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## The Spartan Kingship: Some Extended Notes on Complex Duality

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The Spartans, then, have given these prerogatives to their kings: (to hold) two priesthoods, of Zeus Lakedemon and of Zeus Ouranios . . .

Herodotus *The Persian War* VI 56

The Spartan kingship has attracted attention from ancient times, not least because during the Archaic and Classical florescence of the Greek *polis*, when the office of king tended to become extraneous and obsolete, the Lakedemonian state not only kept its royal office intact but maintained a royalty manned by not one but two kings--a dual kingship. Herodotus and then Xenophon examined this curious regal phenomenon, from their different ideological vantage points, and Aristotle and Plato had something to say as well, as did Thucydides. Later, Plutarch, in his *Bios* of the Spartan "lawgiver" Lykurgus (paired with Rome's Numa), provides us with some valuable information, and Pausanias adds much more out of his odd and special, *völkisch*, often demonstrably archaic, fund of data. It was laconically typical of the Spartans not to examine their own institutions, except obliquely. We know that Sparta drew its kings from two royal houses, the Agid and the Eurypontid, and that this geminated kingship was itself derived semi-mythically, the two kingships said to descend from the twin **[End Page 1]** sons of Aristodemos, Sparta's founding father figure (Herodotus VI 52). The actual or historical origin of the Spartan double kingship has been variously explained, but the precise aetiological explanation is not much of a target in the present study; it does appear likely that the two lines did not appear simultaneously, and that the Eurypontid line was junior to the Agid, being the more recently enroyalled. <sup>1</sup>

It seems clear that despite the purposive archaism of the Spartan system--primarily built on, or at least stated in, their so-called Lykurgan Constitution--the two Spartan kings retained no exceptional powers centered on any primitive or, in Claire Préaux's important definition, "magical" realm: a recent and thoroughly documented study by Pierre Carlier agrees that these two Spartan *royautés* did not carry the dangerous charge implicit in the office of the "sacred king," though they might well have had what Carlier calls a "supernatural halo" derived from the "mystique de la gémellité." <sup>2</sup> How and why the potent area of the *sacred* (that is, of intrinsic sacrality, not the *administration* of the sacred) was detached from the Greek kingly office is, of course, a matter of importance, but little will be attempted on that subject here. The Spartan king, then, was neither "sacred" nor, by definition, a monarch; he (they) maintained certain magisterial and juridical responsibilities, and he (they) was or were involved in the state's military function, as war-leaders. Even in this military area the king's powers were circumscribed: according to what we know of the Spartan "constitution," the *nomoi*, he could not make war off his own bat, for example, and his behavior (and his success or failure) while he led the Spartan army in the field was legally scrutinized by the Gerousia and the Ephorate, much as the *acta* of a Roman proconsul, under the Republic, had to be scrutinized and franked, usually by the Senate. <sup>3</sup>

The Spartan king, or kings, would thus seem to turn a relatively unmysterious face to the gaze of the inquiring political or institutional historian. The kings were, however, involved in certain religious or, more precisely, cultic activities in the role of priests, that is, serving as the managers of correctly-conducted state sacrifice where they were the orchestrators of the mode of civic appeal to, or contact with, the

gods, [End Page 2] though the Spartan king was never regarded as "the interpreter of the [will of] the gods." <sup>4</sup> Yet the king could hold priestly offices of some resonance, especially the two priesthoods of Zeus--of Zeus Lakedemon and Zeus Ouranios--cited in Herodotus; a second series of royal-priestly activities is drawn from Xenophon and Plutarch and again shows a dual or opposed modality as well as some other, odder features.

Because of the opposed thrust of the two instances of royal priesthood or sacrifice first placed in view here, and also because of some marked characteristics found in the second group of sacrifices, I intend to deploy a group of theoretical statements (or suggestions) offered by the late Georges Dumézil and some of the scholars following or respecting him, and, in order to do *this*, I shall first clear my field of mine by briefly dealing with, or at least listing, the more or less substantive objections adduced against the corpus of Dumézilian theory and the analytic techniques he deployed. These objections may be divided into two headings: the strategic, and the tactical or areal. <sup>5</sup>

