**SMELLING THE BLACK SOUP**

**SPARTA, MORALISM, AND POLITICAL ALLUSION IN PLUTARCH [[1]](#endnote-1)\***

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**I**

In the proem to *Pelopidas and Marcellus* Plutarch looks at the possible causes of fearless behaviour on the battlefield. The Spartans are duly zoomed in on, first through the judgement of an anonymous man from Sybaris who thought that the Spartans ‘do not mind dying in wars, in order to escape the many hardships and such a lifestyle’ (*Pelopidas* 1.5 οὐ μέγα ποιοῦσι θανατῶντες ἐν τοῖς πολέμοις ὑπὲρ τοῦ τοσούτους πόνους καὶ τοιαύτην ἀποφυγεῖν δίαιταν). Plutarch quickly rebuffs this interpretation as a view derived from the decadent Sybarite character-type (1.6); life and death for the Spartans, he argues, are both equally satisfying exercises of noble valour (καὶ ζῆν ἡδέως καὶ θνῄσκειν ἀμφότερα ἀρετὴ παρεῖχεν, 1.7). To the man of Sybaris, however, the prime attribute of Sparta is its grim δίαιτα. Although the term certainly has the potential to signify much more than eating habits,[[2]](#endnote-2) it is plain to see that in any socio-cultural analysis of a collective life-style, δίαιτα, food is highly relevant.[[3]](#endnote-3) According to Athenaeus, the visitor from Sybaris commented on the Spartans’ courage after experiencing the traditional Spartan mess dinner, φιδίτιον, which he scored very low (4.138d ‘such a paltry existence’, οὕτως εὐτελοῦς διαίτης).[[4]](#endnote-4) In Aelian’s *Historical* *Miscellany* (13.38) the sardonic *chreia* is ascribed to Alcibiades and, what is more, the Spartans are said to embrace death in war as a way out of ‘the wretchedness that results from their customs’ (τὴν ... ἐκ τῶν νόμων ταλαιπωρίαν), rather than because of their dire meals. The variations of the anecdote in Athenaeus, Plutarch and Aelian thus reveal the interchangeability between Spartan dinners and the more abstract and catch-all concepts that mark out the communal identity of Sparta (δίαιτα, νόμοι) in the eyes of external observers.[[5]](#endnote-5) This interchangeability, in turn, reminds us of the general importance of food as a frame for projecting or querying societal (ethnic, religious, moral – the list might go on) values throughout the ancient world.[[6]](#endnote-6)

Gastronomic austerity is a staple ingredient of the Spartan legend.[[7]](#endnote-7) There is the story (Maximus of Tyre 17.1) about the Spartan authorities (τὰ τέλη) sending away the Syracusan chef Mithaecus; his culinary arts were alien to the people who train themselves ‘to need the necessary food, not designer food’ (δεῖσθαι τροφῆς ἀναγκαίας μᾶλλον ἢ τεχνικῆς). Much more famous and fraught was the Herodotean episode after the victory at Plataea (*Histories* 9.82), when Pausanias compares the splendid Persian repast with the Spartan meal (Λακωνικὸν δεῖπνον) and calls the latter ‘ever such miserable fare’ (δίαιταν ... οὕτω ὀϊζυρὴν).[[8]](#endnote-8) In the Plutarchan *Spartan Sayings* (230E-F) Pausanias singles out the main item of the Spartan menu: ‘our barley-bread’ (τὴν ἡμετέραν ... μᾶζαν).[[9]](#endnote-9)

The fullest extant accounts of what and how the true-type classical Spartans used to eat[[10]](#endnote-10) are found in Plutarch’s *Life of Lycurgus* (ch. 12) and in Book 4 of Athenaeus’ *Dining Sophists* (138b-143a). These texts draw on Hellenistic sources, which Athenaeus identifies and Plutarch does not.[[11]](#endnote-11) Another difference is that Athenaeus explicitly broaches the topic of Sparta’s descent into luxury, reflected in the change of the traditional dining protocols,[[12]](#endnote-12) whereas Plutarch, despite his alertness to the long-term deterioration of Sparta,[[13]](#endnote-13) does not foreground these concerns in the *Lycurgus* passage. The sense of change is not altogether absent in Plutarch; the phrase ‘for quite a long time they protected the mess punctiliously’ (*Lyc*. 12.5 μέχρι γε πολλοὺ τὰς συσσιτήσεις ἀκριβῶς διεφύλαττον) implies that departure from the Lycurgan rules did happen. But on the whole *Lycurgus* 12 offers appreciative comments on the Spartan practice, indeed inviting the reader to view it as current by using a sequence of verbs in the present tense.[[14]](#endnote-14) Notably, Plutarch uses the present tense when he points out the Spartans’ appetite for their black broth:

τῶν δὲ ὄψων εὐδοκίμει μάλιστα παρ' αὐτοῖς ὁ μέλας ζωμός, ὥστε μηδὲ κρεαδίου δεῖσθαι τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους, ἀλλὰ παραχωρεῖν τοῖς νεανίσκοις, αὐτοὺς δὲ τοῦ ζωμοῦ καταχεομένους ἑστιᾶσθαι.

Of the savoury dishes, the black broth is held in the highest esteem among them, so that the older men do not even ask for a piece of meat, but leave it for the young men, while they themselves feast on bowlfuls of the broth. (12.12; trans. R. Waterfield, modified)[[15]](#endnote-15)

This aura of nowness,[[16]](#endnote-16) which is close to yet not identical with ethico-biographical ‘timelessness’ across a great deal of Plutarchan *Lives*,[[17]](#endnote-17) is noteworthy. The reader is enticed by the present tense to think that Sparta keeps going on the gastronomic level – there are still men out there who age into addiction to the black soup.

Another trick that Plutarch appears to be pulling in the *Lycurgus* passage, writing as a moralist with some discernible sympathy for vegetarianism,[[18]](#endnote-18) is to downplay the carnivorous aspect of the Spartan diet.[[19]](#endnote-19) His checklist of the monthly food contributions from each member of the mess (12.3-4) is rather hazy on the supply of meats, especially pork for the black soup.[[20]](#endnote-20) Moreover, the older Spartans – that is, the more experienced practitioners of the Spartan ethos – are not interested in the meat anyway (12.12). All this may be a deliberate ploy by Plutarch to distance the (Lycurgan) Spartans from the luxury and cruelty of meat-eating and thereby to credit them with a righteous, well-nigh philosophical way of life.[[21]](#endnote-21) The Spartan men, notwithstanding their passion for a non-vegetarian soup, do not treat meat as a priority since they are neither savage nor decadent eaters (cf. 10.1); their dinners deserve to be labelled “temperance lessons” (διδασκαλεῖα σωφροσύνης, 12.4).[[22]](#endnote-22) Plutarch’s sleight of hand on the subject of meat in *Lycurgus* 12 aims to enhance idealization of Sparta, yet elsewhere he talks about the Spartan cuisine being simple and intensely carnivorous at the same time:

καθάπερ οἱ Λάκωνες ὄξος καὶ ἅλας διδόντες τῷ μαγείρῳ τὰ λοιπὰ κελεύουσιν ἐν τῷ ἱερείῳ ζητεῖν

as the Spartans give to the cook vinegar and salt only and command him to seek the rest in the slaughtered animal itself (*De tuen*. *san*. 128C; trans. F. C. Babbitt, modified)

Needless to say, meat is perfectly compatible with the Spartan heroic rigour – it is *Delikatessen* that are abhorrent.[[23]](#endnote-23) Agesilaus in Egypt is happy to receive flour, calves and geese, but pastries and perfume he passes on to the helots (*Agesilaus* 36.10);[[24]](#endnote-24) Lysander in Ionia rejects cakes as food unfit for a free man, yet eats, ‘with gusto’ (ἡδέως), the beef cooked κατὰ τὰ πάτρια, ‘in the ancestral way’ (Aelian, *Historical Miscellany* 3.20).

Consumption of black broth was regarded in antiquity[[25]](#endnote-25) as a hallmark feature of the Spartan living.[[26]](#endnote-26) The link between Spartan identity and the soup is made strong by the Middle Comic poet Antiphanes:

You were born in Lacedaemon, so you ought to stick to their customs. Go to dinner in the common mess, enjoy the broth (ἀπόλαυε τοῦ ζωμοῦ) (fr. 46.1-4, quoted by Athenaeus 4.142f-143a; trans. D. Olson).

A Doric-speaking character from a fifth-century comedy thinks of ‘very nice soup’ (δώμος τοι μάλα ἁδύς) when looking forward to the festival menu at Amyclae (Epilycus fr. 4.4, quoted by Athenaeus 4.140a). During the heyday of the Second Sophistic, a major work of Greek lexicography glosses the black broth as ‘Spartan repast, in the main’ (Pollux, *Onomasticon* 6.57: Λακωνικὸν μὲν ὡς ἐπὶ πολὺ τὸ ἔδεσμα). Pollux’s verdict must be taken with a pinch of salt though, because further literary evidence on μέλας ζωμός indicates that soup of that name was not cooked and consumed exclusively in the setting of the Spartan mess (e.g., Nicostratus fr.16; Alexis fr. 145.8-9; Matro, *Attic Banquet* 94). And one should not jump to the conclusion that the Spartan black broth was, to the Greeks, the culinary quintessence of Lycurgan austerity. The picture of food paradise conjured up by the fifth-century comedian Pherecrates includes ποταμοὶ ... ζωμοῦ μέλανος, ‘rivers of black broth’ (fr. 113.3 and fr. 137.3-4, from Athenaeus 6.268d and 6.269c-d respectively); the emphasis is on utopian excess, for sure,[[27]](#endnote-27) yet the audience are clearly supposed to concur that black broth is proper good food. The black broth of Pherecrates’ play would not necessarily taste the same as the Spartan stew: the factor of regional and other variation between recipes (filling in the details is no straightforward task)[[28]](#endnote-28) has to be reckoned with. Even so, it would seem that the default Greek opinion about black soup is by no means negative. The Spartans are not, therefore, gastronomic masochists whose favourite dish is unpalatable.[[29]](#endnote-29) In fact, their enthusiasm for black broth may come across precisely as a suspension of austerity. The broth, which they enjoy in generous quantities,[[30]](#endnote-30) is a relish (ὄψον) anyhow:[[31]](#endnote-31) it may be a far cry from, for example, the extravagance of Lucullus’ dinners (Plutarch, *Lucullus* 40.1 ὄψων ... παντοδαπῶν), but nonetheless it belongs with savoury and artfully prepared food.[[32]](#endnote-32)

**II**

The Spartan black broth is a paradoxical product, then. It is not absolutely unique in terms of recipe or taste, and it smacks of ambiguity vis-à-vis the mainstream (for the Greco-Roman imagination, that is) Spartan norms.[[33]](#endnote-33) Yet the black broth is without doubt a potent and consequential reference to Sparta. Its prominence in the Spartan legend shows how effectual, for the purposes of ‘invented tradition’, can be food celebrated as idiosyncratic and significantly ‘ethnic’.[[34]](#endnote-34) Nevertheless, the reputation of the Spartan μέλας ζωμός rests not so much on its gastronomical qualities per se, but rather on the geocultural situatedness which the dish requires and stands for. It is striking that in Plutarch’s *Lycurgus* 12 the description of the older Spartan men who are exceedingly fond of their soup is juxtaposed with an anecdote about the disappointment the black broth was known to cause when eaten outside Sparta and without full immersion (literally!) into the Spartan living and principles.

λέγεται δέ τινα τῶν Ποντικῶν βασιλέων ἕνεκα τοῦ ζωμοῦ καὶ πρίασθαι Λακωνικὸν μάγειρον· εἶτα γευσάμενον δυσχερᾶναι· καὶ τὸν μάγειρον εἰπεῖν· “Ὦ βασιλεῦ, τοῦτον δεῖ τὸν ζωμὸν ἐν τῷ Εὐρώτᾳ λελουμένους ἐποψᾶσθαι.”

