

## THE DECLINE OF SPARTA

In *CQ* n.s. 26 (1976), 62–84 I argued that the defeat of Sparta in 371 B.C. was not due to the pursuit of unwise policies towards the other Greek states. Unwise policies there had been, Sparta being by no means superior to Athens in the formulation of foreign policy, but these did not affect the position on the eve of Leuctra when, with Thebes politically isolated, and with some of the Boeotians disaffected, Cleombrotus at the head of a numerically superior Spartan and allied army was poised for the destruction of Theban power; a triumph of policy it must have seemed. Sparta failed for military reasons. Her army was unequal to the military genius of Epaminondas.

However, when one reads that at Leuctra in an army of 10,000 hoplites, according to Plutarch (*Pel.* 20. 1), there were no more than 700 Spartiates (Xen. *Hell.* 6. 4. 15), one is bound to consider whether the root cause of the defeat was not the shortage of Spartiates. According to Aristotle (*Pol.* 1270a33) the city ‘was destroyed because of shortage of manpower’ (ὀλιγανθρωπία), and many have found therein the real cause of Spartan failure. How far then was the failure of Sparta internal, the failure of her social system?

It may be noted at the outset that Aristotle may not have meant what he is commonly supposed to have meant. ‘The city did not stand up to a single blow, but was destroyed because of shortage of manpower.’ Aristotle may have meant that the city lacked the reserves of manpower to make good her losses in the battle, not that the defeat itself was due to shortage of Spartiates, and he may not therefore have provided the perfect text for the oft-repeated sermon. Yet Busolt concluded his masterly article ‘Spartas Heer und Leuktra’ (*Hermes* 40 [1905], 387–449), with these words, ‘In consequence of the decline of the Lacedaemonian army... the disaster at Leuctra had become inevitable’ – a view many would echo.<sup>1</sup> An investigation of the decline of Spartan manpower and its effects is necessary if the argument I put forward is to stand unqualified.

### I. THE RATE OF DECLINE IN THE NUMBER OF SPARTIATES

Five thousand Spartiates marched out to the battle of Plataea in 479 B.C. (Hdt. 9. 10). They were the *neotês* (ibid. 12), a term comparable to the Roman *iuniores*, and although we do not know what age-groups were involved and what proportion of the Spartiates were left behind as ‘homeguard’, Herodotus’ figure of 8,000 in all during the Persian Wars (7. 234. 2) is credible enough. By 371 B.C. there were no more than 1,000, a figure derived from Xenophon’s account of the battle (*Hell.* 6. 4. 15, 17 and cf. 6. 1. 1) and confirmed by Aristotle (*Pol.* 1270a31). The rate of decline is however debated. If Thucydides’ calculations for the Spartan army at First Mantinea in 418 B.C. (5. 68) were essentially correct, the total number of Spartiates at that date cannot have been much greater than 2,500 and possibly no more than 2,100;<sup>2</sup> in which case Spartan

<sup>1</sup> cf., most recently, P. A. Cartledge, *Sparta and Lakonia* (1979), 317.

<sup>2</sup> If the proportion of Spartiates to non-Spartiates in the *λόχοι* at First Mantinea was the same as that amongst the captives from Sphacteria, i.e. 120 to 172 (Thuc. 4. 38. 5), there were about 1472 Spartiates in the *λόχοι*, to which must be added the sixth sent home (Thuc. 5. 64. 3) and the 300 *hippeis* (ibid. ch. 72. 4) and certain officers etc., so that there were about 2,100 in all. If proportionately more Spartiates were killed on Sphacteria than non-Spartiates, and if the proportion of Spartiates to non-Spartiates had been in fact the same as in 479 B.C., a figure approaching 2,500 results. Cf. Busolt, *Hermes* (1905), 403 ff.

power was rising at the very time that Spartiate numbers were falling dramatically. If, on the other hand, Thucydides was mistaken and the true number of Spartiates was more like 4,000 to 4,500, a completely different picture presents itself, viz. that Spartiate numbers declined only gradually in the fifth century and sufficed for victory in the Peloponnesian War and for the establishment of Spartan empire, but in the fourth there was a very dramatic decline indeed and one would be moved the more strongly to connect the failure of Sparta with this decline.

The reliability of Thucydides' calculations has long been questioned, but it will be convenient here to address ourselves to the arguments developed by A. J. Toynbee.<sup>3</sup> He postulated two distinct phases in the development of the Spartan army. The first was the army of Plataea, in which Spartiates and Perioeci were brigaded separately, each in five *lochoi* ('companies') commanded by *lochagoi* ('company commanders'). The second was the army we meet in the pages of Xenophon, in which Spartiates and perioeci fought side by side mixed up within the same units, an army of six *morai* ('divisions') commanded by polemarchs. Since it is clear from Thucydides' account of the Spartan occupation of Sphacteria in 425 B.C. that at that time Spartiates and perioeci were indeed mixed up, Toynbee argued that the great reform of the Spartan army had already happened and that when Thucydides based his calculations on the assumption that the *lochos* was the largest unit, he was in error: a proper calculation of two *lochoi* to the *mora* would have produced an army, and consequently a total of Spartiates in 418 B.C., roughly twice as large. In support of this thesis, Toynbee supposed that when Thucydides spoke of seven *lochoi* (5. 68) there were in truth six *morai* and one unit of Brasideans and Neodamodeis (5. 67. 1), and that Thucydides betrayed his error by listing polemarchs in the chain of command (5. 66. 3) and failing to take into account their unit, the *mora*, when making his calculation.