The strategic or theoretical objections to Dumézil are, at base, criticisms of the corpus of his theory either because it is too tentative, flimsy, changeable, and weakly articulated a structure to endure the rigors encountered in the stern context of post-modernist scholarship or, contrarily, that its statements (particularly Dumézilian tripartition and his theory of the Indo-European *idéologie* stressing the three Functions) are too rigid, old-fashioned, and redolent of the quaint archaic absolutes of nineteenth-century sociological theory. The most recent "strategic" critics of Dumézil, after adducing various weaknesses found by them in the broad application of his theory--and tut-tutting over those instances where, over six decades, he actually changed his mind--also point to statements made by him near the end of his life, in which he is claimed to have disavowed much of the body of his work, even referring to it as surviving only as "fiction." <sup>6</sup> How much of this very late meditation on the validity of his life-long labors [End Page 3] should be seen as ironic on Dumézil's part (in line with his earlier declaration, "Je ne suis pas un 'Dumézilien'"), and how much may have been the result of his forgivable state of depression at the increasingly malignant dishonesty of the personal attacks that had been mounted against him, cannot be known. The most perceptive statement on the value of his theories of which I am aware describes this scholar as a Social (or, perhaps more precisely, an Ideological) Darwinian and not an ideologue: he believed that if, in the contest for intellectual validity, his mesostructure as expressed and elaborated in his ideas rooted itself and survived, then *res ipsa loquitur*, and no further defense would be necessary. <sup>7</sup> To use Dumézil's theories is to do so voluntarily--because, in brief, they actually appear to work.

The tactical or areal critique of the usability of Dumézil's ideas brings us right back to ancient Greece, though the workability of various strands of his web-work of ideas in respect to Iran, ancient Rome, and the Germanic North has also been queried by specialists in these areas, which, in turn, led to responses by Dumézil and others. <sup>8</sup> In assembling the sources that, from the first, supported his theoretical structure, the Greek materials, abundant as they were and important as they obviously had to be, seemed to be singularly resistant to his analytical thrust and probative method. Dumézil himself called ancient Greece *une grande mystère*, concluding (in Littleton's summary) that "the Greeks . . . lost most of their [Indo-European] ideological heritage long before they reached the threshold of written history." <sup>9</sup> The question of Indo-European (I-E) survivals in Greece continues to provoke contention. One scholar, Bernard Sergent, has averred that, insofar as the surviving Classic Greek literature was concerned--and specifically in respect to the great burst of tragic dramaturgy in the fifth century--only in Aeschylus' *Persae* could any trace of Dumézilian trifunctionalism be found, and that had to come from a borrowed Iranian source. <sup>10</sup> I have characterized Sergent's dictum as excessively stringent; it is true, or at least arguable, that trifunctional elements can be and have been located in the surviving plays of Aeschylus and Sophokles, at least; [End Page 4] evidently Euripides flew off at too much of an eccentric. <sup>11</sup> So far as the broad spectrum of ancient Greek evidence is concerned, investigators such as Yoshida, Vian--and Dumézil himself, still eyeing that *grande mystère*--excavated I-E traces from an array of Greek sources, <sup>12</sup> and it is from another article by Sergent, "La représentation spartiate de la royauté," that the present essay springs, though some hints are taken from elsewhere. <sup>13</sup>

Sergent's long, provocative, and important essay attempts to fit the Spartan dual kingship (or the field of perception *concerning* this kingship) to a modified Dumézilian pattern. Sergent finds that although the two Spartan kings occupy a position that should qualify as, in the canonical Dumézilian scheme, I-E First Function (F1) Sovereignty, the kings really operate in the I-E Second Function (F2) and Third Function (F3); the Agid house or line occupying or acting in the former and the Eurypontids the latter,

as the Agids primarily concern themselves with the *laos*, the "host" or people-in-arms, while the Eurypontids represent the *dêmos*, the people defined as civil society, the polity, or the city-state. By the evidence of the given royal names--Agēsilaos, Arkhelaos--and by repute, the Agids are thus mainly involved in the military zone and with the "exterior," and carry the signs of the warlike and the masculine, while the Eurypontids take "civil" names--Arkhidamos, for example, or Eudamidas--and have their place in the more pacific and civil line, dealing with the operations of good government, some part of religion, the zone of the "interior," and are seen to bear the symbolic mark of the feminine. There is a parallel to be found here in Spartan kingship with the dual and contrasted icons that J.-P. Vernant found dominating Greek thought generally: the god Hermes signing the power of motion, adventure, the exterior, while the goddess Hestia bore the sign of the fixed point, the paciPc, the concealed (or shielded), and the interior. [14](#)

Sergent reinforces his analysis of the two opposed foci of attention and action in the Spartan kingship by noting the long lives or reigns assigned in the tradition to the Eurypontid kings as compared to the short (warrior, heroic) lives of the Agids, the importance attached to certain notorious Eurypontid queens (especially their adulterous affairs in which **[End Page 5]** they took up an aggressive, masculine posture), and the vulnerability of the kings of the Eurypontid line to bribery and corruption, while Agid kings are best known for actually doing the corrupting--that is, using bribery as a tactic actively directed at their opponents--all as part of their essentially "exterior" bent.