It is told that one of the kings of Pontus bought a Laconian cook for the sake of the broth, and then, when he tasted it, disliked it. The cook said, “O king, only those who have bathed in the Eurotas ought to eat this broth as relish.” (*Lycurgus* 12.13)

In the compilatory pseudo-Plutarchan text *Ancient Customs of the Spartans*,[[35]](#endnote-35) the soup is being cooked for a more notorious autocratic ruler whose anticipation is almost comically thwarted, while the cook explains the cultural pre-requisites of the dish even more bluntly:

λέγεται Διονύσιος ὁ τῆς Σικελίας τύραννος τούτου χάριν Λακωνικὸν μάγειρον πρίασθαι καὶ προστάξαι σκευάσαι αὐτῷ μηδενὸς φειδόμενον ἀναλώματος· ἔπειτα γευσάμενον καὶ δυσχεράναντα ἀποπτύσαι, καὶ τὸν μάγειρον εἰπεῖν ‘ὦ βασιλεῦ, τοῦτον δεῖ τὸν ζωμὸν γυμνασάμενον Λακωνικῶς τῷ Εὐρώτᾳ λελουμένον ἐποψᾶσθαι.’

It is said that Dionysius the tyrant of Sicily bought himself a Laconian cook for the sake of this [broth], and ordered him to prepare it, sparing no expense. But when he tasted it, he was disgusted and spat it out. Whereupon the cook said, “O king, one must eat this broth as relish after exercise in the Spartan manner and a wash in the Eurotas.” (236F-237A; trans. F. C. Babbitt, modified)

There are plenty of foods conducive to exportation and symbolic re-enactment of identities abroad,[[36]](#endnote-36) but the Spartan μέλας ζωμός is apparently not one of them. The Spartan soup works exclusively in the Spartan landscape and, crucially, for the true insiders of that landscape.[[37]](#endnote-37) The secret of Sparta’s black broth is that it is part of a holistic and non-transferable (unless holistically) gastrosociality;[[38]](#endnote-38) the geographical location is important here as the backdrop to tightly-knit practices and values. Hence it may not be entirely fortuitous that in yet another version of the story the tyrant Dionysius tastes the black broth during a visit to Sparta.

*quid? uictum Lacedaemoniorum in philitiis nonne uidemus? ubi cum tyrannus cenauisset Dionysius, negauit se iure illo nigro, quod cenae caput erat, delectatum. tum is, qui illa coxerat: ‘minime mirum; condimenta enim defuerunt*.*’ ‘quae tandem?’ inquit ille. ‘labor in uenatu, sudor, cursus ad Eurotam, fames, sitis. his enim rebus Lacedaemoniorum epulae condiuntur*.’

Well, do we not know of the fare put before the Lacedaemonians at their public meals? When the tyrant Dionysius dined there, he said that the black broth which was the staple of the meal was not pleasing to him; whereupon the cook who had made it said, ‘No wonder; for you did not have the seasoning.’ ‘What is that, pray?” said the tyrant. “Toil in hunting, sweat, a run down to the Eurotas, hunger, thirst; for such things are the seasoning of the feasts of Lacedaemonians.’ (Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 5.98; trans. J. E. King, modified)

The frustrated outsider does not have to be based overseas, as long as he is fundamentally missing out on the totality of Sparta’s physical and, by the same token, moral habitus.[[39]](#endnote-39)

The anecdotes where the black broth becomes a trope for the Spartan identity are thus illustrative of the ancient belief in Sparta’s exceptionalism.[[40]](#endnote-40) Spartan food does not agree with foreigners because their taste buds alone cannot match up to the Spartan body and psyche, neither of which yields to casual sampling or imitation. Interestingly, Plutarch’s Cleomenes, who is himself a dietary traditionalist,[[41]](#endnote-41) is ready to upgrade the menu when foreign diners are present:

τῶν δὲ δείπνων αὐτοῦ τὸ μὲν καθημερινὸν ἦν ἐν τρικλίνῳ σφόδρα συνεσταλμένον καὶ Λακωνικόν, εἰ δὲ πρέσβεις ἢ ξένους δέχοιτο, δύο μὲν ἄλλαι προσπαρεβάλλοντο κλῖναι, μικρῷ δὲ μᾶλλον οἱ ὑπηρέται τὴν τράπεζαν ἐπελάμπρυνον, οὐ καρυκείαις τισὶν οὐδὲ πέμμασιν, ἀλλ᾿ ὥστε ἀφθονωτέρας εἶναι τὰς παραθέσεις καὶ φιλανθρωπότερον τὸν οἶνον. καὶ γὰρ ἐπετίμησέ τινι τῶν φίλων, ἀκούσας ὅτι ξένους ἑστιῶν ζωμὸν αὐτοῖς μέλανα καὶ μάζαν ὥσπερ ἔθος ἦν ἐν τοῖς φιδιτίοις παρέθηκεν· οὐ γὰρ ἔφη δεῖν ἐν τούτοις οὐδὲ πρὸς τοὺς ξένους λίαν ἀκριβῶς λακωνίζειν.

As to his meals, the standard daily pattern was for them to be served in a room with just three couches, and the meal was very restrained and Spartan. However, if he was entertaining envoys or men with whom he had ties of hospitality, two extra couches were brought in, while the servants brightened up the dinner a bit, not with sauces or sweetmeats, but by offering more generous portions and a more mellow wine. He even criticized one of his friends when he heard that in acting as host to foreigners the man had served them the black broth and barley bread, as would normally be done in the messes. Cleomenes said that there was no need to act in too rigidly Spartan a fashion on these occasions and in front of foreigners.” (*Agis*-*Cleom*. 34(13).4-5; trans. R. J. C. Talbert, modified)

At first blush, the reformer-king’s gastronomic liberalism is an attempt to improve Sparta’s international image. Yet maybe his rationale mirrors the reasoning of the cook in the anecdotes quoted above. Inflicting traditional Spartan food on foreigners amounts to fastidious display of the Spartan mores (λίαν ἀκριβῶς λακωνίζειν), which is also futile because the Spartan mores are too deeply special and unified to be meaningfully conveyed via a bowl of soup. Alas, we will never know whether Plutarch’s lost *Life of Augustus* contained a close-up of the emperor eating the Spartan broth; Cassius Dio tells that on his visit to Sparta (21 BCE) Augustus attended the mess (54.7.2 Λακεδαιμονίους ... τῇ συσσιτίᾳ ἐτίμησεν),[[42]](#endnote-42) but gives no details.

The only Plutarchan character who manages to fit convincingly into the Spartan mould is Alcibiades after his defection to Sparta.

In private dealings (ἰδίᾳ) during this time he had no less clout with the common people and beguiled them by adopting the Laconian lifestyle (κατεγοήτευε τῇ διαίτῃ λακωνίζων). For when they saw him with his hair uncut, bathing in cold water, accustomed to barley-bread and consuming black broth (μάζῃ συνόντα καὶ ζωμῷ μέλανι χρώμενον), they could not quite believe whether this was a man who ever had a cook in his house, or set eyes on a perfumer or endured the touch of Milesian wool. (*Alcibiades* 23.3; trans. R. Waterfield, modified)

The fact that Alcibiades’ disguise is but a fraud and a career move suggests that the Spartan authenticity is not impregnable. A singularly competent individual – Alcibiades is a maestro of mimicry (23.4-6)[[43]](#endnote-43) – will be able to replicate its code. Yet Alcibiades could be the exception that proves the rule about Spartan exceptionalism, and after all his nurse was from Laconia (1.3; cf. *Lycurgus* 16.5).[[44]](#endnote-44)

**III**

Plutarch’s references to μέλας ζωμός stimulate reflection on Spartan society and ideology, but also problematize the very task of exploring and understanding Sparta. Should one hope to do better than the anonymous Pontic king (*Lycurgus* 12.13; **see p. \*\*\*7\*\*\* above**)? Is it feasible to come to terms with the stubborn texture of the Spartan paradigm? How available and relevant was Sparta as a concept in the imperial world inhabited by Plutarch’s readers?[[45]](#endnote-45) The black soup itself was within their reach –the present tense in *Lycurgus* 12.12 is either a credible clue or, at the least, a bid for textual credibility.[[46]](#endnote-46) Sparta under the Empire offered manifold opportunities to engage with the Spartan tradition on site and at close range, performatively and participatorily:[[47]](#endnote-47) from autopsy of a brutal ritual (*Lycurgus* 18.2)[[48]](#endnote-48) to getting involved in the Spartan ephebic training, ἀγωγή.[[49]](#endnote-49) The full gastrosocial experience of the Spartan mess must have been accessible to visitors, as the indefinite temporal clause and especially the present tense of φασίν in Plutarch’s *Table Talk* 697E seem to imply:

ἐκεῖνοι μὲν γάρ, ὅταν νέον ἢ ξένον εἰς τὸ φιδίτιον παραλάβωσι, τὰς θυρίδας δείξαντες ‘ταύτῃ’ φασίν ‘οὐκ ἐξέρχεται λόγος’

For whenever they [sc. the Spartans] bring a young man or a foreigner to their dinner, they point at the door and say : ‘No talk exits that way.’ (trans. E. L. Minar)

Even though the request for confidentiality (cf. *Lycurgus* 12.8) does not meet with Plutarch’s approval (697E ‘the attitude and language should be the opposite of how the Spartans do it’, τοὐναντίον ἢ Λακεδαιμόνιοι φρονοῦντας καὶ λέγοντας), this is still a snapshot of Spartans who are sharing their food and their customs. The Plutarchan report has the air of factual statement,[[50]](#endnote-50) yet its nowness could be the result of *bona fide* synchronization through remembrance: as in the *Life of Lycurgus*, Sparta’s ‘timeless’ traits are carried over into its present-day profile. In other words, the proceedings sketched out in *Table Talk* 697E are contemporary and true-to-life within Plutarch’s literary reality, whatever the flesh-and-blood Spartans were up to at the time of writing.[[51]](#endnote-51)

There’s the rub, of course. Sparta in later antiquity is negotiated against its own ethico-political past, which gradually boils down to a retrospective teleology of the Lycurgan discipline, heroic warfare, and so on. But given that under the Principate the Spartan education and exemplarity no longer translated into all-out sovereignty or militarism, the Greco-Roman memory of Sparta is obliged to manoeuvre between implosion and compromise. Accordingly, some influential modern studies of Sparta’s image and legacy have diagnosed the imperial period as recreating an apolitical, antiquarian and, at the end of the day, shallow Spartophilia that fed off ethopoeic (and often clichéd) fantasies.[[52]](#endnote-52) More recent scholarship, however, strongly rehabilitates the status of the Greek past in the self-realisation of the Empire’s educated elites and the societal and literary projects within their purview; as a pool of narratives and identities which operated on a sliding scale from the local to the Panhellenic, the past constituted a valid and vital resource of authenticity and self-styling demanded by the contemporary context(s).[[53]](#endnote-53) To put it simply, the former approach tends to reduce the Spartan legend in imperial culture to an escapist outlet, whereas the latter approach is geared towards appreciating ideological nuances and allusively layered thematization. Does the ostensibly greater interpretative leverage of the second (essentially, post-modern) approach outweigh the honest political anxiety behind the older readings? What sort of heirloom was Sparta under the Empire?

If politics and ‘a delight in the artificial’[[54]](#endnote-54) are assumed to be working together, not against each other, then Sparta is nothing less than a throbbing hub of reminiscences, socio-cultural allegiances and reflective debate. Make-believe Spartan continuity was actively broadcast from within Sparta,[[55]](#endnote-55) but also permeated the wider literary outlook of the Second Sophistic.[[56]](#endnote-56) The mythohistoric Sparta itself allowed for topical flashbacks and refractions. One paramount conceptual bridge between Sparta’s past and the imperial present is φιλοτιμία, competitive ambition. In their own lifeworld hellenophone VIPs and intellectuals of the Empire were preoccupied with φιλοτιμία both rhetorically and politically;[[57]](#endnote-57) it would have been quite impossible for them to ignore Sparta as the prime example from classical Greece of the mentality of state-licensed φιλοτιμία and its dangers.[[58]](#endnote-58) The seemingly more conventional awareness of Spartan rigour and valour retained its discursive clout, too. Contrary to the ‘old-school’ view that the imperial reception of Sparta was an utterly innocuous pursuit,[[59]](#endnote-59) some depictions of the archetypal (‘Lycurgan’) Spartan civilization bait the reader into an atmosphere of corrective – at any rate, polemically expedient – utopia. This is, for instance, how Plutarch spells out Lycurgus’ choice of venue for the assembly:

… οὔτε παστάδων οὐσῶν οὔτε ἄλλης τινὸς κατασκευῆς. οὐθὲν γὰρ ᾤετο ταῦτα πρὸς εὐβουλίαν εἶναι, μᾶλλον δὲ βλάπτειν, φλυαρώδεις ἀπεργαζόμενα καὶ χαύνους φρονήματι κενῷ τὰς διανοίας τῶν συμπορευομένων, ὅταν εἰς ἀγάλματα καὶ γραφὰς ἢ προσκήνια θεάτρων ἢ στέγας βουλευτηρίων ἠσκημένας περιττῶς ἐκκλησιάζοντες ἀποβλέπωσι.