The theory is trebly false. There were polemarchs in the army of the Persian Wars (Hdt. 7. 173. 2), at which time their sole functions may have been regularly that of headquarters staff (cf. [Xen.] *Lac. Pol.* 13. 1) and occasionally that of command on expeditions inappropriate for a king (as in Hdt. loc. cit.).<sup>4</sup> Thucydides may have been quite right not to provide for units for them. The presumption that Thucydides' seven units must have included the Brasideans and Neodamodeis is ill grounded. When Thucydides described the order of battle (5. 67), he sharply distinguished the Sciritans and the Brasideans and Neodamodeis from the *lochoi* of 'the Lacedaemonians themselves', and it is extremely unlikely that when he made his calculations in the following chapter he would have been including as a *lochos* the force he had shortly before so distinguished.<sup>5</sup> He did explicitly exclude the Sciritans from his calculations, but this is not to imply that he included the Brasideans and Neodamodeis. The Sciritans were a regular and well-known *lochos*, and remained so (cf. Diod. 15. 32. 1). The Brasideans and Neodamodeis were a variable and incalculable force<sup>6</sup> which

<sup>3</sup> Toynbee's views were first stated in *JHS* 33 (1913), 246–75 and restated in *Some Problems of Greek History* (1969), 365–417. They conditioned Wade-Gery's discussion in *Essays in Greek History*, 71 ff.

<sup>4</sup> cf. Busolt, art. cit. 418.

<sup>5</sup> A. Andrewes, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides* iv, 112, like many others (e.g. W. G. Forrest, *History of Sparta*, 132), takes the contrary view. His presumption is that Thucydides' calculation at 5. 68. 3 was intended to account for every Lacedaemonian on the field of battle, but he admits that the 'few Lacedaemonians' on the right wing (ch. 67. 1) were not included and debates whether the 300 *hippeis* of 72. 4 were included. Cf. Busolt-Swoboda, *Griechische Staatskunde*, 710.

<sup>6</sup> 700 originally accompanied Brasidas (Thuc. 4. 80. 5). The number of the original Neodamodeis, first met at Thuc. 5. 34. 1, is beyond conjecture. If there were troops of this class

no one would confuse with one of the regular units of the Spartan army, and Thucydides may have felt no need explicitly to exclude. But the real weakness in Toynbee's case is in his ready assumption that in the army of the *lochoi* Spartiates and Perioecs were separately brigaded, not mixed up in the manner described by Isocrates (12. 180). It is indeed true that in 479 B.C. the 5,000 Spartiates and 5,000 perioecs marched out separately (Hdt. 9. 10. 1, 11. 3), for reasons only to be conjectured.<sup>7</sup> But once the Spartan army was assembled in Boeotia there is in Herodotus' account of the actual fighting no trace of separate brigading. In his account of the order of battle (Ch. 28) he has 'ten thousand of the Lacedaemonians' on the right wing, and although 'the Spartiates chose to station the Tegeans next to themselves', he cannot mean that the non-Spartiates were on the extreme right with the Spartiates to their left, for in the preliminary operations Pausanias is said to have led 'the Spartiates' back 'to the right wing' (Ch. 47). At no point in the engagement does Herodotus clearly distinguish 'Spartiates' and 'Lacedaemonians', as a reading of Chapters 53–63 will show.<sup>8</sup> He speaks for instance in Ch. 54. 2 of 'Spartiates' and three lines later of 'the Lacedaemonians'; in Ch. 56 Amompharetus is expected not to stand his ground with the Pitanate *lochos* when 'the other Lacedaemonians' were moving off; in the final stages 'the Lacedaemonians and the Tegeates' (Ch. 61. 2) were isolated. Clearly what at one point he calls 'the Laconian army' (Ch. 53. 4) remained together. Yet there were no non-Spartiates killed (70. 5, 85. 1). Tegeates were killed. Spartiates were killed. Where are the Perioec dead? 'Many of the Lacedaemonians' were shot down (63. 1); no Perioecs were buried. Are we to suppose that the Perioecs, brigaded separately, shared in the battle, with Spartiates dying to the right of them and Tegeates to the left, but miraculously escaped fatal casualties themselves? The whole story is consistent not with separate brigading, but with the Perioecs being in the rear ranks. The Spartiates in front bore the brunt (61. 3) and turned back the Persian attacks (62. 3). As Busolt rightly observed, in the army of the *morai* 'the strongest', i.e. the Spartiates, were always the ones who confronted the enemy ([Xen.] *Lac. Pol.* 11. 8),<sup>9</sup> though occasionally through the shortage of Spartiates Perioecs could

in the force that Ischagoras was to take out in 423 (Thuc. 4. 132. 2) or in the force that went in 422 (Thuc. 5. 12. 1), they may have been quite numerous (cf. 5. 31. 4, 49. 1). But Thucydides probably had not the necessary information to calculate their number in 418 B.C.

<sup>7</sup> Herodotus would have it thought that the Spartans were waiting for the Isthmus wall to be more nearly completed (9. 7. 1), and the celebration of the Hyacinthia was only a pretext. But as Xen. *Hell.* 4. 5. 11 makes clear, if they had gone out earlier, the Amyclaeans would have returned. So the Spartans had to wait until the festival was ended to order out the army, which went out quickly and waited in Arcadia for the Perioecs, just as in 386 Agesilaus marched to Tegea and summoned the Perioecs thither (Xen. *Hell.* 5. 1. 33), at a time when it is sure that there was no separate brigading (*pace* Beloch, *Klio* 6 [1906], 63 f., who rejects the evidence of Isoc. 12. 271).

<sup>8</sup> In Ch. 29 he speaks of the *Σπαρτιατικὴ τάξις* and then of *οἱ Λακεδαιμόνιοι*. The word *τάξις* seems to be rather loosely used by Herodotus (cf. 6. 3. 3, 9. 31. 2, where it seems to be equivalent to 'rank'), and here he uses the word as a means of marking the variation in the number of light-armed attached to the two types of Spartan hoplite. In his account of the battle itself there is no trace of different formations of Spartiates and non-Spartiates.

<sup>9</sup> Busolt, art. cit. 423. For the practice of always having the best troops in the front, cf. Asclepiodotus 3. 5, 6, and 10. 14 (the Laconian counter-march). The famous single line at Dipaea (Isoc. 6. 99) should not be taken to mean that there was literally a single rank of Spartans facing the Arcadians; no matter how valorous the warriors, victory for such a formation would have been impossible in a hoplite battle. What Isocrates refers to presumably is that there were only enough Spartiates available to fill the front rank.