In Dumézilian terms, what Sergent has laid out fits with the bipartite aspect of I-E sovereignty, that is, it exposes the combination of the two polar potencies Dumézil called, using the ancient Indic divine model, the Mitraic and the Varunaic, which he found encased, alone or in combination, in the operations of the I-E kingly office. [15](#) The Mitraic aspect, in outline, displays the open, jural, contractual, or administrative side of sovereignty *en plein aire*; the Varunaic aspect projects an image of darker, concealed, possibly magical, and certainly less predictable royal powers. According to this reading, the Agid house would tilt toward the Varunaic, the Eurypontids toward the Mitraic valence, though the picture is not perfect, for each house shows elements of both valences. Sergent also characterizes the two valences as "interior" and "exterior" in their basic operation. [16](#) But the Spartan dual kingship presents another image: the Agid line and its activity operates within the I-E Second or Military Function, the Eurypontids are most often seen to act and have their *imaginal* being within the Third Function, the function marked by nurturing order, fruitful growth, riches, and sexuality. So the two kings not only divide the theoretical valences of F1 Sovereignty, but also set themselves, or are set as, representatives not of the sovereign zone, but of the other two, F2 and F3, Indo-European *fonctions*. This being the case, we should note the parallelism between these divided royal functions and the separate functional activities imputed to the widely-encountered I-E image of the Divine Twins, as analyzed in the work of Donald Ward. [17](#) Of course, it would be understandable if a memory of the Dioscouroi, the sons of Tyndareos, lingered in Sparta, where their myths were emplaced, and we can also point to the legendary origin of the two Spartan royal houses (in the twin sons of Aristodemos), but the Germanic data focussed on by Ward are worth recalling as well, for it seems that we can excavate in Sparta hints of what might be called a Germanic connection, a connection to be found in some other aspects of the Spartan royal office. **[End Page 6]**

What we seem to have here is a right mare's nest, a confusion of categories and patterns figured both horizontally (the Mitraic and the Varunaic within the First Function) and vertically (respecting the arrangement and the internal categories representative of the three Functions). Such confusion is what we ought to expect when we examine data from a context where the I-E patterning is so faint, but it is good that we remember what Dumézil insisted: his trifunctional scheme was meant to be a *moyen d'analyser*, a technique to be used in advancing analysis and not an absolute, canonical statement. The Dumézilian *idéologie* should not, then, be taken as an *ideology*, if ideology is to be defined as an absolute, invariant, and predictive metasystem. The flexibility, non-dogmatism, and openness of the Dumézilian analytic statement produces, one hopes, what was not visible before: the tracery of connections, the concordance of signs.

To return to our royal Spartan priesthoods of Zeus Lakedemon and Zeus Ouranios, one can agree with Sergent when he says that Zeus must be a combinatory god "who contains in himself the two sovereign gods of the Indo-Europeans," who works his wonders, in Greek terms, within the realms both of (Mitraic?) *themis* (justice, right) and (Varunaic?) *mêtis* (wiliness, misdirection, mental manipulation). [18](#)

Now, divine and sovereign Zeus acts, as indeed he should, as a key figure, a "king-pin" in the myth-history of Greek kingship. It is he, in Préaux's reading, who brings to an end the line of the dangerous, taboo-violating "magical kings" of the Pelopid house by investing Agamemnon the Atreid king with the *palladion* that signifies legitimate royal rule according to *themis*, royal rule on the Right Hand, administrative not sacral. In fact, by this act, Zeus created a mode of kingship that displayed only a part of the powers Zeus himself wielded. <sup>19</sup> Can it be that Zeus, too, is a jealous god? Of course he is, or at least a canny one, and by the time the Spartan kingship appears it is plainly inconceivable that any Greek king could operate as an earthly imitator of the all-sovereign Zeus, wielding both *themis* and *mêtis*, using the powers of Right and Left Hand together. Thus **[End Page 7]** we see two priesthoods that, in essence, seem merely to identify the supreme god as Zeus "here" (Lakedemon) and Zeus Ouranios "out there" (or "up there," which is a different matter). Not only that, but we see that, with any potential for an interior duality of essential powers dissolved, the Spartan royal office itself is split and its *functional* components are divided, and, finally, that the functions themselves are not unitary and coherent. The Eurypontids, then, may resonate to an F3 signal, but they also hold the relics of F1 governance, administration, ordering principles--at base, occupying a watered-down Mitraic office. Nor is the Agid house and its signs and powers completely of a piece.