… neither porticos nor any other construction were there; because he thought that these things had no effect on the process of sound deliberation but hindered it, rather, making the people gathered there foolish and vacuous due to inane ideas brought on by gazing at statues and paintings, or at the theatrical stages, or at the extravagantly decorated roofs of council ­halls. (*Lycurgus* 6.4-5; trans. R. Waterfield, modified)

Here the wistfully polemical overtones are loud enough. The puritanism of the Lycurgan civic space is contrasted with architectural plenitude as witnessed by Plutarch’s contemporaries, not least in the cityscape of imperial Sparta.[[60]](#endnote-60)

It is clear that both Sparta’s present and its past are more than capable of deflating the prerogative of Sparta to embody the Spartan ideal.[[61]](#endnote-61) On the Greco-Roman literary horizon, the impetus to glorify Sparta co-exists with the notion of Sparta caught in the cycle of backsliding from Lycurgan standards and reviving them, also at the dinner table. Plutarch’s *Lives* of Agis and Cleomenes explore the challenges of full-scale gastrosocial regeneration in Hellenistic Sparta.[[62]](#endnote-62) The self-indulgent Spartans of the mid-first century CE, according to Flavius Philostratus, were willing to recoup their classic identity when prompted to do so:

καὶ τὰ φιλίτια ἐπανῆλθε, καὶ ἐγένετο ἡ Λακεδαίμων ἑαυτῇ ὁμοία.

… and the messes came back, and Sparta became similar to itself. (*Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 4.27)[[63]](#endnote-63)

The instability, whether historical or fictional, of Sparta’s relationship with her own *gestalt* is thus part and parcel of the Spartan theme for imperial readers – metaphorically speaking, they know all too well that the Spartan black soup has had to be re-heated time after time.

The imperial context, moreover, adds allusive pathos to almost any scenario in which Sparta is disrupted or existentially inhibited by external political pressures. The worst crisis would have to be the ban on the ἀγωγή in the aftermath of Sparta’s ill-fated struggle against the Achaean League (189/188 BCE);[[64]](#endnote-64) Plutarch portrays a demoralized community who ‘submitted … to the severing of the city’s sinews, as it were’ (*Philopoemen* 16.9 ὥσπερ νεῦρα τῆς πόλεως ἐκτεμεῖν ... παράσχοντες). It appears that to historically savvy Greco-Roman cogitators, the resilience of the Spartan ἀγωγή under Roman rule was in fact a dramatic success story rather than an unfaltering and organic perpetuation.[[65]](#endnote-65) But even minor, low-key narratives that dwell on the moments of hesitancy and political malaise in historical Sparta cannot help being acutely relevant to the ideological and discursive environment of Roman Greece. Consider the mood of the following Plutarchan anecdote, in which a Spartan king keeps his feet firmly on the ground after hearing a lofty proposition.

Someone was arguing for freedom of the Greeks – not a cowardly plan but hard to implement (περὶ τῆς τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἐλευθερίας οὐκ ἀγεννῆ μέν, δυσχερῆ δὲ ἐπιτελεσθῆναι). He replied, ‘Your speech, stranger, is wanting power and money.’ (‘προσδέονταί σου, ὦ ξένε,’ ἔφη, ‘οἱ λόγοι δυνάμεως καὶ χρημάτων.’) (*Spartan Sayings* 216A)

In the transmitted text the anecdote features among the sayings of Agis II, yet there are strong reasons to suspect that conflation between the *dicta* of Agis II and Agis III has taken place.[[66]](#endnote-66) The slogan ‘freedom of the Greeks’ gives off a very different vibe, of course, during the Peloponnesian War[[67]](#endnote-67) (if the words were uttered by Agis II, that is) than it does in 330s BCE, when Agis III tried to strike back against Macedon.[[68]](#endnote-68) Whichever chapter of Spartan history this anecdote may actually reflect, its commonsensical message about freedom[[69]](#endnote-69) would not have been lost on the Greek and Roman readers of the imperial era. ‘Freedom’ in their political lexicon and praxis is a value that people still fight for – on the fringes of civilization (Dio of Prusa 12.20; Tacitus, *Agricola* 30.1, 31.4); conversely, for the beneficiaries and stakeholders of the *pax Romana*, ‘freedom’ means assorted liberties and preferences that are granted from above, in line with a policy ratified or directly initiated by the emperor. The legislative, economic and ideological contents of liberation vary, from a manifesto targeting a particular social group (cf. Pliny, *Panegyric* 66.4 ‘you command us to be free’),[[70]](#endnote-70) to bestowal of limited autonomy on a provincial city,[[71]](#endnote-71) to tax exemptions for an entire region (Plutarch, *God’s* *Slowness to Punish* 568A; Pausanias, 7.17.3).[[72]](#endnote-72) At its core, this model of freedom is a trade-off between the blatant imbalance of power within the Empire and the elites’ reciprocal and genuine nervousness about the risks of antagonism. Plutarch assures contemporary Greek statesmen that their communities are getting a fair deal:

ἐλευθερίας δ᾿ ὅσον οἱ κρατοῦντες νέμουσι τοῖς δήμοις μέτεστι καὶ τὸ πλέον ἴσως οὐκ ἄμεινον·

The citizen bodies[[73]](#endnote-73) possess as much freedom as the rulers allocate, and more freedom would not be necessarily better. (*Advice on Government* 824C)[[74]](#endnote-74)

‘Freedom’ remains available to the Greeks, because the Romans are keen not to run the Empire as slavemasters (Dio of Prusa 31.111; cf. Plutarch, *Advice on Government* 814F); compare how Pliny’s friend Maximus is urged against takinga cavalier attitude towards the freedom, however vestigial, of the renowned Hellenic cites such as Athens and Sparta (Pliny, *Epistle* 8.24.3-4).[[75]](#endnote-75) Despite these reassurances, on the Greek side there is the lurking fear that one’s *polis* and nation could be stripped of freedom ‘under any random pretext’ (Dio of Prusa 31.112), or when the emperor decides to tighten his grip on revenues and provincial administration (Pausanias, 7.17.4).

I contend that for Plutarch’s readership, the guarded response to ‘freedom of the Greeks’ in *Spartan Sayings* 216A would hit home as a prod to them to cross-examine their own transcripts of freedom, in a world where radical action by a Greek city-state was pretty much unthinkable,[[76]](#endnote-76) and heroic propaganda, while tolerated, borders on being a liability (cf. *Advice on Government* 814C). There is no suggestion in the Plutarchan anecdote, however, that the prudent and pragmatic Spartan king demurs at the idea of Panhellenic freedom-fighting in principle, so the story is both something less and something more than a clear-cut antecedent of Greek compliance with the Roman Empire. Having said that, a scrupulous reader of the Spartan apophthegms might wonder how Agis’ caution squares with the claims by anonymous Spartan men and a woman that freedom is their primary, exclusive and inalienable expertise – effectively, the crux of their identity (*Apophth.* 235B ‘we alone of the Greeks have learned to be free and not to obey others’, also *Apophth.* 234B and *Sayings of Spartan Women* 242D).[[77]](#endnote-77) Such a commitment to freedom, wherein national sovereignty and personal honour are fused, impels the Spartans to choose death over surrender or slavery: their answer to Philip II’s ultimatum is that that they are resolved ‘to die like men’ (ἀνδρείως, 235B),[[78]](#endnote-78) and enslaved Spartans of either sex may kill themselves rather than perform a degrading chore (234C, 242D).[[79]](#endnote-79) And yet not every Spartan who is about to become a slave seems to be set on suicide (234C);[[80]](#endnote-80) the proud declaration at 235B is closer, in hindsight, to a diplomatic bluff, since no military showdown with the Macedonians ensued[[81]](#endnote-81) – perhaps it is the intention that counts? In short, ‘freedom’ is an axis of Spartan exemplarity but also a catch, for whenever the historical (anecdotal, textbook) Spartans fail to deliver gallantly and spectacularly on freedom, Sparta’s uncompromising ethico-political posture slumps just a bit, since it is by definition incompatible with survival, calculated inaction, and acquiescence with outside control. Or is it?[[82]](#endnote-82) The Plutarchan anecdotes are not merely swatches from the narrative of Spartan decline; the upshot of all this intratextuality is that the Spartan renaissance under the Empire is left tacitly begging for vindication – let us not forget that the self-referential repertoire of imperial Greek literature is haunted by the idiom of slavery (e.g., Joseph. *BJ* 2.358; Dio of Prusa 34.51; [Longinus] *On the Sublime* 44.3).

Cognizance of Sparta in the imperial period hinges to a large extent on the motif of the Spartans’ military mettle. Stereotyped as warriors *par excellence* (e.g., Maximus of Tyre, 23.2), the Spartans continued to be popular and paradigmatic in a rhetorical climate where warfare was an enduring obsession.[[83]](#endnote-83) Again, this is not a situation of purely antiquarian reverence, because the Second Sophistic thrives on handling classical heroism as culturally contiguous, relevant (rather than obsolete) and quasi-extant;[[84]](#endnote-84) the title of Plutarch’s lost (declamatory?) text *How Should a Spartan Fight*? (Lamprias Catalogue no. 213 πῶς δεῖ Λάκωνα μάχεσθαι;) may well testify to the unabated immediacy of Sparta’s warlike past in the educated Greek imagination.[[85]](#endnote-85) Yet it was also possible to counterpoint Sparta’s heroic kudos by hinting at the downward trajectory of the Spartan performance on the battlefield. Plutarch appears to insinuate exactly that in the *Life of Brutus* 41.8, through a fleeting mention of the Spartans mowed down by Brutus’ troops at Philippi:

ἦν δὲ φόνος ἐν τῷ στρατοπέδῳ τῶν ἁλισκομένων, καὶ δισχίλιοι Λακεδαιμονίων ἥκοντες ἐπίκουροι νεωστὶ συγκατεκόπησαν.

In the camp there was a massacre of the captives, and two thousand newly arrived Lacedaemonian auxiliaries were slaughtered also.

The abrupt phrase and the passive voice of the verb συγκατεκόπησαν speak volumes.

It is both predictable and symptomatic that it was the Romans who were the yardstick for measuring the extent of Sparta’s debilitation. Plutarch in the *Brutus* holds up this yardstick more or less discreetly.[[86]](#endnote-86) However, the reality of the Empire left the whole issue open to point-blank and drastic assessment. For instance, when Dio of Prusa acknowledges that ‘the duty ... to honour the governors’ (ἀνάγκην ... τοὺς ἡγεμόνας τιμᾶν) – that is, the Roman officials and benefactors – is incumbent upon every Greek city-state, his sample list of communities where such reverence is practised (θεραπεύουσιν) begins with ‘the Athenians and the Spartans’ (31.105).[[87]](#endnote-87) Earlier in the same speech, which upbraids the Rhodians for their re-use of honorific statuary,[[88]](#endnote-88) the citizens’ relationship with the statues and the honorands themselves is exposed by Dio as cravenly pragmatic yet also shrewdly diachronic:

‘Because the majority of them are Romans, who would touch (τίς ἂν ... ἅψαιτο) them? But those standing next to them (παρεστῶτες αὐτοῖς) are Macedonians, and these over there are Spartans – it is these that we touch (ἁπτόμεθα).’ (31.43; trans. J. W. Cohoon)

This is tantamount to saying that from the Rhodian, and the wider Greek, perspective,[[89]](#endnote-89) the Romans are the latest instalment in a series of superpowers, all of which (so far) proved to be temporary. By way of deadpan provocation, Dio encourages his audience to think of the defunct Spartan hegemony as a foil and precedent to the Roman Empire.[[90]](#endnote-90)

To date, the allusive resonance of Sparta in imperial Greco-Roman culture has not received the attention it calls for. In his magisterial survey of references to Sparta in the literature of the High and Late Empire,[[91]](#endnote-91) Eugène Napoleon Tigerstedt argues that the interest in Spartan material is disconnected from how the texts interact with their own socio-political present, pointedly so in the case of Plutarch who ‘renders unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar and unto Lycurgus what belongs to Lycurgus’.[[92]](#endnote-92) The problem with Tigerstedt’s approach is that it neglects the deep-running tendency in imperial literature of outsourcing contemporary relevance to stories set in the past as well as on foreign (more accurately, pre-Roman) terrain, for example, in Achaemenid Persia or classical Athens or at the court of Alexander the Great.[[93]](#endnote-93) Indeed, Sparta’s suitability for extraterritorially and historically embedded allusion would have been writ large, considering the steady circulation, from the time of Polybius onwards, of explicit commonalities between Sparta and Rome. Alongside the alleged ethnic connection (e.g., Plutarch, *Romulus* 16.1; *Numa* 1.5), Lycurgan Sparta and early Rome were homogenized as constitutional structures and as models of military and civic discipline.[[94]](#endnote-94) It is hardly accidental that dietary dirigisme came into the picture, too:

Note that the Laconians and the Romans had a law that one was not allowed to buy food (ὀψωνεῖν) according to one’s own taste or as much as one wished. They gave instructions that the citizenry should be moderate (σωφρονεῖν τοὺς πολίτας) in a number of ways, and not least at table (διὰ τῆς τραπέζης). (Aelian, *Historical Miscellany* 3.34; trans. N. G. Wilson, modified)

Poignantly, Sparta could be mobilized into the discourse of Rome’s imperial growth and the ensuing loss of internal integrity. In Athenaeus’ *Dining Sophists* 6.273e-f, the Spartan constitution tops off the list of practices which the Romans had the good sense to borrow from the nations they had subdued (παρὰ τῶν χειρωθέντων) – note how Rome’s indebtedness to Sparta is exonerated straightaway by the Romans’ superior constancy:

μιμησάμενοί τε κατὰ πάντα τὴν Λακεδαιμονίων πολιτείαν διετήρησαν αὐτὴν μᾶλλον ἢ ἐκεῖνοι.