Fatal casualties on the field of battle were light and confined to those who withstood the first shock, but there may have been ample wounded amongst the non-Spartiates. (The cenotaph of

find themselves in that distinguished position (Isoc. 12. 180). I submit that it was no different in the army of the *lochoi*, and that Toynbee's criterion for deciding whether the Spartan army we meet in the pages of Thucydides was in fact the army of the *morai* is unsound.

More serious arguments have been advanced by Andrewes,<sup>10</sup> who 'with misgiving' believes 'that we should double Thucydides' figures'. First, he argues that, whereas Thucydides stated that the Spartan array was greater than that of their opponents (5. 68. 1, 71. 2), the likely strength of the opposing forces was surely greater than that suggested by Thucydides' calculations. Secondly, the Thucydidean numbers for Mantinea seem inconsistent with the figure of about 6000 Lacedaemonian hoplites alleged by Xenophon for the battle of Nemea in 394 B.C. (*Hell.* 4. 2. 16). Thirdly, there are indications that in the first decades of the fourth century a *mora*, i.e. a sixth of the army, was at full strength larger than a *lochos* as described by Thucydides; the *mora* which was destroyed by Iphicrates in 390 B.C., without the Amyclaeans who properly belonged to it (Xen. *Hell.* 4. 5. 11 f.), was 600 strong, even though it was unlikely to have been at full strength; Callisthenes, presumably describing events after 387/6, probably the Spartan operations in Boeotia in the 370s, gave the figure of 700 as the strength of the *mora*.<sup>11</sup> How then is one to explain what is an increase in Spartan strength, if Thucydides' calculations for 418 B.C. are correct?

The second and third of these arguments are easily blunted. After 424 B.C., when Brasidas took a non-Spartiate force to Thrace (Thuc. 4. 80), Sparta more and more used non-Spartiates for military purposes. Neodamodeis were probably never incorporated in the *morai*,<sup>12</sup> to judge by their role on their last appearance in the evidence (Xen. *Hell.* 6. 5. 24), though there may have been enough of them at the battle of Nemea considerably to swell the total of the Spartan army, more of them indeed than moderns are prepared to allow. But there were two other sources of non-Spartiates in the *morai* which render inapposite comparison of the army of 418 B.C. with that of the early fourth century. First, the 'Inferiors' (Hypomeiones). It emerges from the story of the Conspiracy of Cinadon that they were 'in the army' (*συντεταγμένοι*) (Xen. *Hell.* 3. 3. 7).<sup>13</sup> It is to be presumed that as the number of Spartiates declined, the number of 'Inferiors' grew. The decline was certainly not due to infertility; quite apart from the consideration that the group was too large to suffer the demographic effects of inbreeding, we have a firm indication in the existence of a substantial class of *nothoi* (bastards) (Xen. *Hell.* 5. 3. 9) that infertility was not the trouble. The cause of the decline was presumably where Aristotle (*Pol.* 1270a15 ff.) placed it, viz. in the system of land-tenure and the inequality of property; more and more Spartiates were unable to pay their share of the messes and had to drop out.<sup>14</sup> The increase in the number of Inferiors did not necessarily equal the decrease in the number of Spartiates, but the Inferiors may have made an ever more considerable contribution to the strength of the *morai*. Of the growth of this class we can only conjecture, but it is to be noted that Herodotus knew only of Spartiates and Perioecs in the Spartan army

the Aeginetans at Plataea about which Herodotus was scornful (9. 85. 3) may have been set up to commemorate men who later died of their wounds.) For the vulnerability of hoplites, cf. Xen. *Anab.* 3. 4. 30, 32.

<sup>10</sup> *Ad.* Thuc. 5. 68. 3, written before the publication of Toynbee, *Some Problems*.

<sup>11</sup> Plut. *Pel.* 17, Diod. 15. 32. 1.

<sup>12</sup> cf. Forrest, *op. cit.* 132.

<sup>13</sup> For the term, cf. Wade-Gery, *Essays*, 83 n. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Toynbee, *Some Problems*, frequently speaks of the 'Inferiors' as Spartiates; cf. 310, 343, 346 n. 2. Since, in the one passage where the term is used (Xen. *Hell.* 3. 3. 5 ff.), they are plainly treated as not being Spartiates, it is hard to see why.

(cf. 9. 10, 11), and the incorporation of the 'Inferiors' may well have been a post-Brasidean development. If so, it stultifies comparison of army strengths in 418 B.C. and the 390s. The other source of non-Spartiates, the Perioecs, may well have been drawn on ever more heavily. Diodorus records early in the 370s (Diod. 15. 31) a rearrangement of the military forces of the Peloponnesian League. It may have been accompanied by a decision to call up more of the Perioecs, but probably no such decision was needed. They had very little in the way of rights (cf. Isoc. 12. 180 f.), and Sparta could use them as freely as she wished. So neither of Andrewes' second and third arguments is of great force.

His first argument,<sup>15</sup> however, is very serious. If the Spartan side at the battle of Mantinea was indeed greater than the opposite array, there must be something seriously awry with Thucydides' calculations. Such an error would be of far-reaching import. Thucydides appears to have known a great deal about Sparta. His exile gave him the chance to travel in the Peloponnese (5. 26. 5), and we see him at Sparta reflecting on the paradoxical contrast between the magnitude of Spartan power and influence and the puniness of the public buildings (1. 10. 2), just as we see him pondering the inscription at the tomb of Pausanias the Regent (1. 134. 4). His information is remarkably full. He has penetrated 'the secrecy of the state' (5. 68) sufficiently to know about the massacre of the helots who deemed themselves worthy of liberation (4. 80. 3), though he appears not to know precisely when it happened.<sup>16</sup> Impressively, he furnishes a large number of names and patronymics; for instance, he could give the names of all three commanders on Sphacteria and the order of seniority (4. 38. 1). A glance at the index to his *Histories* reveals a very ample knowledge of Spartan names and, more impressively, knowledge of social status (cf. 3. 5. 2, 8. 55. 2 for two men designated 'Lacôn', whatever he meant by that,<sup>17</sup> no one else in the *Histories* being so designated; 8. 6. 4, 22. 1, a pair of Perioecs, again the only cases cited). It is notable that of the many Spartans he names only a certain number are described as 'Spartiate', and most of the rest are simply 'Lacedaemonians'; this is more likely due to his knowing when he did not know than to mere fitfulness of method.<sup>18</sup> His restraint argues that he knew what he was talking about. Especially on military matters he manifests caution; 'it was difficult to ascertain the truth' about Spartan casualties (5. 74. 2); only a hearsay figure is given. Evidently Thucydides had tried, but been dissatisfied. It is therefore very striking when he makes a firm statement about Herodotus' 'Pitanate *lochos*' – 'it never existed' (1. 20. 3). He has been accused of pedantry,<sup>19</sup> but he has evidently satisfied himself about the organisation of the army of the *lochoi*. It should indeed arouse 'misgiving' to suppose that his calculations for 418 B.C. are wrong by half. Only if there is no other way of explaining his statements about the superior size of the Spartan array should we have recourse to such a desperate hypothesis. And there is another way, viz. that Thucydides was alluding to the greater frontage of the Spartan array. 'The army of the Lacedaemonians *appeared* greater' (μείζον ἐφάνη – 5. 68. 1). 'The Spartans and the Tegeans overlapped the Athenians still more, in so far as they had the greater army' – sc. the army with the