It is at this point that we may see the Spartan situation as projecting images reminiscent of a tripartite "classification" found in a fragment of Hesiod: a fragment that seems to assign, by the act of the Olympians, specific "functional" characteristics to three pairs of legendary heroes (or hero-kings). <sup>20</sup> Here *strength* or *prowess* (*alkhê*) is given to Achilles and Ajax, *intelligence* (*nous*) to Amphiaraus and Adrastus, and *wealth* (*ploutos*) to the Atreidae, Menelaus and Agamemnon. So far as the last two are concerned, we first might mark their quasi-dioscoursic pose and the intriguing fact that Hesiod places the two firmly in the F3 category as they are seen primarily as the possessors of *richesse*; the dioscoursic relationship between Menelaus and Agamemnon is reinforced by recalling that one brother committed himself to rescuing the wife of the other from an abductor, an act that is a clear part of the Divine Twins mythos. <sup>21</sup>

So far as the two priesthoods of Zeus are concerned, it would certainly ice our particular cake if the two Spartan kings were assigned to the respective priesthoods that would most closely fit their perceived characteristics, that is, the Eurypontids to Zeus Lakedemon and the Agids to Zeus Ouranios, but unfortunately our source does not specify; we can assume but we cannot prove such a neat assignment of priestly offices. What we can see is something about the Greek sovereign god, as reflected in Sparta, and also something about the Spartan dual royal office that should remind us of quite another I-E context: the Germanic-Scandinavian North. The first parallel between the two contexts has to do with the dual royal mode itself, for from Tacitus on through the sixth century A.D. observers commented on the two apparent modes of Germanic kingship, **[End Page 8]** that is, of *rex* contrasted to *dux* (using the Roman terminology), with the Germanic *rex* usually described as the "traditional" leader, drawing his authority from tribal memory, tradition, and the need for social unity, while the *dux* was your typical war-leader, whose power extended from his own aggressive character. <sup>22</sup> The second resemblance is rather fainter, but it has to do with the fact that although Zeus, like the Germanic-Norse chief god Woden-Wotan-O  inn, must be assigned a Sovereign (F1) function, he retains a character that is at base antipathetic, even inimical, to the king himself, that is, to any human who imitates him. <sup>23</sup>

The second cluster of ritual events in view involves the Spartan dual kingship in one aspect of its primary activity, war-making, though what is now seen is a sequence of royal sacrifices leading from Sparta proper out onto the battlefield. The main source for this sequence is Xenophon's *Constitution of the Lakedemonians* (XIII), with some assistance from Plutarch on Lykurgus (XXI 7).

In these sacrifices are what we might call three stages in the sacralization of war, with the king active in each: (1) he sacrifices "to Zeus the Leader," *Dii agêtori*, "and to those [gods] associated with him," *tois syn autô*, by which the translator of the LCL edition of Xenophon (C. M. Marchant) understands the Dioscoursi. <sup>24</sup> (2) Then, on the city-state's borders, the king sacrifices again to Zeus, and also to Athena (XIII 3). (3) Two sacrifices are later conducted right on the battlefield, the first to Artemis Agrotera, the second to the Muses (in Plutarch *Lyk.* XXI 7, as above).

The first rite involves another sacred nomen of Zeus, one specific to Sparta; it is tempting to hypothesize that this title, Agêtor (with the eta), is somehow linked to a term like *agelai*, the "herded" boys (led by their *boagos*) who underwent the initial stage of the Spartan training of their male youth, when the



emphasis was placed on eliciting *to thêriades*, "the beast in man." Zeus' appellation would then approximate the meaning of **[End Page 9]** "herder," but implicit in the epithet is a more markedly *passive* control. The sacrifice to the Dioscouroi makes excellent sense in Sparta; here were Divine Twins whose characteristics, like those of the Spartan kings, were split, <sup>25</sup> and we also see one of a pair of classificatory "twins" organizing the rite partly for the Dioscouric pair who, at this point, show their warlike side: when contrasted to the more passive posture of Zeus, the Twins stand for boundary-breaking or predation, not guardianship.