They also imitated the Spartan constitution in all respects and preserved it better than the Spartans themselves did. (trans. S. D. Olson)

But this was back in the day. The speaker (who happens to be the party host Larensius himself) goes on to deplore the indiscriminate cultural eclecticism of Rome’s ‘now’ (6.273f νῦν δὲ), albeit that his examples of the demise of frugality, and of culinary ethics in particular (6.275a-b), are anything but contemporary.[[95]](#endnote-95)

**IV**

There is no mistake that for imperial Greek literature Sparta can be a rich resource of allusions which are pregnant with political irony, pessimism, *schadenfreude*, nostalgia and every other conceivable subcategory of resentment and, broadly, resistance.[[96]](#endnote-96) It would be rash to see this subversive drift as specifically anti-Roman – rather, the confrontation is between Rome and the universal, relentless forces of ethico-political entropy, so starkly illustrated by Sparta in the *longue* *durée*.[[97]](#endnote-97) The Spartan pathway takes the Greek intellectuals to a safe discursive space for pondering on the Roman Empire and, naturally, for tipping it off about the hazards of normative and/or hegemonic statehood. Although the message does not have to advance beyond mischievous intimation (e.g., Dio of Prusa 31.43),[[98]](#endnote-98) it is likely that more tangible and constructive feedback might crystallize from the texts which espouse an overtly educational and Greco-Roman programme, such as Plutarch’s *Parallel* *Lives*. Many Plutarchan passages are implicitly interpretable asguidelines (or, caveats) tailored to Trajan’s reign.[[99]](#endnote-99)Furthermore, in pairs of *Lives* and throughout the series, biographical coverage and comparative moralism mesh with historical sensitivity at the macro-level, where states, societies and epochs are sized up and mutually coordinated.[[100]](#endnote-100)

An intriguing (and hitherto largely unnoticed) case of ‘positive’ political allusion framed through a somewhat eulogistic reading of Sparta’s past is *Lycurgus* 30.4-5.[[101]](#endnote-101) In the middle of a lengthy digression, Plutarch refers to several Spartan commanders, all of whom led operations abroad, as proof that the graduates of the traditional Spartan system were all-round experts in discipline and authority:

Thus, people refuse to obey those who are incapable of command; obedience is a lesson taught by the ruler (ἡ πειθαρχία μάθημα μέν ἐστιν τοῦ ἄρχοντος), because the right sort of leader inculcates the right sort of compliance. Just as the object of horsemanship is to produce an even-tempered, tractable horse, so the kingly science is about instilling obedience in men (βασιλικῆς ἐπιστήμης ἔργον ἀνθρώποις εὐπείθειαν ἐνεργάσασθαι). In fact, what the Spartans instilled in others was not so much obedience but rather a desire to obey and to be ruled by them (Λακεδαιμόνιοι δὲ οὐκ εὐπείθειαν, ἀλλ᾿ ἐπιθυμίαν ἐνειργάζοντο τοῖς ἄλλοις τοῦ ἄρχεσθαι καὶ ὑπακούειν αὐτοῖς). People did not ask them to send ships or money or hoplites, but a single Spartiate leader (ἕνα Σπαρτιάτην ἡγεμόνα), and when they got him they treated him with respect and awe (μετὰ τιμῆς και δέους) – as the Sicilians treated Gylippus; the Chalcidians, Brasidas; and all the Greeks living in Asia, Lysander, Callicratidas, and Agesilaus. They called these men ‘regulators’ and ‘chasteners’ of the masses and of the officials, wherever it was (τοὺς μὲν ἄνδρας ἁρμοστὰς καὶ σωφρονιστὰς τῶν ἑκασταχοῦ δήμων καὶ ἀρχόντων ὀνομάζοντες). They regarded the Spartans’ city as a whole as a tutor or teacher of respectable living and stable government (ὥσπερ παιδαγωγὸν ἢ διδάσκαλον εὐσχήμονος βίου καὶ τεταγμένης πολιτείας ἀποβλέποντες). (trans. R. Waterfield, modified)

Plutarch is busy pushing the idea that Greek communities, from Sicily to Asia Minor, used to crave subordination to the agents of the Spartan order.[[102]](#endnote-102) If the overarching aim is to celebrate the impact of the Lycurgan customs, this may seem a slightly odd move. By accepting the invitations to govern, the Spartans sleepwalk into global mastery. Yet, as Plutarch admits before long, Lycurgus was not in favour of expansionism (31.1 ‘Still, Lycurgus’ main point then was not to leave his city in command of the maximum number of subjects…’, οὐ μὴν τοῦτό γε τῷ Λυκούργῳ κεφάλαιον ἦν τότε, πλείστων ἡγουμένην ἀπολιπεῖν τὴν πόλιν);[[103]](#endnote-103) in the *Life of* *Aristides* Plutarch is impressed with the Spartans’ decision to quit from their position of Panhellenic supremacy (in the wake of recent victories against Persia), so as to concentrate on the moral temper of their citizenry instead (23.7).[[104]](#endnote-104) But perhaps in *Lycurgus* 30.5 the Spartans are grist to an altogether different ideological mill. The reason why Plutarch puts an agreeable spin on the history of Sparta’s international interventions may be that he means to energize a parallel between Sparta and the most self-evident mistress of the Mediterranean world – that is, of course, the Roman Empire.[[105]](#endnote-105) The passage contains vocabulary which warrants such allusive assimilation: “leader” (ἡγεμόνα) as well as “kingly science” (βασιλικῆς ἐπιστήμης) chime in with the standard Greek terminology for Roman rule during the Principate.[[106]](#endnote-106) Especially interesting lexical clues are ἁρμοστάς, “regulators” and σωφρονιστάς, “chasteners”. Let’s examine these two words more closely.

The term σωφρονιστής carries moralizing and didactic connotations, which can be summoned to define a political entity that holds back or penalizes, either *de facto* or hypothetically, some other political entity (Thucydides 3.65.3, 6.87.3, 8.48.7; Plato, *Republic* 471a6-7). Much more commonly, however, σωφρονιστής designates the figure(s) responsible for supervision in the sense, broadly understood, of pedagogical effort – from hands-on involvement with youngsters (e.g., Demosthenes 19.285; Philo, *Migration of Abraham* 116, *Special Laws* 2.240, *Joseph* 254; Aelius Aristides 29.226) to forceful philosophical monitoring and likewise to the time-honoured poetic transmission of ethical values at large (e.g., Maximus of Tyre 3.7.a; Strabo 1.2.3; Dio of Prusa 2.54; Pollux, *Onomasticon* 4.39; Julian, *To the Cynic Heracleios* 8).[[107]](#endnote-107) The term gained particular traction in Attica during the last three decades of the fourth century BCE, when it served as the official title of the overseers (one per *phulê*) of ephebes ([Aristotle], *Athenian Constitution* 42.2-3; [Plato], *Axiochus* 367a; cf. Demosthenes 19.285).[[108]](#endnote-108) The post of σωφρονιστής was discontinued, judging from the hiatus in recorded data, before the end of the fourth century BCE, then made a startling comeback around the middle of the second century CE, as evidenced by numerous Attic inscriptions.[[109]](#endnote-109)

Now, Plutarch may not have lived to witness the resuscitation of σωφρονισταί in the schedule and parlance of Attic ephebeia,[[110]](#endnote-110) but there can be little doubt that in *Lycurgus* 30.5 this word was chosen by him with an eye to its educational tinge. The claim that the Spartan governors abroad were characterized as ‘chasteners’ prepares for the sweeping generalization about Sparta’s prestige *qua* ethico-political teacher (30.5 ὥσπερ παιδαγωγὸν ἢ διδάσκαλον εὐσχήμονος βίου καὶ τεταγμένης πολιτείας), which Plutarch proceeds to elaborate upon by citing two wisecracks from the days of Spartan imperialism (30.6-7):

Apparently Stratonicus jibed about this, when he proposed a mock law to the effect that the Athenians should be organizing mysteries and processions, the Eleans should be responsible for athletic contests, because this is what they do best, and the Lacedaemonians should be flogged (δέρεσθαι) for any mistakes the Athenians and Eleans might make! This saying is meant to get a laugh, but Antisthenes the Socratic remarked, when seeing the Thebans puffed up with pride after the battle of Leuctra, that they were no different from children jumping for joy because they gave a thrashing to their tutor (συγκόψαι τὸν παιδαγωγὸν). (trans. R. Waterfield, modified)

The trouble is that neither of these jokes is in keeping with the upbeat picture of Spartan authoritativeness offered above (30.4-5). In 30.6 the Spartans are nominated for the role of flogged scapegoats,[[111]](#endnote-111) whereas the Battle of Leuctra (30.7) represents a blow against Sparta’s quasi-pedagogical prepotency in warfare and politics. [[112]](#endnote-112) The Thebans’ triumph at Leuctra not only throws into relief the finiteness of Sparta’s military might – the optimism of the prior assertion, that ‘the Spartans instilled in others (τοῖς ἄλλοις) … a desire to obey and to be ruled by them’ (30.4), is willy-nilly put to the test too. Furthermore, it is tempting to see the spirit of intertribal one-upmanship, which is what both jokes in 30.6-7 palpably capitalize on, at work behind the phrase τοὺς μὲν ἄνδρας … σωφρονιστὰς …ὀνομάζοντες in 30.5; as a known technical term from the vocabulary of Athenian *ephebeia*, the word σωφρονισταί is a rather ambiguous word choice for paying a compliment to the Spartans.[[113]](#endnote-113)

On a more positive note, in the Greek communities under the Roman Empire ephebic education was an important conduit for good citizenship and enculturation overall,[[114]](#endnote-114) so an allusion to *ephebeia* (via σωφρονιστάς) in *Lycurgus* 30.5 may suffice to steer Plutarch’s ancient readers towards ideological certitude. The sundry instances of sarcasm, hostility and defeat that befell the historical Spartans (30.6-7)[[115]](#endnote-115) complicate but do not annul the advantages of a political model based on normative ethics,[[116]](#endnote-116) consent and rightful control – that is, the model which Sparta was thought once upon a time to have exemplified (30.4-5). While the term σωφρονιστής has plenty of regionalist baggage, it also helps to induce a perception of the imperial agenda as some kind of global ephebate (by analogy with today’s ‘global citizenship’). The Romans, in their turn, are consciously construed in hellenophone prose through the semantic properties of σωφρονιστής. Thus, the singular form of this Greek word can be applied to an individual in charge of ethico-political superintendence in the Roman state, such as the censor (Plutarch, *Cato the Elder* 16.2; *Fortune of Romans* 322E) or the emperor’s adviser (Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 52); Plutarch’s contemporary Josephus calls the Roman governor and his troops ‘foreign chastisers’ (ἀλλοφύλους … σωφρονιστὰς) of the multiple revolts that flared up in Judaea in the early first century CE (*Jewish Antiquities* 17.277). Unlike Josephus, who talks about violent punishment set against the background of brazen imperialistic abuse,[[117]](#endnote-117) Plutarch in *Lycurgus* 30.4-5 envisages a good-natured and salutary rapport between the local populations and their imported bosses. It would not be far-fetched to suppose that Plutarch was inspired to boost the image of beneficial external governance with the term σωφρονιστής by his reading of Plato’s *Republic*. In Plato, the lexeme ushers in the clarification of how the warriors of Callipolis are going to treat the other Greeks (471a6-7):

εὐμενῶς δὴ σωφρονιοῦσιν, οὐκ ἐπὶ δουλείᾳ κολάζοντες οὐδ’ ἐπ’ ὀλέθρῳ, σωφρονισταὶ ὄντες, οὐ πολέμιοι.