<sup>15</sup> Also discussed by Toynbee, *Some Problems*, 400.

<sup>16</sup> He makes clear that it is earlier than 424 B.C. (cf. καὶ τότε, 4. 80. 5), but is not precise. 'Ἐν τοῖς πολέμοις (§3) suggests the troubled period, 480–460 B.C.

<sup>17</sup> cf. Bolte, *PW* III A. 2, cols. 1283 ff.

<sup>18</sup> For instance in Book 8, Thucydides describes seven persons new to the *History* as Spartiate, in addition to the four he names as nauarchs; then four are described as 'Lacedaemonian', one as 'Lacon'; ten lack any designation. Four Spartans receive patronymics, nineteen none. On two occasions he names two Spartans, one with patronymic, one without.

<sup>19</sup> cf. Wade-Gery, art. cit. 76.

greater frontage (5. 71. 2). The Spartans were generally eight deep (5. 68. 3), until Leuctra their steady practice.<sup>20</sup> But elsewhere different ideas were coming in. The Thebans at Delium were 25 deep (Thuc. 4. 93), half their depth at Leuctra (Xen. *Hell.* 6. 4. 12). The Syracusans in 415 were drawn up 16 deep (Thuc. 6. 67). It would be no surprise if the Argives at Mantinea had adopted Theban ideas of depth.<sup>21</sup> So there is a way of explaining Thucydides' statements other than the desperate hypothesis of Thucydides' making careless calculations, and without misgiving one can confidently accept his figures for the Spartan army in 418 B.C.<sup>22</sup>

The decline of numbers of Spartiates was steady enough. In the sixty years since the Persian Wars they had dropped by between 69 and 73 per cent, in the fifty years since 418 by between 60 and 54 per cent, the larger drop in the earlier period doubtless reflecting the effect of the great earthquake of 465 B.C.<sup>23</sup> There was no dramatic drop in the fifty years before Leuctra, but despite the steady decline of the fifth century Sparta's military prowess continued. Overwhelmed in the utterly unprecedented style of warfare encountered on Sphacteria and thus causing the Greeks to wonder whether Sparta was losing her dash (Thuc. 5. 75. 3), she showed at Mantinea that her courage was still supreme (ibid. 5. 72. 2).

## II. COMPENSATION FOR DECLINING NUMBERS

After the dizzy excitement of 465 B.C., the helots, whom Aristotle declared (*Pol.* 1269a38) to be continually waiting for an opportunity to attack, never revolted again until the Thebans invaded Laconia in 369 B.C. The Spartans, however, never ceased to fear a helot uprising (cf. Thuc. 4. 80. 3), and not just in Messenia. The occupation of Pylos in 425 B.C. was quickly followed by the occupation of Cythera, and Spartan fears of the effects seem to have been much the same in the two cases (ibid. 4. 55. 5. 15) just as in each case helots, given the opportunity, took to deserting (ibid. 7. 26. 2).<sup>24</sup> So why were there no revolts between 465 and 369, or indeed after 369? The number of Spartiates was steadily declining throughout the period, and therefore, one would expect, the chances of successful revolt steadily increasing. Nor does there seem to have been any lack of opportunity. After the disaster of 425 Sparta was suspected of having gone 'soft' (Thuc. 5. 75. 3; cf. 4. 40), and when the Spartan army had to march out in haste to the battle of Mantinea, a Helot revolt could have played a

<sup>20</sup> See the table in W. K. Pritchett, *Ancient Greek Military Practices* 1 (Berkeley, 1971; republished as *The Greek State at War* 1 (Berkeley, 1974)), 135.

<sup>21</sup> cf. their development of a corps d'élite (Thuc. 5. 67. 2, 81. 2; Diod. 12. 79. 4; Paus. 2. 20. 2).

<sup>22</sup> Andrewes, op. cit. 126, states that 5. 74. 1 'clearly demands that exceptional numbers of troops were engaged', but Thucydides constantly (and curiously) resorts to superlatives and he may mean no more than that the battle was very great in the sense that it was of very great importance.

<sup>23</sup> Toynbee, *Some Problems*, 349 f., unwisely follows L. Ziehen, 'Das spartanische Bevölkerungsproblem', *Hermes* 68 (1933), 231 f., in taking Diodorus' figure of 20,000 casualties (11. 63) literally, but clearly the earthquake had very serious demographic effects, to judge by Sparta's reaction to events on Sphacteria (cf. also n. 9 for the shortage of Spartiates at the battle of Dipaea).

<sup>24</sup> The Athenians built a fort in Laconia opposite Cythera in 413, which they had to abandon after the Sicilian disaster but which was intended as a haven for deserting Laconian Helots (Thuc. 7. 26. 2, 8. 4). Xenophon (*Hell.* 4. 8. 8) records the occupation of Cythera and the installation of an Athenian as harmost in 393 B.C.; the fact that Xenophon makes no mention of unrest and desertions on the mainland proves nothing. The only record of desertion in the *Hellenica* concerns Corcyra (6. 2. 15), but it was a fact of Greek life which Xenophon saw no reason to mention or else preferred not to mention.

decisive part in the ruin of the state. Again, during the early days of the Corinthian War, the distractions of operations in Boeotia and round the Isthmus provided a suitable context. Why was there no revolt?

