again, the *kyrieia* seems to be implied.

<sup>118</sup> We might add that, if a daughter were produced, she and the existing son(s) would be *homomatrioi* and so, following Philo (n. 87), entitled to marry. They would thus unite in the succeeding generation the property of their married parents with that of the extra-marital partner.

<sup>119</sup> W. Den Boer, *Laconian Studies* (Amsterdam, 1954), pp. 216 f.

<sup>120</sup> Lacey, pp. 207 f. However, Lacey's study is misleading to the extent that it equates the Greek *oikos* (household) with our 'family' and employs an ideal-typical model of 'the family in the city-state', as if this had everywhere in Greece served the same functions and had the same history.

male children, in line with the legal compulsion placed on males to marry (above, section V).

It is perhaps significant that Xenophon makes no reference to adultery in Sparta.<sup>121</sup> By contrast, Plutarch (*Lyk.* 15. 16; *Mor.* 228 BC) felt bound to deny its occurrence explicitly. As far as sexual relationships between citizens are concerned, Plutarch seems to have been technically correct, and this is a remarkable comment on the emphasis laid on the maintenance of the male citizen population. None the less, it is certain that adultery in the sense of sexual intercourse between a citizen and a non-citizen who were not married to each other did occur.

The alleged paternity of the evanescent hero Astrabakos (Hdt. VI. 63–9) and the distinctly corporeal mortal Alkibiades,<sup>122</sup> in each case involving the wife of a king, do not particularly concern us here. The complex and confused evidence for the so-called Partheniai illuminates Greek attitudes to the proper relationship between the sexes,<sup>123</sup> but this mysterious group is attested only in connection with the foundation of Taras (modern Taranto) in c. 706. On the other hand, there is evidence for other specially named categories of men in Sparta which undoubtedly is relevant to the position of Spartan wives in our period. Xenophon (*Hell.* V. 3. 9) refers in a context of 380 B.C. to bastards (*nothoi*). Later sources (Phylarchos, *FGrHist* 81 F43; Plutarch, *Kleom.* 8. 1; Aelian, *V.H.* XII. 43) mention the category *mothakes*, to which lexicographers and scholiasts add that of the possibly identical *mothōnes*.

These disparate sources have been collected and well discussed, and the identification of at least some members of these categories as the offspring of Spartan fathers and Helot mothers seems virtually certain.<sup>124</sup> Such liaisons are at any rate a more cogent explanation for the lack of evidence for female prostitutes in Sparta (at least before the third century)<sup>125</sup> than alleged 'free love' among the Spartans. We cannot, however, say how frequent such liaisons may have been nor what psychological effect they may have had on Spartan wives – a salutary reminder of the inadequacy of the ancient evidence.

## IX

It will be noticed, finally, that very little has been said directly on the subject of gynocracy (and nothing about 'matriarchal survivals'). My silence is the measure of my disagreement with Aristotle (and Bachofen)<sup>126</sup> – tempting though it would have

<sup>121</sup> But his strained attempt to prove that Spartan men were more modest even than the women (*L.P.* 3. 4 f.) suggests that the accusation of female indiscipline (*anesis*) in Sparta was already current.

<sup>122</sup> Xen. *Ages.* 4. 5; Plut. *Alk.* 23. 7–9, *Ages.* 3. 1 ff., *Mor.* 467 F; Anon. *ap. Athen.* XIII. 574 CD (= Kock, *Comicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, iii, p. 398).

<sup>123</sup> S. G. Pembroke, 'Locres et Tarente: le rôle des femmes dans la fondation de deux colonies grecques', *Annales (ESC)* 25 (1970), 1240–70; P. Vidal-Naquet, 'Esclavage et gynécocratie dans la tradition, le mythe, l'utopie', in C. Nicolet (ed.), *Recherches sur les structures sociales dans l'Antiquité classique* (Paris, 1970), pp. 63–80, at pp. 72–5.

<sup>124</sup> D. Lotze, 'Mothakes', *Historia* 11 (1962), 427–35, followed in the main by Toynbee, *op. cit.* pp. 343–6; and Oliva, *op. cit.* pp. 174–7.

<sup>125</sup> Athen. XIII. 574 CD, 591 F; Clement, *Paed.* II. 10. 105. 2. There is a single representation of flute-girls in sixth-century Lakonian vase painting (Stibbe, *op. cit.* pp. 243, 279, no. 191), but this probably owes more to artistic convention than real Spartan life.

<sup>126</sup> cf. Pembroke, 'Women in charge: the function of alternatives in early Greek tradition and the ancient idea of matriarchy', *JWI* 30 (1967), pp. 1–35. Sparta in our period certainly does not meet C. G. Thomas' acceptable definition of a matriarchal society as 'one in which women enjoy recognizable economic, social and religious privileges which, in sum, give them greater authority than men': 'Matriarchy in early Greece: the Bronze and Dark Ages', *Arethusa* 6 (1973), 173–95.

been to cite the sixth-century bronze mixing-bowl found at Vix in France as a perfect illustration of Aristotle's view.<sup>127</sup> To a quintessential sexist like him, however, anything remotely approaching sexual equality, let alone female emancipation, both of which he thought he detected in Sparta, must have seemed like the world turned upside down. Moreover, Aristotle's criticisms really only apply to rich women, who were of course a minority of the women under study here.

But if for once it is easy to set aside the opinions of Aristotle, it is far harder to 'hold the balance with a steady and equal hand' (an expression of Edward Gibbon) in the longstanding controversy over the general social position of Spartan wives in the sixth to fourth centuries B.C. – not least, as has been shown, because of the nature of the ancient evidence. To be consciously anachronistic, a modern feminist might perhaps approve their equal though separate education, which may have included an intellectual element; their frankness of utterance; their liberating attire; their freedom from sedentary and stultifying domestic chores; their control and management of their household(s); and above all their property-rights. On the other side, however, the modern feminist is unlikely to be over-impressed by the way in which Spartan women were trained to act, and obliged to look, like men; by their restricted or non-existent choice in the matter or manner of acquiring a husband; by the way in which they were 'seized' and 'had' as wives in the domicile of their husbands, who could 'lend' them for extra-marital procreation; finally, and perhaps least of all, by the overriding emphasis placed on their child-bearing potential and maternal roles by men who monopolized the political direction of a peculiarly masculine society.

For what it is worth, my own view coincides roughly, and for rather different reasons, with that of Simone de Beauvoir: 'such examples as Sparta and the Nazi regime prove that [woman] can be none the less oppressed by the males, for all her direct attachment to the State'.<sup>128</sup> But even if I have failed to persuade readers of this, I hope that I may at least have made them hesitate before seeking to enlist the women of ancient Sparta as allies in the just cause of feminism.

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<sup>127</sup> This huge vessel (1.64 m high) is of disputed origin, but a cogent case for manufacture in Sparta can be made out; for some recent bibliography on this controversy see Rolley, *op. cit.* (n. 47), 131 f., 139. Around its neck there progresses a stately file of armed men; above them, in the form of a lid-handle, rises the crowning figure of a demure, draped woman.

<sup>128</sup> de Beauvoir, p. 89; cf. pp. 120 f., 143, 157, 174, 189, 446, 598.