They will be moderating in a gentle spirit, not punishing with enslavement and destruction, for they are chasteners , not enemies. (trans. G. A. M. Grube, modified)

Apart from the fact that Plutarch knows Plato’s texts intimately (cf. *Table Talk* 718C), he is apt to recall Platonic theory when ruminating on the Roman Empire (e.g., *Fortune of Romans* 316E-F; *Galba* 1.3-4). Sparta, *ephebeia*, Rome and a whiff of Platonism – σωφρονιστής in *Lycurgus* 30.5 runs a gamut of cultural references, or better, cements them all into a rewarding interpretative platform.

Yet more vibrant and far-reaching associations are unlocked by the word ‘regulators’, ἁρμοστάς. On the one hand, ‘harmost’ is a historical term for a Spartan commandant abroad. The term was remembered as a specifically Spartan political idiolect (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 5.74.3; Appian, *Civil Wars* 4.2.7); it belongs in the narrative of Sparta’s pre-eminence during the fifth and early fourth centuries BCE[[118]](#endnote-118) and is therefore at home in imperial Greek literature that deals with the period (e.g., Plutarch, *Alcibiades* 29.6, 30.1; *Lysander* 13.5; *Pelopidas* 13.3, 31.6; Aelius Aristides 26.49). But ‘harmost’ also crops up as a descriptor for plenipotentiary authority that has no concrete affiliation to Sparta as such (Xenophon, *Anabasis* 5.519-20; Plutarch, *Demetrius* 39.4). The sophist-cum-scholar Pollux, writing in the 180s CE, lists ‘harmost’ with titles applicable to the holder of autocratic or near-autocratic power.

εἴποις δ' ἂν <…> τὸν δὲ ἄρχοντα ἔξαρχον, ἡγεμόνα προηγεμόνα, προστάτην, δεσπότην, βασιλέα, ἐπιμελητήν, ἁρμοστήν, ὕπαρχον, σατράπην, στρατηγόν, αὐτοκράτορα, τύραννον, δυνάστην, μόναρχον, ἔφορον ἐπόπτην ἐπίσκοπον

You might call … the ruler: principal, leader, foreguide, champion, master, king, curator, harmost, prefect, satrap, commander, lord, tyrant, chief, monarch, overseer, inspector, supervisor… (*Onomasticon* 8.84)

Saliently, the term is being used about Roman administrators of overseas territories:[[119]](#endnote-119) in Lucian, ἁρμοστής corresponds to the post of provincial governor (of Asia: *Death of Peregrinus* 9; *Toxaris* 17; of Egypt: *Toxaris* 32), while Appian’s account of the Roman conquest of Spain (*Spanish Wars* 7/38) mentions legates of praetorian rank (στρατηγούς) who were sent annually to the new province as ‘regulators or managers … of peace’ (ἁρμοστὰς ἢ ἐπιστάτας … τῆς εἰρήνης).[[120]](#endnote-120) Appian, moreover, takes heed of the term’s Spartan provenance when he looks for the Greek equivalent of the powers arrogated by the Second Triumvirate in 43 BCE (*Civil Wars* 4.2.7):

καινὴν ἀρχὴν … ἴσον ἰσχύουσαν ὑπάτοις (ἣν ἄν τις Ἑλλήνων ἁρμοστὰς ὀνομάσειεν, ὃ καὶ Λακεδαιμόνιοι τοῖς ἄρτι καθισταμένοις τὰ ὑπήκοα ἐτίθεντο ὄνομα).

new magistracy… with the same power as consuls. (Among the Greeks these would be called harmosts, which is the name the Lacedaemonians gave to those whom they appointed over their subject states.) (trans. H. White)

With these usages of ἁρμοστής Lucian and Appian (and Pollux) indulge the Second Sophistic’s taste for stylistic archaism,[[121]](#endnote-121) yet the word must inevitably trigger cross-cultural reflection and allusivity.

In the philosophically informed texts, ἁρμοστής would tend to acquire a suprahuman and outright cosmic dimension, with the accent on creation and maintenance of order for the universe and mankind alike.[[122]](#endnote-122) The word comes in handy as a reference to the supreme deity (Maximus of Tyre, 41.2: ‘the regulator of the heavens’, τὸν οὐρανοῦ ἁρμοστήν) or the mythological civilizers who were appointed ‘as if regulators’ (ὥσπερ ἁρμοστὰς) by the gods (Dio of Prusa, 30.27). Plutarch employs ἁρμοστής in the course of Platonizing dialogical argumentation about Eros and also in (presumably) more serious exegesis of Platonic cosmogony:

PLUTARCH: Eros, our king, chief magistrate and regulator (ἡμῖν δὲ βασιλεὺς καὶ ἄρχων καὶ ἁρμοστὴς)), is brought down from Helicon to the Academy by Hesiod and Plato and Solon, with a crown on his head. (*On Love* 763E-F; trans. D. A. Russell, modified)

LAMPRIAS: Then, after setting up Reason in each substance as its regulator and guardian (ἑκάστῃ [sc. οὐσίᾳ] λόγον ἐγκαταστήσας ὥσπερ ἁρμοστὴν καὶ φύλακα), he [the Demiurge] created the worlds… (*Oracles in Decline* 430E)

It is obvious that the philosophical and theological appositeness of ἁρμοστής is owed to the noun’s in-your-face etymology – “harmony” cannot fail to be a good thing. The culturally enshrined merits, as well as the sheer availability, of such genial re-literalization of the term ἁρμοστής[[123]](#endnote-123) explain why in *Lycurgus* 30.5 the Spartan governors are so briskly whitewashed; Plutarch there is prioritizing[[124]](#endnote-124) the idea of ethico-political harmony over the dark stories about harmosts with which he was very familiar from the historical tradition.[[125]](#endnote-125)

Last but not least, in Plutarch’s essay *On the Fortune and Virtue of Alexander* the word ἁρμοστής epitomizes the overlap between divine providence and human politics of imperial calibre. Alexander regards himself as ‘the universal heaven-sent regulator and mediator of the whole world’ (329C κοινὸς ἥκειν θεόθεν ἁρμοστὴς καὶ διαλλακτὴς τῶν ὅλων). The mass wedding of Macedonian soldiers to Persian girls, which Plutarch hails as a union between Europe and Asia, is an event at which Alexander performs several roles simultaneously, but that of ἁρμοστής has a particularly conclusive quality to it (329E).[[126]](#endnote-126) It goes without saying that to Plutarch, and in imperial Greco-Roman literature more broadly, Alexander is a profoundly paradigmatic figure for raising and channelling issues of cultural identity and autocratic and imperialist power. There is Romanness (Roman Empireness, rather) aplenty around Alexander;[[127]](#endnote-127) his impersonation of the ideologies of harmony and global peace coheres with the ‘conformist’ discourse of Rome’s imperial know-how[[128]](#endnote-128) where the very same ideological strands are brought to the fore (e.g., Aelius Aristides, 26.66; cf. Plutarch, *Fortune of Romans* 317C). But as educator of humanity Alexander is also comparable with Lycurgus[[129]](#endnote-129) and, if my reading of *Lycurgus* 30.4-5 stands, with the leaders the Lycurgan system was expected to produce.

The allusive nexus in *Lycurgus* 30.4-5 distorts history for the sake of moral and ideological satisfaction. For Plutarch and his target readership, it is a win-win situation, really: Sparta momentarily emerges as a respectable precursor of the Roman Empire, while the Romans can gauge the characteristics required of successful imperial supervisors through the assets of Greek terminology (ἁρμοστής, σωφρονιστής) which they are entitled to appropriate.[[130]](#endnote-130) The Spartan black soup never works outside Sparta (Section II above), but perhaps a sprinkle of Spartan-style authority may improve and enrich the shared consummation of Empire by the ruled, the ruling class, and their philosophical mentors.