The answer may simply be that the Helots were so afraid of reprisals that they would not move until Sparta had been defeated and a foreign army was in Laconia itself, the position in 369; in which case either Spartan fears of the Helots were exaggerated or Spartan repression had successfully cowed them. However, that is not the impression one receives from Xenophon's account of the conspiracy of Cinadon (*Hell.* 3. 3. 4–11), which suggests that the Spartiates had very good reason to fear and that the Helots were very ready to play their part. Some further considerations seem to be called for to explain the long quiescence.

All the evidence concerning the condition of the Helots suggests that they were treated with great severity and cruelty,<sup>25</sup> and continued to be so treated long after the liberation of Messenia. Both Theopompus, writing in the second half of the fourth century (*FGH* 115 F 13), and Myron of Priene, probably in the third (*FGH* 106 F 2), appear to be describing the position in their own day. So there is no reason to distinguish Messenian from Laconian Helots as far as their treatment is concerned. However, there is strong reason to make the distinction with regard to their attitude to Sparta. The Messenians, as far as we know, remained uncompromisingly intransigent, pining for their long-lost liberty. The Laconian Helots seem to have been curiously ambivalent. They were ready to desert in the Peloponnesian War (Thuc. 7. 26. 2) and could be counted on by Cinadon (*Xen. Hell.* 3. 3. 6). Spartiates at home in Sparta did not dare to leave their shields in a usable condition (Critias DK 88 B 37). The Laconian Helots had shown themselves at the time of the Great Earthquake as ready as the Messenians to make the most of Sparta's disasters (Plut. *Cim.* 16; Diod. 11. 63 f.), and the Spartiates never relaxed their guard or their severity. Yet in 369 an astonishing thing happened. Messenia was asserting its independence. Epaminondas, at the head of a huge army, had advanced into Laconia, for centuries inviolate, burning and pillaging – and the unwonted spectacle of smoke broke the Spartan women's wonted restraint (*Xen. Hell.* 6. 5. 28). Some of the Perioecs joined the Thebans in their attack (*ibid.* §32). Dissidence showed itself amongst even the Spartiates (Plut. *Ages.* 32). The unwall'd city was defended by what were and could be seen to be 'really few' Spartiates. It must have seemed to all the Helots of Laconia that proud Sparta was on the point of destruction, that their oppressors would shortly oppress no more. In these circumstances 'the authorities saw fit to make a proclamation to the Helots that if any was willing to take up arms and join the ranks, he should receive solemn assurances that those who joined in the fight would be free.' It was said that over 6,000 responded (*Xen. Hell.* 6. 5. 28 f.).<sup>26</sup> This is indeed astonishing. What had these Helots to gain from Sparta which they would not gain from the Thebans?

There seems only one explanation of such conduct. The *mirage spartiate* bedazzled all classes alike. The Perioecs, who could be relied on to fight side by side with Spartiates, were so loyal that the Athenians in the Peloponnesian War saw fit only to ravage Perioecic territory,<sup>27</sup> not to expect revolt. The Helots too were sufficiently loyal to wish only for freedom within the Spartan system, not for freedom from that

<sup>25</sup> Cartledge *op. cit.* 347–56 has a useful collection of evidence.

<sup>26</sup> Diodorus 15. 65. 6 alludes to the 'recent freeing' of the Helots and gives the figure of 1000, but, if that is the figure he actually wrote and if it is correct, the argument is not basically affected.

<sup>27</sup> Thuc. 2. 56. 6, 3. 16. 2, 4. 56. 2, 7. 18. 3, 26. 2. Cf. F. Hampl, 'Die lakedämonischen Periöken', *Hermes* 72 (1937), 24.

system. It is notable that in the conspiracy of Cinadon, which embraced all classes of non-Spartiate, the aim of Cinadon was not necessarily radical. When asked what his intention had been, he replied that he wanted to be 'inferior to no one' in the state (Xen. *Hell.* 3. 3. 11), by which he may have meant no more than the status of 'Equal' (homoios). A revolution may have been planned very similar to that proposed by King Agis in 243 B.C., viz. a vast increase of Spartiates (Plut. *Agis* 8) – a desire for social advancement, not for the eradication of the whole Spartiate order; what Agis sought, Cleomenes realised (Plut. *Cleom.* 11), promptly seeking to revivify the ancient system of education (the *agoge*). The Spartan way of life was the ideal, or so all classes conceived it, including even those helots who were not imbued with Messenian nationalism.

How had Sparta won the loyalty of the oppressed? A large part of the answer must lie in the offer of social advancement. Ancient writers could dwell on the stability and the endurance of the Spartan constitution and find the secret in the nice balancing of constitutional principles.<sup>28</sup> More worthy of attention would have been the remarkable evolution of Spartan society. Herodotus appears to have known of only the threefold division of Spartiates, Perioecs and Helots. By 400 the two classes of 'Inferiors' and 'Neodamodeis' have emerged (Xen. *Hell.* 3. 3. 6). In the third century Myron (F1) can name no less than five kinds of freed slave. When this differentiation of society began we can only guess, but the information Thucydides provides about the Neodamodeis suggests that the decision in 424 B.C. to allow Brasidas to use non-Spartiates in the service of the state (4. 80) was a major turning point. He first mentions them, and as a distinct class, in 421 B.C. (5. 34. 1), and in view of their constant use thereafter on military service it seems unlikely that such a class existed when Brasidas marched out with his 700 Helot hoplites. So the creation of a distinct class of Neodamodeis formalised what Brasidas had begun.<sup>29</sup> What exactly their status was, in what sense they were, as the name suggests, 'newly put in the *damos*', we can only conjecture, but whatever it was, clearly there was now a career open to military talent and the will to serve Sparta's interests. It was not, strictly speaking, the first moment that the principle of promotion was applied. In 425 B.C. Helots who were ready to help break the blockade of Sphacteria were promised their freedom (Thuc. 4. 26. 5), and such promises may have been made and acted on, for all we know, at an earlier date. But that 424 B.C. was a turning point is clear from Thucydides' contrast with what had happened earlier when 2,000 Helots had betrayed their uppishness by responding to a Spartan offer of freedom (4. 80), and it seems safe to assert that it was in the latter part of the Archidamian War that Sparta began a regular policy of social advancement for Helots.<sup>30</sup> Nor was it confined to strictly military functions. The Thebans in their appeal to Athens in 395 B.C. are made by Xenophon (*Hell.* 3. 5. 12) to assert that the Spartans 'think fit to appoint helots as harmosts'; presumably these

<sup>28</sup> Thuc. 1. 18, Plato *Laws* 712d, Arist. *Pol.* 1294b14 ff., Polyb. 6. 10. 6–11.