The second sacrifice--right at the state's border--is tied to the first, since Zeus Agetor is again an object of the cultic act and because fire from the first ritual is brought to the second by a *pyrphoros*. Now Athena replaces the Dioscouroi; is this Athena imagined to be the divine Protectress of Cities, or the war goddess, or some other aspect of this deity? Probably, in parallel to the earlier sacrifice to the Dioscouroi, this sacrifice is to the warlike Athena and the wielder of *mêtis*; we know that tied cults of Zeus and Athena were important in Sparta, for the establishment of the cults of Zeus Sullanos and Athena Sullania is put into the *rhêtra* by which Lykurgus shaped the Spartan state (Plutarch *Lyk.* VI 6). <sup>26</sup> At this point, it is not clear whether or not the gods to whom sacrifice was made at the borders (*horia*) of Sparta are also sacrificed to on the march; no deities are mentioned (at least in this source, elsewhere the Dioscouroi reappear), but it is said that the holy fire was carried along and never quenched, and animals for sacrifice accompanied this religious "parade." <sup>27</sup> One reading would be that the ported fire represents the king as *phlegmainousê*, a characteristic that was of old attached to the Spartan kings: the royal heat or "feverish" quality of the king (to be balanced by the moderation or coolness assigned to the Gerousia and the Ephorate) mentioned by Plato and Plutarch. <sup>28</sup> It is also possible that the fire carried toward the battlefield represents Sparta's hearth-fire, an "interior" power transported to the "exterior," but maybe the fire is merely prophylactic. It must be more than a coincidence, however, that the Twin Gods, the Greek Dioscouroi or others of the type, are in several I-E traditions (specifically the Indic-Vedic and the **[End Page 10]** Germanic in addition to the Greek) associated with fire, and may even be named as "divinities of the sacred fire." <sup>29</sup>

But Zeus, in whatever aspect, is no longer in the field, and he is left far behind when the final two sacrifices are made by the king, two sacrifices notable because, again, they clearly show two aspects of the connective link between human warfare and the activities of the gods. The specific sacrificial appeal by the king to the Muses, the final sacrifice, has been explained as expressing the pious hope that the warriors' deeds will be appropriately "sung," but Plutarch (and more modern observers) explain the sacrifice at least partly as a *deixis* or *didachê* of order, harmony; the emphasis is on inducing and reinforcing discipline in the heavy-infantry regiments as the battle lines close. <sup>30</sup> The penultimate sacrifice is even less well understood. Both Plutarch and Xenophon mention the sacrifice of a she-goat (*khimaira*) by the polemarch-king at a slightly earlier point than the last sacrifice, that is, when the foe has first been sighted. Neither author mentions the goddess to whom the sacrifice is dedicated, that must be deduced from other sources (for example, from Xenophon in his *Hellenica* 4.2.20) where the Spartan cult of Artemis Agrotera, Artemis the Huntress, Mistress of the Wild, is named as the specific object of the she-goat sacrifice.

This battlefield sacrifice to the "wild" goddess Artemis is important because it balances (or forces?) the last, "harmonizing" cultic act undertaken by the king: the connection made in the ritual is to the manic, the uncontrolled--in another I-E context we would say the *berserkr*--aspect of the fighting man. What we find in Sparta, then, is a reflection of a widely-encountered Indo-European perception of the warrior in two modes or guises: one ordered, controlled, capable of discipline, and the other wild, blood-maddened, out of control. Such is one lesson of Vidal-Naquet's essay on the "Black Hunter," where he locates a sequential program in the Athenian ephebate in which the young, unarmored, and barely armed warriors-in-training took up all the darker, chance-laden attributes of the treacherous wild, the *agros*, before they were inducted into the disciplined (and heavily armed and armored) ranks of the hoplite regiments. <sup>31</sup> Vidal-Naquet also found in the Spartan *krypteia*, the "wild hunt," another institution **[End Page 11]** he called "by no means completely unrelated to the life of the hoplite; the two were symmetrical opposites." <sup>32</sup> This duality in the warrior can be computed in various ways; Vidal-Naquet emphasized an "armed" vs. a "naked" contrast (as well as underlining the sequential or educative aspect), and he noted that Dumézil had discovered something similar in dealing, in the I-E epic (Indic) evidence, with the two nonpareil warriors of the Pandava, the Second Function figures Bhîma and Arjuna--Brutal Slugger and Parfit Knight--who are central characters in the *Mahâbhârata*. <sup>33</sup> In other I-E contexts, the "pairing" of warrior types may take a different track, and emphasize the difference in social