1. \* I am grateful to the co-editors and to the anonymous reviewer for their valuable comments. Special thanks are due to Rosanna Rocca, Mica Kajava, and the late Anton Powell. Translations which are not noted otherwise are my own. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. In Plutarch δίαιτα is regularly loaded with the broader, inclusive sense of lifestyle: e.g., *Lyc*. 5.3; *Nic*. 11.2; *Per*. 34.5; *Alex*. 40.1, 47.5; *Comp*. *Lys*.-*Sulla* 3.2. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Cf. Nenci 1989, 25. Plutarch applies δίαιτα to the sphere of nutrition, too: e.g., *Lyc*. 10.2-3; *Cato Ma*. 21.3; *Ant*. 53.6; in *Crass*. 1.2 family meals (τὴν ... τράπεζαν) have a formative influence on the overall manner of living (ὅθεν ... περὶ τὴν δίαιταν). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Cf. 12.518e “living like this”, τοιοῦτον βίον. The reliability of Athenaeus’ picture of Sybaritic luxury is questioned by Gorman & Gorman 2007. On Athenaeus’ dietary ethnography, see generally Bruit & Schmitt Pantel 1986; Oikonomopoulou 2013. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Consider also the verbal duelling between Phocion and Demades in Plutarch’s *Life of Phocion* 20.6: when Demades sarcastically notes that Phocion would not be against having ‘the Spartan constitution’ (τὴν Λακωνικὴν ... πολιτείαν) at Athens, Phocion replies that as a perfume-wearing fashionista Demades is hardly the right person ‘to advise the Athenians about Spartan dinners (περὶ φιδιτίων) and to praise Lycurgus.’ On Plutarch’s exploitation of regional and national stereotypes, see Schmidt 1999; Alexiou 2017. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Wilkins & Hill 2006, 15, 43, and *passim*. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. E.g., Fisher 1989, 31; Nafissi 1991, 179-85; Lavrencic 1993, 62-3, 123-4; Dalby 1996, 126; Link 1998, 83; Wilkins 2000, 97, 147-48, 277-8; Wilkins & Hill 2006, 41-2. On the ancient perception of Sparta as an ideological experiment in resistance to luxury, see generally Tigerstedt 1974, 21-2; Bernhardt 2003, 109-21, 294-8; for critical scrutiny of the tradition, see van Wees 2018a, 213-27. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. It should not be overlooked that by the end of the scene Pausanias has drawn an equation between the primitive Spartan cooking and Greek food *tout court*: cf. Link 1998, 83 n. 7. Athenaeus quotes Herodotus *verbatim* yet replaces the epithet ὀϊζυρήν with ταλαίπωρον (4.138d); see Pelling 2000, 181-4. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. On the Spartan μᾶζα, see Lavrencic 1993, 63-6. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Figueira 1984, 107: ‘The ideology of the elite at Sparta was also an ideology of a particular style of eating.’ The gastrosocial tensions inherent in the Spartan syssitic arrangements are explored forcefully by Link 1998, 83-101. Lavrencic 1993 remains the most comprehensive overview. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Plutarch’s reticence is deplored by Bielschowsky 1869, 7: “eo magis dolendum est, quia ... nobis ne conjecturam quidem facere licet.” For a tentative explanation, see **n. \*\*\*15\*\*\*** below. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. 4.141f τὴν δὲ τῆς διαίτης τῆς τοιαύτης σκληρότητα ὕστερον καταλύσαντες οἱ Λάκωνες ἐξώκειλαν εἰς τρυφήν (‘the Spartans later loosened this stern regimen and drifted headlong into luxury’), followed by a long quote (or, paraphrase?) from the historian Phylarchus. Cf. Figueira 1984, 107-8; Lavrencic 1993, 63; Link 1998, 99. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Gengler 2019, 213. See further Pelling and Mossman in this volume, as well as the unified reading of Plutarch’s Spartan *Lives* by Liebert 2016, 100-46. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. ‘The Spartans call (προσαγορεύουσιν) their common messes φιδίτια’ (12.1), ‘the oldest man ... says (φησίν)’ (12.8), ‘they do not accept (οὐ προσδέχονται) the newcomer’ (12.10), ‘they throw in (ἐμβάλλουσι) the morsels of bread’ (12.11), ‘such is the protocol (ἔχει τάξιν) of the mess’ (12.14). Cf. Kennell 1995, 24. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Cf. [Plutarch], *Inst*. *Lac*. 236F: δοκιμαζομένου μάλιστα παρ' αὐτοῖς τοῦ μέλανος λεγομένου ζωμοῦ, ὥστε μὴ κρεαδίου δεῖσθαι τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους, παραχωρεῖν δὲ τοῖς νεανίσκοις (‘the so-called black broth is greatly approved by them, so that the older men do not ask for a piece of meat, but leave it the young men’). The use of present tense in this work is noted by Santaniello 1995, 20-1 n. 21. For archaic Sparta, the popularity of μέλας ζωμός might be an anachronism: so Thommen 2017, 115-16. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Something of a trend in imperial Greek references to Sparta: e.g., Pausanias 7.1.8 ‘where the Spartans hold the dinners called *pheiditia* (ἔνθα τὰ δεῖπνα Λακεδαιμονίοις ἐστὶ τὰ Φειδίτια καλούμενα)’; Dio of Prusa 25.3 on the harsh routine the Spartans follow ‘even now’ (ἔτι νῦν). Plutarch may be playing a similar game when he opts not to mention any sources in his account of the Spartan meal (*Lyc*. 12) – otherwise the impression of nowness would have been sabotaged; cf. *Quaes*. *conv*. 697E, discussed below. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Pelling 2002, 241-3. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Newmyer 2006, 85-102. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Contrast Athenaeus 4.141b and 142e, also 141e, 139c; Plutarch, *Ages*. 33.7: ‘meat from the mess’ (ἐκ φιδιτίου κρέας); Lavrencic 1993, 48, 85. The black broth was also known as αἱματία, ‘blood-soup’: Pollux, *Onomasticon* 6.57. See Lavrencic 1993, 46, 66; Wilkins 2000, 149-50 n. 25. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. On this, see Michell 1952, 291; Figueira 1984, 90; Lavrencic 1993, 44-6; Link 1998, 100-1; less confident is Ruzé 2005, 289. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. The Neoplatonist Porphyry in *Abst*. 4.5.1-2 explicitly construes the Spartan diet along these lines; Tigerstedt 1974, 266. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. See further Humble 2002, 92-8. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Cf. Aelian, *VH* 14.7: ‘Spartan cooks were expected to know about meat only (ἔδει δὲ ὀψοποιοὺς ἐν Λακεδαίμονι εἶναι κρέως μόνου); anyone with other skills (παρὰ τοῦτο ἐπιστάμενος) was banished from Sparta, as if this were the purging of a sick element’ (trans. N. G. Wilson). [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Cf. Nepos, *Ages*. 8.4; Athenaeus 14.657b-c; yet in Plutarch’s *Apophth*. *Lac*. 210B-C Agesilaus (on Thasos) takes flour only. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. And sometimes today, too: Nafissi 2000, 22; Thommen 2017, 1; cf. the title of Valzania 1999. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. As perhaps it genuinely was: Lavrencic 1993, 66-7, 69. See also Wilkins 2000, 97 (with n. 187) and 277; Dalby 2003, 214. Yet see **n. \*\*\*14\*\*\* above**. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Wilkins 2000, 110-15, 119-21; Hitch 2018, 33-4. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. See further Lavrencic 1993, 67-9. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. As some modern scholars have been too readily concluding; e.g., Link 1998, 83, 101; Liebert 2016, 120; more references in Lavrencic 1993, 67 n. 32. On the other hand, there is little disagreement that the Spartan ‘after-dinner treats’, τὰ ἐπάϊκλα were toothsome: Bielschowsky 1869, 18-20; Lavrencic 1993, 69-77; Nafissi 2000, 32-3, 38-40; van Wees 2018b, 241-2. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Athenaeus, 4.141b: ‘enough soup to cater for the whole party through the entire dinner’ (ζωμὸς ἱκανὸς ὢν παρὰ πᾶν τὸ δεῖπνον ἅπαντας αὐτοὺς παραπέμπειν). Cf. Figueira 1984, 91. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Plutarch’s choice of word in *Lyc*. 12.12 (τῶν ... ὄψων) may be read against the Platonic wariness about ὄψον as an element of pleasurable lifestyle, with the benefits and pitfalls that it comprises: *Rep*. 373a3, 559b6; *Tht*. 175e4-5; Davidson 1997, 25; cf. Plut. *De soll*. *anim*. 959E. The Sicilian chef Mithaecus is characterized by Plato as a master and teacher of ὀψοποιία: *Grg*. 518b6-c1; cf. *Rep*. 404d1-2 and Maximus of Tyre 17.1; see Dalby 1996, 109-11. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Dalby 2003, 212-13; further, Davidson 1997, 20-6. Nicostratus, fr. 16 (from Athenaeus, 12.517a and 14.664c) implies that black broth is a relatively uncomplicated dish; see Wilkins 2000, 285-8. Yet it is also recognized that a generic soup (ζωμός) involves skilful seasoning: Plutarch, *De* *tuen*. *san*. 137A, cf. Pollux, *Onomasticon* 7.26; tellingly, a prosaist’s ornate style can be compared to over-seasoned soup (Lucian, *Hist*. *scr*. 44 τοῖς κατηρτυμένοις τῶν ζωμῶν). The notion of culinary craft is adjacent to the idea of pleasure. In Plutarch’s *Spartan Sayings* 218C (cf. 223F-224A) Archidamus II draws a patronizing analogy between a virtuoso harper and a broth-maker (ζωμοποιός) who cooks for the Spartans, and the narrator makes sure to reinforce the point: ‘there is no difference between affording pleasure through the sound of instruments and through preparation of flavoured foods and broth’ (τῆς δι’ ὄψων καὶ ζωμοῦ σκευασίας, trans. R. J. C. Talbert, modified). Lavrencic (1993), 68-69 stresses that flavoured food in Sparta would have been confined to the festive menu, as opposed to food eaten on a daily basis; cf. van Wees 2018b, 247-8. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. For hard-line polarization between the Spartan identity and pleasure, see Plutarch, *Apophth*. *Lac*. 210A and Maximus of Tyre 33.2. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Modern comparanda are countless and, obviously, much better documented; see e.g., Tyrell, Hill and Kirkby 2007 on the inauguration of Scottish national food in the nineteenth century. Seminal work on ‘invented traditions’ by Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Tigerstedt 1974, 89-92; Kennell 1995, 20-3, 102-7. Unlike the *Sayings of the Spartans*, on which see Stadter 2014 and Scott 2017, 35-6, there have been no major breakthroughs recently in the debate about the authorship of the *Customs*: Santaniello 1995, 19-21. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. See Tyrell, Hill and Kirkby 2007, 56-8. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Lavrencic 1993, 33-5 claims that during the classical age foreigners were in any case very rarely admitted into the Spartan mess; yet see Thommen 2017, 111. Cf. text to **nn. \*\*\*49-50\*\*\* below**. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. The Spartan gastrosociality encompasses, *inter alia*, rules about speech (Plutarch, *Lyc*. 12.6-8). A sensible foreign guest would abide by these implicit rules – even if for him it means staying silent for the duration of the dinner, as shown by the anecdote about the ‘sophist’ Hecataeus (Plutarch, *Lyc*. 20.3; *Apophth*. *Lac*. 218B); Lavrencic 1993, 34 n. 81 assumes that the pioneer historian Hecataeus of Miletus is meant here, yet a plausible alternative could be the early Hellenistic thinker and ethnographer Hecataeus of Abdera, on whose intellectual context see Warren 2002, 150-9. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Tigerstedt 1974, 22; Liebert 2016, 89-90. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. The most recent reappraisal of Spartan exceptionalism is Hodkinson 2018. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Cf. Athenaeus 4.142b-f. It is therefore grimly ironic that Cleomenes sends his henchmen to assassinate the ephors in their mess hall (*Agis*-*Cleom*. 28(8.1-2). [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Cartledge and Spawforth 2002, 199-200; Spawforth 2012, 89-91. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Duff 1999, 235-6; Verdegem 2010, 273-8. Cf. Nepos, *Alc*. 11.3-5. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. For *Quellenforschung*, see Verdegem 2010, 106-8. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. My focus is going to be on the ideological quandaries within the Spartan legend, rather than on the social history of Roman Sparta. For the latter, the most arresting case study is C. Julius Eurycles and his male offspring: Chrimes 1949, 169-204; Bowersock 1961; Piper 1986, 155-67; Cartledge and Spawforth 2002, 97-101, 110-11; Balzat 2005; Steinhauer 2010; Kennell 1999, 201-3; 2010a, 184-6; Thommen 2014, 157-60; 2017, 177-9; Rizakis & Zoumbaki 2017, 162-3, 168; Lafond 2018, 407-8; Gengler 2019, 208-9. This family was on Plutarch’s radar: *Ant*. 67.2-4; *Reg*. *et imp*. *apophth*. 207F; *De laude ips*. 539A; see Jones 1971, 41; Puech 1992, 4850-5. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. On *pheiditia* in imperial Sparta, see further Chrimes 1949, 161-2; Cartledge & Spawforth 2002, 199-200; Spawforth 2012, 90-1. Thommen 2017, 181 warns that ’[I]nwiefern die Speisegemeinschaften noch regelmaßiger Bestandteil des tägliche Lebens waren, bleibt unklar.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. E.g., Michell 1952, 336; Tigerstedt 1974, 165-7; Lavrencic 1993, 122; Swain 1996, 74; Desideri 2002a, 325; Hölkeskamp 2010, 329-30; Kennell 2018, 648, 658. The standard study of imperial Sparta is Cartledge & Spawforth 2002, 105-19, 127-211; see also Thommen 2014, 155-67; Lafond 2018; Kennell 2018. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. See further Baudini 2013; Powell 1989, 188 provides astute gloss on the Plutarchan passage. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Spawforth 1980, 203-6; Kennell 1995, 86-7; 2018, 658. Humble 2004 takes stock of the scanty earlier evidence on foreign boys entering the ἀγωγή. For succinct discussions of the Spartan ἀγωγή during the Roman era, see Kennell 2010a, 190-1; 2010b, 208-11; 2018, 646-8; Gengler 2019, 214-15. Desideri 2002a tries to map the interest in the ‘Lycurgan’ ἀγωγή onto the evolving ancient arguments about the role of the Roman state in education. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. This is how *Quaes*. *conv*. 697E was taken by Bielschowsky 1869, 17. On Plutarch’s first-hand acquaintance with Sparta, see most recently Davies 2020, 519-24. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. See **n. \*\*\*\*45\*\*\*\*** above. A good handful of Laconian inscriptions from the second century CE contain the term ἔνσιτος (*IG* V.1.53.35, V.1.64.14, V.1.71.18, V.1.129.4; in the nominative plural V.1.65.26, V.1.89.5, V.1.116.13, V.1.128.14, V.1.1507.3; cf. V.1.1315.21-22 προτενσιτε[ύ]οντος), which suggests entitlement to “honorific dining-rights” (Cartledge & Spawforth 2002, 180) in the company of Sparta’s senior officials; because the word *pheidition* turns up too (*IG* V.1.128.13; V.1.150.1; V.1.155.6; V.1.1507.1), it seems safe to infer that the format and menu of the meals were supposed to be traditional. Yet while some of these inscriptions fall in Plutarch’s lifetime (*IG* V.1.53; less likely, V.1.1315), the holders of the dining rights mentioned there are not foreigners but local grandees: see Bradford 1977, 37 and 296. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. Ollier 1943, 167-9, 173-5; Tigerstedt 1974, 107, 163, 166, 195-6, 207, and *passim*; also Rawson 1969, 107, 112-13; Piper 1986, 189-90. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. Flagship panoramic studies are Swain 1996, 65-100, Schmitz 1997 and Whitmarsh 2005, 66-73; the groundwork was laid by Bowie 1970. See also e.g., Schmitz 1999; van Nijf 1999; 2001; Connolly 2001; Desideri 2002b; 2013; Konstan & Saïd 2006; Jung 2006; Bowie 2007; Jones 2010. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. After ní Mheallaigh 2014, 23, whose book is focused on the (meta)literary strategies of imperial Greek prose. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. Kennell 1995, 97; Liebert 2016, 108-9. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. Gengler 2019, 205-6, 219; **nn. \*\*\*13-15\*\*\*** above. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. E.g., Panagopoulos 1977, 206-8; Schmitz 1997, 97-135; Roskam, de Pourcq & van der Stockt 2012; Stadter 2015, 270-85; 2011; Liebert 2016, 41-3, 196, 202-203; Aloumpi 2017; Lafond 2018, 404, 413, 415; Zadorojnyi 2019. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. Liebert 2016, 103-4; Lucchesi 2018. On the centrality of φιλοτιμία in the Plutarchan vision of Sparta, see Duff 1999, 84; Pelling 2012, 57-8; Liebert 2016, 101, 115-17, 122-5, 141, 144. Plutarch delves into the perils of Spartan φιλοτιμία especially in the biographies of Lysander and Agesilaus: see Stadter 1999, 482-6; Duff 1999, 84-5, 178-80, 194; Candau Morón 2000, 466-73. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. So Ollier 1943, 172: ‘On n’idealise plus Sparte contre rien ni contre personne.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. See Cartledge & Spawforth 2002, 127-33; Cavanagh 2018, 85-6;Lafond 2018, 416; Gengler 2019, 216-18. Plutarch’s portrayal of Lycurgan Sparta may also bespeak qualms about the booming ‘epigraphic habit’ in the cities of the Roman Empire: while γραφάς in *Lyc*. 6.5 could refer both to paintings and to inscriptions, the gendered strictures on sepulchral epigraphy (*Lyc*. 27.3) are covered by the blanket approbation of Lycurgus’ funerary laws (27.1 ‘he arranged most excellently’, ἄριστα διεκόσμησεν). The Greek text of *Lyc*. 27.3 is notoriously problematic: see Brulé & Piolot 2004; Dillon 2007; Volpe Cacciatore 2021, 105-7. On Plutarch’s attitude to epigraphy, see generally Liddel 2008. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. E.g., Liebert 2016, 109; Kennell 2018, 643. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. Cf. *Ag*.*-Cleom*. 4.2 ‘meals, baths, the Spartan practices” (καὶ δεῖπνα καὶ λουτρὰ καὶ διαίτας Λακωνικάς), 32(11).4 ᾽the gymnasia and the public messes were recovering their proper order (τὸν προσήκοντα τῶν τε γυμνασίων καὶ τῶν συσσιτίων κόσμον ἀναλαμβανόντων), 37(16).7 ᾽the barley-bread (τὴν μάζαν) and short cloak … and abolition of wealth and restoration of poverty᾽. [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. See Abraham 2014, 473-4. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. Livy 38.34. See **n. \*\*\*89\*\*\*\*** below. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. With potentially provocative political implications – it may be worth pondering how in Plutarch’s *Ag*.-*Cleom*. 38(18).4 even a partial revival of ἀγωγή helps Sparta to resurge as a major player of Greek politics: ‘Just a short time had passed, and they had only just resumed their traditional customs and had got back into the way of the famous *agoge* (ἁψάμενοι μόνον τῶν πατρίων ἐθῶν καὶ καταστάντες εἰς ἴχνος ἐκείνης τῆς ἀγωγῆς), yet already – as if Lycurgus were there in person and conducting their policy – they were offering ample proof of their valour and discipline as they had regained the Peloponnese and were winning back the leadership of Greece (τὴν τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἀναλαμβάνοντες ἡγεμονίαν) for Sparta.’ (trans. R. J. A. Talbert) [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. Santaniello 1995, 331. [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
67. Cf. Duff 1999, 193; Raaflaub 2004, 194-202. [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
68. On the reign of Agis III, see Badian 1967; Cartledge and Spawforth 2002, 21-4; Stewart 2018, 385-7. The anonymous champion of Greek freedom in *Apophth*. *Lac*. 216A could be none other than Demosthenes: cf. Aeschines 3.167; further, Dmitriev 2011, 421-3. [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
69. The importance of having sufficient human and material resources is underscored repeatedly in Greek (and specifically Spartan) aphoristic wisdom: Santaniello 1995, 331, 373. Still, it matters that in *Apophth*. *Lac*. 216A the familiar warning interlocks with a sorely sensitive ideologeme, such as freedom. [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
70. ‘We’ and ‘us’ in Pliny’s *Panegyric* are shorthand for the senatorial class: Norena 2011, 33-5. See further Whitmarsh 2001, 166-7; Connolly 2009, esp. 268-74; Madsen 2014, 19. Attrition of the Roman freedom (*libertas*) under the Principate is of course a leitmotif in the work of Pliny’s friend Tacitus: see e.g., Strunk 2016; van der Blom 2020. [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
71. Millar 1993, 237; Ando 2010, 34-5; for further bibliography on ‘free cities’ in the Roman Empire, see Meyer-Zwiffelhoffer 2002, 104 n. 8. [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
72. Plutarch uses the term ‘race’, γένος (cf. *Flam*. 12.13 ‘the Greeks’, τοὺς Ἕλληνας), although strictly speaking taxation was abolished in 67 CE by Nero only for the province of Achaea (cf. *SIG*3 814). The unmistakable precedent is T. Flamininus’ liberation of Greece in 196 BCE, narrated at length by Plutarch in *Flam*. 10.4-11.7; note that the Spartans are not listed among the liberated Greek tribes (10.5), since they were never completely subdued by Macedon. [↑](#endnote-ref-72)
73. On δῆμος in the official vocabulary of the imperial era, see Millar 1993, 244-5. [↑](#endnote-ref-73)
74. Freedom is a veritable fault-line of Plutarch’s political thinking: see Jones 1971, 120-1; Pelling 2002, 244-46; 2014, 159; Ángeles Durán López 2004, 35-8, 41; Liebert 2016, 37-8. For analysis and contextualization of *Advice on Government*, see Swain 1996, 161-86; Duff 1999, 291-8; Trapp 2004; Desideri 2011; Pelling 2014, 153-60. [↑](#endnote-ref-74)
75. Rocca 2013. On the history and scope of Sparta’s status as a “free” polis under Roman control, see Cartledge and Spawforth 2002, 93-4, 149-55. [↑](#endnote-ref-75)
76. E.g., Lafond 2018, 403-4; cf. nn. \*\*\***83-84**\*\*\* below. [↑](#endnote-ref-76)
77. Freedom here thus equals refusal to bow to external dictate (which is automatically conceptualized as enslavement, cf. Seneca, *Ep*. 94.62) – whereas within the Spartan polity civic obedience and military discipline are of course a *sine qua non*. [↑](#endnote-ref-77)
78. See further Scott 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-78)
79. Also Philo, *Prob*. 17/114; Seneca, *Ep*. 77.14; cf. Seneca the Elder, *Suas*. 2.8. [↑](#endnote-ref-79)
80. Think also of the cooks bought by the gastronomically curious foreign autocrats: Plutarch, *Lyc*. 12.13 and [Plutarch] *Inst*. *Lac*. 236F-237A – although in all probability they were not pureblooded Spartiates: see Lavrencic 1993, 94-6. [↑](#endnote-ref-80)
81. Cartledge & Spawforth 2002, 14, 18. [↑](#endnote-ref-81)
82. Philostratus’ Apollonius of Tyana insists that the Spartans ‘are the freest of the Greeks’ (*VA* 6.20.2 ἐλευθεριώτατοι … τῶν Ἑλλήνων εἰσί), and generally that under the Empire ‘the Greeks are still lovers of freedom’ (8.7.38 Ἕλληνες δὲ ἐλευθερίας ἐρασταὶ ἔτι). Compare and contrast the cautionary speech by Herod Agrippa in Josephus (*BJ* 2.358-61), where the Athenians, the Spartans, and the Macedonians all exemplify how even the heroic and militaristically ambitious people have ended up in bondage to Rome. [↑](#endnote-ref-82)
83. Tigerstedt 1974, 168-225, *passim*. On the pervasiveness of war in Greek rhetoric and prose fiction under the Empire, see Russell 1983, 23-6;Lalanne 2006, 125-7. On the Greeks joining the real-life imperial army, see Bowie 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-83)
84. This does not rule out the occasional defeatist insight, from the military angle, into Greece’s present: thus, Plutarch tags on the contemporary *polis* the Sophoclean half-verse ‘neither lances of the flatland…’(*Praec*. *reip*. 813E, citing Soph. *Trach*. 1058) and chooses the hoplite levy as the criterion for estimating population decline (*De def*. *or*. 414A). [↑](#endnote-ref-84)
85. But it was equally possible to press home the gap between imperial Sparta and its martial excellence in the olden days. The sage Apollonius (Philostratus, *VA* 4.31.2) sees no point in teaching the first-century CE Spartans about courage: ‘And to what use’, he said, ‘are you going to put courage?’ (‘καὶ τί’ ἔφη ‘τῇ ἀνδρείᾳ χρήσεσθε;’). In his excursus on the Spartan men’s custom of wearing their hair long (8.7.17), Apollonius alludes to their heroic militarism in the past tense: ‘it was practised by them when they were at their peak as warriors’ (κατὰ <τοὺς> χρόνους ἐπιτηδευθὲν αὐτοῖς, [ἐς] οὓς μαχιμώτατα αὑτῶν εἶχον). [↑](#endnote-ref-85)