<sup>29</sup> The various appearances of the Neodamodeis are listed by Toynbee, *Some Problems*, 380 n. 1. For fuller discussion, see V. Ehrenberg, *PW* XVI. 2, cols. 2396–2401. Cf. R. F. Willetts, 'The Neodamodeis', *CPh* 49 (1959), 27–32. It is to be noted that the one thousand Neodamodeis of Xen. *Hell.* 3. 1. 4 are referred to in Diod. 14. 36. 1 as *πολιται*, and that Pausanias the Regent is said by Thucydides (1. 132. 4) to have offered the Helots *ἐλευθέρωσιν τε... καὶ πολιτείαν*. F. Hampl, art. cit. 26 f., argues that the Neodamodeis were Helots promoted to the same status as Perioecs.

<sup>30</sup> The class of freedman called *δεσποσιοναῦται* mentioned by Myron F 1, to judge by the name, probably came into existence as Sparta concerned herself more with the sea, another instance of promotion to meet the needs of the Peloponnesian War.



were liberated Helots, but it is remarkable that men of helot origin could be deemed trustworthy agents of Spartan policy.<sup>31</sup>

Sparta in the last two decades of the fifth century must have been becoming a very different place from what it had been. In 413 the Spartans 'picked out the best of the Helots and the Neodamodeis', 600 hoplites in all, and sent them to fight in Sicily (Thuc. 6. 19. 3). Presumably they shortly returned with experience of war and the confidence of victory, and lived within the state until they were next used. Evidently the Spartans did not too greatly fear to have such trained warriors in their midst. The very people once the most likely to join in revolt had been won over by the prospect of promotion and the enjoyment of their new status.

Nor was it only Helots who shared in this change of policy. In the Ionian War we meet a Perioec in command of a squadron of thirteen ships (Thuc. 8. 22. 1). The Spartan commander sent out by the city with 700 hoplites to assist Cyrus in his revolt, Chirisophus, had as his second-in-command Neon of Asine (Xen. *Anab.* 1. 4. 3, 5. 3. 4), who was presumably a Perioec, sent out on service. Other cases can be no more than suspected,<sup>32</sup> but clearly the great extension of Spartan operations and Spartan influence had opened up prospects of honourable posts for many non-Spartiates. But the change for the Helots was the most important, for it must have enormously reduced the danger of Helot revolt, and therein must be found a large part of the explanation of Sparta's freedom from Helot uprising in the seventy years before the Thebans liberated Messenia.

All this, however, only indirectly affected the Messenians. If the Laconian Helots were bought off, any Helot revolt would be confined to Messenia, but that would hardly deter if Spartan military power was declining as fast as the number of Spartiates. There were, however, compensatory factors.

The 'Inferiors' of whom we hear only in Xenophon's account of the conspiracy of Cinadon must always have existed in some number. To be a Spartiate it was necessary both to have been through the *agoge*, the education system, and to make one's contribution to the common messes, the *syssitia*, and it is likely that there had always been those who could not fulfil the latter condition and thus ceased to rate as Spartiates. Down to 425 B.C., to judge by the fact that neither Herodotus nor Thucydides appears to conceive of others than Spartiates and Perioecs composing the army, those lost in this way to the numbers of Spartiates were lost to the army. But by the turn of the century these 'Inferiors' were, as already noted, 'in the army' (*συντεταγμένοι*), and there was this compensation for the loss of numbers. As to when precisely they were incorporated, there is no way of knowing, but once Sparta had

<sup>31</sup> The reading of one manuscript, *τῶν Εἰλώτων ἐνὶ δουλείῃν*, at Isoc. 4. 111 is normally preferred and reference to Lysander is presumed (cf. J.-F. Bommelaer, *Lysandre de Sparte* [1981], 38); in which case it is notable that Isocrates finds such a role for a Helot conceivable. But the right reading may be *ἐνίοις*, and provide confirmation of the statement in the Theban speech quoted in the text.

<sup>32</sup> There is no explicit evidence that Eteonicus was a Spartiate, save Pausanias 10. 9. 9 f., which may be doubted; Pausanias may simply have presumed that the subordinates of Lysander at Aegospotami were both Spartiates, though §10 suggests that the inscriptions on the statues at Delphi described them simply as *Λακεδαιμόνιοι*. Thucydides (8. 23) refrained from social designation. At *Hell.* 1. 1. 32 Xenophon describes him as *ὁ Λάκων ἄρμυστής*. If he was not a Spartiate, he had a very striking career, for which see Poralla, *Prosopographie der Lak.*, 53. (Xenophon's use of *Λάκων* is an uncertain guide. Chirisophus is *Λάκων* at *Anab.* 2. 1. 5, 6. 1. 32; *Λακεδαιμόνιος* at *Anab.* 1. 4. 3 – cf. Diod. 14. 27. 1; *Anab.* 4. 6. 14 makes it probable if not certain that he was a Spartiate.) Charminus and Polynicus (*Anab.* 7. 6. 1, 7, 39) may not have been Spartiates. Busolt, *Gr. Ges.* 3. 2. 1532 n., may not have been right to presume that Pasippidas (Xen. *Hell.* 1. 1. 32) was nauarch, which would require that he was Spartiate.

begun to use Neodamodeis and Helots as hoplites, it is unlikely that the use of 'Inferiors' would be long delayed, especially considering that a good number, if not all, had probably been through the *agoge*, part of the class of so-called Mothakes.