usefulness; in the Scandinavian North, the warrior of Órr will be compared to the warrior of Óinn: the first drawn to serve social goals and unity, the second a violent, anti-social isolate, whose extreme morphism is indeed the semi-animalized *berserkr*.<sup>34</sup> To detect a duality in the warrior being, then, is not difficult, and it seems that the Spartan king acted ritually to deal with both sides of this essence as the Spartans perceived it: the last sacrificial act he undertook, dedicated to the Muses, established a terminus, for the act marked the final importance of military discipline.

One remaining question is a simple one: why make the appeal to female deities? The androcentric bias in old, conservative, ultra-militarized Sparta is well known. Then too, in respect to the object of the "wild" sacrifice, there was a war god, Ares, whose avatar as Ares Enyalios, the bloody Ares "of the war-cry," could have served as a titular divinity and object of sacrificial attention.<sup>35</sup> Yet the king immolated a she-goat to Artemis of the Wild (assuming that Athena had been left at the city's borders, but she isn't named later: was her implicit gift to the army, whether accepted or not, again that of the covert power of *métis*?).

The question is not answerable at this time, but again the Germanic North shows some striking structural resemblances to the Spartan situation in the extreme South of Europe. In Scandinavian myth, the heroic dead from the stricken battlefield were divided between Óinn, [End Page 12] that "Varunaic" chief god and war god combined, and Freya (*Grímnismál* str. 14):<sup>36</sup>

. . . where Freya chooses  
who shall have seats in her hall  
half of the slain are hers each day  
and half are Odinn's own.


Freya and Artemis show some clear commonalities: both are daughters of a chief god and both are twinned to a male brother-counterpart, Frey or Freyr and Apollo respectively. I must admit that, at least as regards the Greek goddess, her myth is still resistant to the Dumézilian "functional" formulae. At the minimum, however, we might point to the fact that in both instances or contexts a Third Function goddess--for such Freya certainly is, and a good case can be made for Artemis as well in at least one of her many guises--is allowed to intrude into the Second Function activity of war.<sup>37</sup> And there is one more Germanic datum to be noted, when Paul the Deacon indulgently repeats the "silly story" of how the Longobards got their tribal name, after the "twin kings" (Ibor/Ebor and Aio or Agio) of the proto-Lombardic Viniller appealed to Freya to aid them in battle--in fact, to aid them against their enemies, votaries of Godan/Wotan.<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusion

By instituting and maintaining its dual kingship, Sparta reinvigorated a whole series of dual or duplex images, a complex of duality, as follows:

- (1) mythological/legendary: the Spartan Dioscौरic connections and the allied mythologem of the I-E Divine Twins; [End Page 13]
- (2) sovereign duality: Mitraic-Varunaic or the Right/Left duality;
- (3) duality in deities: exterior/interior (or Hermes and Hestia), "home and away," passive and active gods and consequent dualities, male and/vs. female deities, Zeus' potencies divided?
- (4) characteriological dualities: royal attributes, "balancing" characteristics, including balancing the king against other political institutions ("hot" against "cold" modalities, or personal against collective powers); and
- (5) military dualisms: undisciplined/disciplined, warrior contrasted to soldier, and some possible sequential, maturational, or educational elements.

Of these imaginal categories it is the first and the third that need some further explication, and in both instances the Dioscouri are in central focus. The Spartan cultic use, in fact their specific iconization, of

the Dioscouroi was known to Herodotus, who after 506 B.C. (as we reconstruct the date) mentions only one of the "sons of Tyndareos" because after that date only one Spartan king led the army; before this the sons (the Dioscouroi) "were both entreated for aid and went with [the army],"  (V 75). Carlier believes that this passage means that the mysterious *dokana*, ancient wooden images or *xoana* that, Plutarch says, represented these Tyndarides, were carried along with the army, that is, one part of the old image after 506 B.C. was so carried. <sup>39</sup> Certainly for a king to imitate one of the Sons of Tyndareos must have added to Carlier's *halo surnaturel*--yet this "halo" surmounted the idea of the *dyarchy*, not the two kings themselves, as individuals. <sup>40</sup>