86. In 46.1 Brutus promises his soldiers Thessalonica and Sparta ‘for plunder and booty’ (εἰς ἁρπαγὴν καὶ ὠφέλειαν). The promise is never fulfilled, but for a split second the image of Sparta as a weak and vulnerable city flashes before the reader. [↑](#endnote-ref-86)
87. See Lewin 1999, 559-62. [↑](#endnote-ref-87)
88. Desideri 2011, 91; Atwill 2014; Bailey 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-88)
89. A key tactic of Dio’s speech is to coaxthe Rhodians into calibrating the self-image of their polis against the Panhellenic narrative: Jones 1978, 30; Bailey 2015, 50, 55-7. [↑](#endnote-ref-89)
90. Signally, the Spartans are aligned with the Macedonians and the Romans and thus dissociated from Hellenism, although elsewhere Dio may describe the Spartans and the Athenians as ‘the foremost Greeks’ (τῶν ἄκρως Ἑλλήνων, 50.2). Likewise, the interrelation between Sparta and Greekness in Plutarch’s *Lives* gets tangled every now and then. Numa was a ‘far more Hellenic (μακρῷ τινι ... ἑλληνικώτερον) lawgiver’ than Lycurgus (*Comp*. *Lyc*.-*Numa* 1.10), and Philopoemen – the man whom the Romans dubbed ‘the last of the Greeks’ (*Phil*. 1.7; *Arat*. 24.2) – made sure to suppress the Spartan ἀγωγή(189/188 BCE), so that its subsequent revival had to be authorized, again, by the Romans (*Phil*. 16.7-9); see Chrimes 1949, 45-7; Kennell 1995, 9-11; Cartledge & Spawforth 2002, 78-9, 82; Spawforth 2012, 91-2. On Hellenicity as a nexus of ethnic consciousness and cultural assumptions amongst the imperial Greek intelligentsia, see generally Kemezis 2014; Dench 2017, 103-7. [↑](#endnote-ref-90)
91. Tigerstedt 1974, 168-297. [↑](#endnote-ref-91)
92. Tigerstedt 1974, 263. [↑](#endnote-ref-92)
93. Persia: e.g. Roller 2001, 3-6; Schwartz 2003; Connors 2008, 165-7; Whitmarsh 2011, 56; Almagor 2018, 18. Athens: Saïd 2006, 53-8. Alexander: e.g. André 1990; Plácido 1990; Weileder 1998, 122-9; Roller 2001, 90, 102, 159-61, 233-9; Spencer 2002; 2009; 2010; Haegemans & Stoppie 2004; Asirvatham 2005; 2010; Wardle 2005; Koulakiotis 2006, 149-88; Carlsen 2014; Bellemore 2015; Nabel 2018, 216-19; Celotto 2018; Gilley 2018; Peltonen 2019, 19-22, 29-57, 64-76, 92-163. [↑](#endnote-ref-93)
94. Tigerstedt 1974, 109-11, 118-23, 128-33, 138, 141-2, 153-9, 221; Weileder 1998, 230-2; Liebert 2016, 89, 91-2; already Ollier 1943, 171. [↑](#endnote-ref-94)
95. See Braund 2000, 10-12. [↑](#endnote-ref-95)
96. Cf. Whitmarsh 2013. [↑](#endnote-ref-96)
97. Liebert 2016, 111: ‘If Sparta’s defeat by Thebes revealed something about the regime, what might Spartan submission to Macedon and then Rome reveal?’ Cf. generally Kennell 2018, 659. [↑](#endnote-ref-97)
98. Yet see Jones 1978, 33-4. Compare Philostratus’ cursory remark in *VS* 495 (apparently distilled from Plato, *Hipp*. *Ma*. 285d6-e1) on the propensity toward imperialism in classical Sparta: the Spartans enjoy lectures on international political history ‘because of their wish to rule’ (διὰ τὸ βούλεσθαι ἄρχειν). The lecturer is the sophist and polymath Hippias of Elis, whose biographical highlights in Philostratus’ narrative (active ambassador, multiple citizenships …) fit surprisingly well with the socio-intellectual template of the Second Sophistic. [↑](#endnote-ref-98)
99. Pelling 2002, 253-66; Stadter 2015, 165-87. On Plutarch’s generally contented and conciliatory – *pace* Madsen 2014, 17, 31-2, 36-7 – stance towards Rome, see more recently Van der Stockt 2013; Stadter 2015, esp. 21-44, 70-81. [↑](#endnote-ref-99)
100. Pelling 2010; cf. Liebert 2011, 553-4 and 2016, 98-100, as well as ingenious observations on *Agesilaus and Pompey* by Almagor 2017. [↑](#endnote-ref-100)
101. To my knowledge, only Desideri 2002a, 326 latches on, however briefly, to the allusive thrust of this text. [↑](#endnote-ref-101)
102. Indeed, the Plutarchan passage could be read as an intertextual riposte to Xenophon, *Lac*. *Pol*. 14.5-6, where the idea of Spartan leadership is said to have lost its appeal for the Greeks: ‘There was a time when they [sc. the Spartans] would fain be worthy to lead; but now they strive far more earnestly to exercise rule than to be worthy of it. Therefore in times past the Greeks would come to Lacedaemon and beg her to lead them against reputed wrongdoers; but now many are calling on one another to prevent a revival of Lacedaemonian supremacy.’ (καὶ ἦν μὲν ὅτε ἐπεμελοῦντο, ὅπως ἄξιοι εἶεν ἡγεῖσθαι· νῦν δὲ πολὺ μᾶλλον πραγματεύονται, ὅπως ἄρξουσιν ἢ ὅπως ἄξιοι τούτου ἔσονται. τοιγαροῦν οἱ Ἕλληνες πρότερον μὲν ἰόντες εἰς Λακεδαίμονα ἐδέοντο αὐτῶν ἡγεῖσθαι ἐπὶ τοὺς δοκοῦντας ἀδικεῖν· νῦν δὲ πολλοὶ παρακαλοῦσιν ἀλλήλους ἐπὶ τὸ διακωλύειν ἄρξαι πάλιν αὐτούς) (trans. E. Marchant, G. Bowersock, modified). See further Gengler 2020. [↑](#endnote-ref-102)
103. Lycurgus is invoked in *Ages*. 33.4, where the Plutarchan critique of Sparta’s imperialistic ventures is much more forthright: ‘For the Spartan constitution was perfectly designed to promote peace, virtue, and unanimity. But they then added dominions and regimes run by force, elements which Lycurgus thought unnecessary for maintaining the happy life of a city. And so they were overthrown.’ (πρὸς γὰρ εἰρήνην καὶ ἀρετὴν καὶ ὁμόνοιαν ἄπιστα συντεταγμένῳ πολιτεύματι προσαγαγόντες ἀρχὰς καὶ δυναστείας βιαίους, ὧν οὐδενὸς ἡγεῖτο δεῖσθαι πόλιν εὐδαιμόνως βιωσομένην ὁ Λυκοῦργος, ἐσφάλησαν) (trans. I. Scott-Kilvert, modified); cf. already Polybius, 6.49.7-10. See Liebert 2016, 126, 129, 134-5. [↑](#endnote-ref-103)
104. ‘An amazing display of Spartan mentality occurred. … they voluntarily abandoned the empire … choosing rather to keep their citizens morally sound and loyal to their customs than to have the sway over all Greece’ (τὸ φρόνημα τῆς Σπάρτης διεφάνη θαυμαστόν … ἀφῆκαν ἑκουσίως τὴν ἡγεμονίαν … μᾶλλον αἱρούμενοι σωφρονοῦντας ἔχειν καὶ τοῖς ἔθεσιν ἐμμένοντας τοὺς πολίτας ἢ τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἄρχειν ἁπάσης) (trans. B. Perrin, modified). See Sansone 1989, 200; Liebert 2016, 127-8. [↑](#endnote-ref-104)
105. To be exact, in 30.5 Plutarch is summing up the ‘other’ Greeks’ view of the Spartan officers (as does Xenophon in *Lac*. *pol*. 14.6: **n. \*\*\*101\*\*\*** above). On the intradiegetic onlookers and commentators in the Plutarchan *Lives*, see Pelling 2002, esp. 119-20; Duff 1999, esp. 120, 152-3, 231-5 and 2011, 65-7, 71-2; Chrysanthou 2018, *passim*. [↑](#endnote-ref-105)
106. See Mason 1974, 51-2, 144-51 and 30, 120-1 respectively. [↑](#endnote-ref-106)
107. Besides, σωφρονιστής is a well-established epithet for abstract causes of orderliness, such as λόγος as discourse and/or reason (Lycophron fr. 3 Snell = Diogenes Laertius 2.140, also Athenaeus 10.420c; Philo, *The Sacrifices of Abel and Cain* 51, *Abraham* 243, *The Worse Attacks the Better* 146, *The Heir of Divine Things* 77, 109), legislation (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 2.24.6), fear (Philo, *Husbandry* 40), toil (Philo, *On the Preliminary Studies* 162) – as well as for an allegorized deity (Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris* 378C). [↑](#endnote-ref-107)
108. See Rhodes 1981, 504; Burkhardt 1996, 68-70; Bernhardt 2003, 286-7; Steinbock 2011, 297; for epigraphic evidence, Reinmuth 1971, *passim*. The prevailing consensus in scholarship is that σωφρονισταί were introduced into Attic ephebic training in 330s BCE, as part of a root-and-branch reorganization which is almost invariably bracketed with the name of Lycurgus son of Lycophron: e.g., Mitchell 1965, 197-8; Reinmuth 1971, 127-33; Burkhardt 1996, 30-1, 33, 43, 46, 61-2, 74 and 2004, 193-4; Bernhardt 2003 285; Weiler 2004 33; Steinbock 2011, 284-95; Casey 2013, 418-19; D. Allen 2013, 124. Plutarch is not the author of the *Life* of Lycurgus the Athenian attributed to him (*Vitae X or*. 841B-844A), but he is well aware of Lycurgus’ political stature and acumen: *Demosth*. 23.4-6; *Phoc*. 9.10, cf. 7.5, 17.2-8; *Flam*. 12.7; *Comp*. *Nic*.-*Crass*. 1.3; *De se laud*. 541F. On the Athenian Lycurgus’ interest in Spartan laws, cf. *In Leocr*. 128-30; Burkhardt 1996, 48. [↑](#endnote-ref-108)
109. Reinmuth 1971, 120; Kennell 2006, 19. [↑](#endnote-ref-109)
110. The earliest imperial inscription mentioning σωφρονισταί (*IG* II2 2044) is dated to 139/140 CE. [↑](#endnote-ref-110)
111. To the imperial beholders, the Spartan floggings are emblematic of Sparta’s cultural otherness and therefore attract interrogation that might cheekily play the past against the present: in Philostratus’ *Life of Apollonius* (6.20.2), a rival pundit (based in Ethiopia) asks the protagonist whether ‘the good Greeks are not ashamed to see the people who once ruled over them being publicly flogged, or to have been ruled by people who are being publicly flogged?’ (οὐκ αἰσχύνονται … οἱ χρηστοὶ Ἕλληνες ἢ τοὺς αὑτῶν ποτε ἄρξαντας ὁρῶντες μαστιγουμένους ἐς τὸ κοινόν, ἢ ἀρχθέντες ὑπ’ ἀνθρώπων, οἳ μαστιγοῦνται δημοσίᾳ;) [↑](#endnote-ref-111)
112. Cf. the taunting of Agesilaus by Antalcidas: *Lyc*. 13.10, *Ages*. 26.3, *Pel*. 15.3, *Reg*. *et imp*. *apophth*. 189E-F, *Apophth*. *Lac*. 213F, 217D-E, 227C-D. [↑](#endnote-ref-112)
113. Even though the root σωφρον- is employed extensively by Plutarch in relation to the Spartan ethos: see Humble 2002, 92-8. [↑](#endnote-ref-113)
114. Hin 2007, esp. 154; further, Krumeich 2004; Kennell 2009; 2010b; J. Allen 2017, 167-8; also case studies of Greek and non-Greek material in Scholz & Wiegandt 2015. The parallelism between ephebic training and civic life was self-explanatory, cf. Dio of Prusa, 51.8: ‘And by Zeus it cannot be true that while the ephebes have need of instruction and virtue, the grown-ups and the entire city do not.’ (trans. H. Lamar Crosby, modified). [↑](#endnote-ref-114)
115. Not to overlook the factor of ethico-political slippage among the Spartan emissaries themselves: Plutarch, *Arist*. 23.7, cf. Xenophon, *Lac*. *pol*. 14.2. [↑](#endnote-ref-115)
116. Cf. Martin 2011. [↑](#endnote-ref-116)
117. Compare the use of σωφρονιστής about justified violence of mythological heroes: Maximus of Tyre, 15.6.d and especially 19.1, where the physical enforcement by σωφρονιστής is contrasted with philosophical persuasion. [↑](#endnote-ref-117)
118. Bockisch 1965; Stewart 2013; Thommen 2017, 147-8. [↑](#endnote-ref-118)
119. Bowie 1970, 33; Mason 1974, 25-6. [↑](#endnote-ref-119)
120. Cf. the synonyms for ‘peacemakers’ in Pollux, *Onomasticon* 1.153: ‘one might also call them regulators’ (εἴποι δ' ἄν τις αὐτοὺς καὶ ἁρμοστάς). [↑](#endnote-ref-120)
121. So, rightly, Bowie 1970, 33. [↑](#endnote-ref-121)
122. See further Petrucci 2021. [↑](#endnote-ref-122)
123. Which can be traced back to the term’s earliest usage: see Cuscunà 2007. [↑](#endnote-ref-123)
124. Yet see **n. \*\*\*104\*\*\*** above. [↑](#endnote-ref-124)
125. Cf. Pelling 2014, 156-7. Nasty harmosts in Plutarch: e.g., *Lys*. 15.6-8; *Ages*. 24.4-9; on the Plutarchan portrayal of Gylippus, see Lucchesi 2016. It is instructive to compare how Aelius Aristides (26.49) taps into the negative tradition about Spartan imperialism via a pun on ‘harmony’: ‘the sea was filled with the expelled [Spartan] regulators, since they were unregulated and when installed did not hold their cities in keeping with their title’ (ἐπίμπλατο δὲ ἡ θάλαττα τῶν ἁρμοστῶν ἐκπιπτόντων, ἅτε ἀναρμόστων καὶ οὐ κατὰ τοὔνομα ἐγκατασταθέντων τε καὶ ἐχόντων τὰς πόλεις) (trans. C. A. Behr). [↑](#endnote-ref-125)
126. Pollux notes that ἁρμοστής is an ancient term for bridegroom (*Onomasticon* 3.35). Yet in Plutarch’s passage there is νυμφίος for bridegroom, so ἁρμοστής must signify the overall orchestration of the wedding, and beyond. [↑](#endnote-ref-126)
127. Plutarch’s Alexander and Rome: Plácido 1995; Asirvatham 2005; 2018, 368-70; Liebert 2011, 558; Peltonen 2019, 52-4. Further, **n. \*\*\*\*92\*\*\*\*** above. [↑](#endnote-ref-127)
128. This is an intentional echo of Plutarch’s phrase ‘kingly science’, βασιλικῆς ἐπιστήμης (*Lyc*. 30.4). [↑](#endnote-ref-128)
129. Koulakiotis 2008. [↑](#endnote-ref-129)
130. It is interesting to compare Aelius Aristides’ formula of the Roman Empire as ‘global democracy under one man’ (26.60); see Schmitz 1997, 39-40; Cortés Copete 2007, 431-3.

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