We have it on the authority of Phylarchus<sup>33</sup> that 'the Mothakes are foster-brothers of the Lacedaemonians: for each of the sons of the citizens, adopting according to their means some a single one, some a pair, certain a greater number, make them their foster-brothers. So the Mothakes are free yet not Lacedaemonians, and they had a full share in the education'. Some of the lexicographers' notices<sup>34</sup> might suggest that the Mothakes were slaves, but if Phylarchus is right in adding 'They say that Lysander was one of them', and Aelian (*VH* 12. 43) right in saying that Callicratidas, Gylippus and Lysander were Mothakes, the lexicographers must be mistaken. There is no good reason to reject their evidence.<sup>35</sup> Likewise when Phylarchus speaks of 'Lacedaemonians' he must mean Spartiates, for only the sons of Spartiates automatically went through the *agoge*. So from the Mothakes Sparta could draw an ample enough supply of men who could compensate in the army for the ever-diminishing number of Spartiates. But were the 'Inferiors' Mothakes? Since the term 'Inferiors' occurs only once, one cannot be sure, but when one considers that the 'Inferior' Cinadon was given a *scytale* and was told to go and 'order the most senior of the *Hippagretae*' (who were Spartiates) (*Xen. Hell.* 3. 3. 9), it seems likely that the 'Inferiors' had been through the *agoge* as Mothakes. Both the Mothakes Gylippus and Lysander were sons of Spartiates but probably 'Inferiors' in status. Their subsequent careers showed they were not inferior in military skill. It is probable that they had been through the *agoge*, and in general it seems reasonable to suppose that 'Inferiors' were Mothakes and that they were good military material – a partial compensation for the decline of Spartiates.

But if the training of 'Inferiors' was a source of strength for Spartan military forces, so too were the other Mothakes, what Xenophon terms (*Hell.* 5. 3. 9) 'foreigners of the so-called *trophimoi*', a term which might be translated 'foster-children' and which appears to be the same as Phylarchus' *syntrophoi* ('foster-brothers'), those from whom Agis in 243 B.C. proposed to recruit a large number of Spartiates (Plut. *Agis* 8. 3 *ἐνών, ὅσοι τροφῆς μετεσχῆκότες ἐλευθερίου*).<sup>36</sup> Three such are known to us, viz. the sons of Xenophon (Diogenes Laertius 2. 54) and the son of Phocion (Plut. *Phoc.* 20), but to judge by what is said of Phlius in 380 B.C. this class of persons was very numerous. Agesilaus was accused of embroiling the Spartans with a city of over 5,000 citizens 'for the sake of a few men'. So he prescribed messes and training for all those who came over to the Spartan side, and there were found 'more than a thousand men, in excellent physical condition, good at military drill and very good with their hoplite equipment' (*Xen. Hell.* 5. 3. 16 f.). Of course, it is not suggested that all this thousand had been to Sparta for the *agoge*; if as many as that had come from a single small city, the sons of Spartiates would have been swamped. But the story does suggest that enough Peloponnesians had imbibed the values of the *agoge* to export Spartan military excellence to their own cities. There is no way of knowing when this great diffusion

<sup>33</sup> *FGH* 81 F 43.

<sup>34</sup> Conveniently set out by D. Lotze on p. 426 f. of his article '*Μόθακες*', *Historia* 11 (1962).

<sup>35</sup> Callicratidas and Lysander were certainly, as nauarchs, Spartiates, Gylippus probably (Thucydides never says as much, but it is probably Gylippus to whom he refers at 7. 58. 3, and not Ekkritos, the Spartiate commander of 7. 19. 3; cf. 6. 91. 4, 93. 2, 7. 2. 1). But that does not reflect on whether they were promoted *μόθακες*. Nothing is known of the youth of Callicratidas, but the discrediting of Gylippus' father (Plut. *Per.* 22) may have down-graded the son, and Lysander is explicitly stated to have been 'brought up in poverty' (Plut. *Lys.* 2). J.-F. Bommelaer, *op. cit.* 36–8, for no good reason rejects the evidence of Phylarchus.

<sup>36</sup> cf. Ehrenberg, *PW* VII A. 1, cols. 675 f.

of virtue began. The sons of 'the best men' of the Peloponnesian League may have been going to Sparta for a Spartan education for generations, but it is possible that the habit grew in reaction to the spread of sophistic influence.<sup>37</sup> Certainly in the course of time the effect must have been cumulative, and it is likely that the decline in the numbers of Spartiates in the Spartan army itself was matched by some increase in the effectiveness of the Peloponnesian allies.

There is therefore no great problem in explaining why the Helots, especially the Messenian Helots, refrained from revolt for almost a century after the Great Earthquake. Spartiate numbers steadily fell. Spartan power supported by the Peloponnesian League remained formidable. Only in the shadow of Theban defeat and the distraction of Theban invasion was Sparta unequal to Messenian nationalism.

### III. THE NEGLECT OF THE LAWS OF LYCURGUS

Before going on to consider the condition of the Spartan army as a whole at the time of the battle of Leuctra, it would be well to treat of the Spartiates themselves. Had they become less formidable themselves?

'If anyone asked me whether I think the laws of Lycurgus still today remain unshaken, I could no longer assert this with confidence. For I am aware that once the Spartans preferred to associate with each other at home with moderate possessions rather than to be corrupted as imperial officials (*ἀρμόζοντας ἐν ταῖς πόλεσι*) subject to flattery. I am also aware that previously they were afraid to be thought to possess gold; now there are some who even preen themselves on having acquired it. I know that previously the purpose of expelling foreigners from the state and not being allowed to go abroad was to stop the citizens copying foreigners and taking their fill of easy living; now, I know, those who are thought to be the most important have exerted themselves never to stop being imperial officials abroad...'. Thus the author of the Xenophontic *Constitution of the Spartans* (ch. 14),<sup>38</sup> and the passage is freely quoted to support the idea that there was a slackening of Spartiate moral fibre.