The descent of the Spartan kings from the twin sons of Aristodemos also refreshes our view of the I-E connections of this state. The mysteries surrounding *géméllité* attracted Dumézil's attention several times, last in a posthumously published work, <sup>41</sup> where he reminds us that, in the rich lode [End Page 14] of the Ossete "Nart" tales, the heroic (and Second Function) clan of the *Æhsærtæggetæ* was descended from twins, *Æhsar* and *Æhsartæg* (as the Spartan war-kings held their legendary descent from twins and maintained their tie to the Dioscouroi as war-makers). <sup>42</sup> The notion of founding twins (or brothers) we know to have a solid I-E pedigree extending from Romulus and Remus to, of all places, Byzantium, where a popular tale derived the city's old, pagan name from two eponymous brothers, Byzas and Antes. <sup>43</sup> In the Spartan instance, a more archaic I-E element is marked since any deadly rivalry between the two brothers is absent; Dumézil believed that such a rivalry is one of the "thèmes étrangers . . . généralement aux jumeaux indo-européens," though the theme was added very early to the I-E founding myth. <sup>44</sup>

To dissect out and collocate all these modes and operations of duality should not be allowed to conceal the fact that they are complexly interrelated in the data and cross-cut and moderate one another: my list is only that, a list, an organizing device. On the other hand, at the end, we are able to see what I might call the fall of shot of the Dumézilian canon and note the number of times his suggestions hit the target. What seems to be revealed most clearly in the attributes and acts of the Spartan dual kingship is this: in archaizing, in reaching back into what they understood of the past for a sustaining sociopolitical ideology, the Lakedemonian state dipped deep, however knowingly or unknowingly, into an old Indo-European stratum. Here is where, to cite one area, the intriguing parallels perdure between Sparta and the northern, Germanic world (and, less dramatically, between Sparta and the Ossetes to the east); certainly not in any demonstrable contact between any two I-E-speaking "tribes," but precisely in the typological area, where problems are solved by laying them out according to the Functional proto-pattern or signifiactive memory, and by means of the construction, in this particular Spartan case, of a complex network of binarisms and dualities. This is what we see when we cut beneath the Spartan surface, a surface worn almost smooth by history and by human use.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup>. See Finley 1982.39, where he takes it as a "defensible hypothesis" that the dual kingship was "a product of the sixth-century revolution" and not an antique survival.
- <sup>2</sup>. Préaux 1962.83-86, Carlier 1984.310.
- <sup>3</sup>. Carlier 1984.257ff.
- <sup>4</sup>. Carlier 1984.266.
- <sup>5</sup>. A series of ideological and personal attacks on Dumézil's theories, as these were "contaminated" by his supposed addiction to, or at least openness to, right-wing, fascist, and even Nazi elitist and racist arguments in the 1930s have to my mind been summarily dealt with by Eribon 1992.
- <sup>6</sup>. A paper making this claim, delivered by Bernfried Schlerath at the Sixth UCLA Indo-European Conference in May 1994, has now been published: Schlerath 1995. Wouter Belier (1991) presents a detailed and, in the main, unsympathetic critique, making much of the shifts in Dumézil's theoretical stances.

[7.](#) Udo Strutynski, personal communication.

[8.](#) See Littleton 1982.186-203; Belier (see fn. 6) is antagonistic to Littleton's exposition of Dumézilian theory as well as to Dumézil himself.

[9.](#) Littleton 1982.273.

[10.](#) "Eschyle est *le seul* auteur antique du Ve s. qui paraisse faire usage . . . de la trifonctionnalité," Sergent 1980.234 (author's emphasis).

[11.](#) See Strutynski 1970, Miller 1986, Evans 1979.

[12.](#) E.g., Yoshida 1964, Vian 1960, Dumézil 1953. And see the topical issue of *Arethusa* on Indo-European Roots of Classical Culture (13.2, Fall 1980).

[13.](#) Sergent 1976.

[14.](#) Vernant 1965/1983.127-61.

[15.](#) Dumézil 1948/1988.

[16.](#) Sergent 1976.26ff.

[17.](#) Ward 1968, 1970a, 1970b.

[18.](#) Sergent 1976.47.



[19.](#) Préaux 1962. The last enormity of the old kind of kingship, as carried out by Clytemnestra and especially Aegisthus, would be the slaying (sacrifice), the archetypal king-killing, of Agamemnon: see Miller 1977.259-68.

Note that Kerényi, citing the evidence of Euripedes' *Iphigenia in Aulis* (l. 1150) underlines Agamemnon's earlier, uncontrolled royal behavior when he seized Clytemnestra from her first husband: this was "Zeus-like" behavior and suggests that Agamemnon *lost* one aspect of his old sovereignty when he accepted the *palladion*: Kerényi 1974.319.

[20.](#) Fr. 157 Gottl. (?), Merkelbach and West fr. 203. See Yoshida 1964.38.

[21.](#) See Ward 1968.60ff.

[22.](#) See Miller forthcoming. Some sort of doubled leadership is seen widely in pre-modern human societies, from the "war chief" and "peace chief" identified in Amerindian tribal cultures, through the attempted balancing of "killers"--leaders or specialists in bloodshed--with "harmonizer" (often "speaker") leadership figures in societies ranging from the North Arabian to the Melanesian.

[23.](#) For that matter, the two chief gods are also united in their mythic antipathy to inhuman, powerful, ancient rivals: Zeus to the Titans, O inn (and orr as well) to the potent Giants of the North.

[24.](#) Xenophon *Script. Min.* 178, n. 1.

[25.](#) Ward 1968.198-99.

[26.](#) These epithets are not seen elsewhere and E. Bekker, editor of the Tauchnitz version of the *Lives*, took the reading to be Zeus *Hellaios* and Athena *Hellania*.

[27.](#) The Tyndaridae--presumably the *images* of the Dioscouroi--are mentioned in Herod. V 75: see below, p. 14.



- [28.](#) Plato *Leges* 691e, Plutarch *Lyk.* V 6. In a similar Vedic context these sacrifices probably would be made to Agni, the Fire-god.
- [29.](#) *Rg Veda* 10.184.3; see Ward 1968.26, 44.
- [30.](#) Carlier 1984.261.
- [31.](#) Vidal-Naquet 1986.
- [32.](#) Vidal-Naquet 1986.113.
- [33.](#) Dumézil 1968.63-65. Bhîma, unfettered and brutal, "combat sans arc, sans char ni cuirasse, avec la force de ses bras." Arjuna the chivalrous, armed and armored, is his precise opposite. See also McCone 1991.117, for another dimension of the problem.
- [34.](#) See Miller 1991, also Miller 1992.
- [35.](#) On the "savage" war god see Vian 1968.54-57.
- [36.](#) In Hollander 1986.56. This strophe begins with the name of the eighth valkyrie, Folkvang, "Battlefield"; Folkvang is also Freya's residence.
- [37.](#) The Norse chief god who is Freya's father is not Oðinn, whom we can tentatively identify as a parallel figure to Zeus, but Njörðr, chief god of the Third Function Vanir, a sea-god who has some slight resemblance to Poseidon. The Goddess of the Wild motif does come into the Northern myths, but only as Njörðr was once married to Skaði, a giantess called "a creature of the mountains and the forest": see Polomé 1989.116-17. It is possible, to add one more complication, to read Njörðr, Frey, and Freya within the I-E mythologem of the Divine-Twins-with-Sister: see Ward 1970a.407.
- [38.](#) *Historia Langobardorum* I 7-8. See Ward 1968.50-56, on "Germanic Dual Kingship."
- [39.](#) Carlier 1984.300. This scholar believes, following Plutarch, that the *dokana* had the shape of a figure "H" with two cross-bars; if only one Twin accompanied the Spartan host was this ancient image split, and how dramatic and effective would such a "split image" have been?
- [40.](#) There are subtle distinctions here; the two kings appear mainly as intercessory figures or middlemen between the divine and the human, and yet it seems likely that *individual* and essential powers occasionally showed themselves in the acts, attributes, and ambitions of one or the other king. For that matter, how might the model of the Dioscouroi, one mortal, one immortal, be followed?
- [41.](#) Dumézil 1994.
- [42.](#) Both Ossete names have their root in OS. *æxar(t)*, "profession of arms, warriorly activity" = IN *ksatra*: Dumézil 1994.101; see also his early translation, edition, and study of the Nart tales: Dumézil 1930.18-20.
- [43.](#) Dagron 1984.79-86.
- [44.](#) Dumézil 1994.101.

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