Much has been made of the corrupting effects of the importation of wealth,<sup>39</sup> but the matter should be viewed with scepticism. When at the end of the Peloponnesian War Lysander sent home the money in his possession, it was proposed that this gold and silver coin should not be allowed to remain in the city and that the ancient iron spits should continue to be the only currency in the city. The matter was resolved by deciding to keep the gold and silver coin in the care of the state and to use it strictly

<sup>37</sup> cf. the law of Critias (Xen. *Mem.* 1. 2. 31) and Xenophon's criticism of sophistic education (*Cyneg.* 13).

<sup>38</sup> F. R. Wüst, 'Laconica', *Klio* 37 (1959), 53–60, unconvincingly argued that the treatise belonged to the period of Cleomenes III, but I follow K. M. T. Chrimes, *The Respublica Lacedaemoniorum ascribed to Xenophon* (1948), in rejecting Xenophon as the author. Ch. 14 appears to have been written in the 390s, to which the remark about those wanting to be continually abroad as harmosts seems more appropriate than later, and indeed in 395/4 B.C., a year to which the statement that 'now many are summoning each other to prevent them (sc. the Spartans) getting empire again (*πάλιν*)' seems especially suitable, the danger in that year being that Sparta might set up decarchies again. It is most unlikely that at the very time that Xenophon was with admiring eyes serving under Agesilaus in Asia and before he had experience of Spartans in Sparta, he would have written such a chapter. (Cf. Chrimes, 24–8 for other strong arguments.) If Ch. 14, as it seems to be, is a (misplaced) postscript, the treatise must have been written at a time when it was even less likely that Xenophon was in a position to describe so fully the Spartan system. (The date of 387 suggested by E. Delebecque, *Essai sur la vie de Xénophon*, 194–9, is, to my mind, wholly unsatisfactory.)

<sup>39</sup> e.g. by J.-F. Bommelaer, op. cit. 231. Contra, P. A. Cartledge, op. cit. 316.

for purposes of state but to retain for individual citizens the ancient currency. This is the account of Plutarch (*Lys.* 17), who proceeds to moralise on the demoralising effect on individuals of seeing the state value what they were expected to spurn.<sup>40</sup> But the account of the debate is unsatisfactory. Sparta must always have held some money in a form acceptable to the rest of the Greeks. One can hardly imagine ambassadors going abroad with no means of paying their expenses or with a cart-load of useless spits. Further, since 424 B.C. at least, Sparta had made use of mercenaries of some sort (cf. *Thuc.* 4. 80. 5), who were not to be satisfied with payments in iron spits. So there can have been no great breach of principle in 404 B.C. Whatever the alternative proposed, the decision was precisely that accepted by Plato in the *Laws* (742a, b) who saw that 'Hellenic currency' was necessary 'for campaigns and foreign travel' but omitted discussion of the disastrous effects on which Plutarch dilates, with considerable exaggeration.<sup>41</sup> Love of money was an ancient Spartan disease to judge by the oracle delivered three centuries earlier (*Plut. Mor.* 239 f) and by the frequent charges of corruption made against eminent Spartans.<sup>42</sup> 'The love of money, and nothing else, will destroy Sparta' ran the oracle (*Aristotle, frag.* 501), but it had been a long time about its work of destruction. One should therefore regard the statements about the great change in the early fourth century with great scepticism.

The charge that service abroad as imperial officials had damaged the Spartan way of life at home is more difficult to assess. Startling allegations about the conduct abroad of Pausanias the Regent, who 'could no longer live in the established manner' (*Thuc.* 1. 130. 1), presumably reflect Spartan fears of what might become of a Spartiate removed from the careful supervision of the state. Brasidas, Thucydides seems to imply (4. 81. 3), was the virtuous exception. Clearchus behaved with all too Spartan severity and, when recalled, refused to obey (*Diod.* 14. 12, *Xen. Anab.* 2. 6). But in general the supervision of the state was effective enough and a single *scytale* would recall the errant official. Xenophon noted that Dercyllidas was 'always fond of being abroad' (*Hell.* 4. 3. 2), but one suspects exaggeration in the author of *The Constitution of Sparta*. The ephors kept control and it seems unlikely that any Spartiate who wanted to be constantly abroad would have been able to get his way.

Spartiates probably remained as formidable as ever on the field of battle. In the Corinthian War the Argives had shown a marked reluctance to face the Lacedaemonian shields, venturing against them when they thought from the Sigma on the shields the Spartans had picked up that they were facing Sicyonians and quickly retiring when they discovered the truth (*Xen. Hell.* 4. 4. 10 f.). There is no suggestion in either Diodorus' account of the battle of Leuctra (15. 55 esp. §4) or Xenophon's (*Hell.* 6. 4. 13 f.) that the Spartiates did not fight with great courage or that the heroism of Cleonymus (*Xen. Hell.* 5. 4. 33) was unique. After the battle some of the Spartans were unwilling to make a truce and were only forced to do so by the reluctance of the allies (*Xen. Hell.* 6. 4. 14 f.). Plutarch (*Ages.* 30. 2) does speak of 'those who had been cowards in the battle, whom the Spartans term "quakers" (*τρέσαντες*)', but 'cowardice' at Sparta was not cowardice in the sight of other men. The man who was unable to join in the battle at Thermopylae in 480 B.C. because he had an infection of the eyes and could not see was treated as a 'quaker' (*Hdt.* 7. 229–31). Not to die in a battle that was lost was deemed disgraceful (cf. *Xen. Hell.* 6. 4. 16).<sup>43</sup> At the Pathos

<sup>40</sup> cf. *Plut. Lyc.* 30.

<sup>41</sup> cf. *Posidonius ap. Ath.* 6. 233 f–234a (= *FGH* 87 F 48).

<sup>42</sup> *Hdt.* 3. 148, 5. 51, 6. 72. 2; *Thuc.* 2. 21. 1, 5. 16. 3; *Diod.* 13. 106. 10; *Ephorus (FGH 70) F* 193.

<sup>43</sup> cf. *Plut. Lyc.* 21. 2, *Tyrtaeus* 11. 14. The sole survivor of the Battle of the Champions, who had been left in victorious possession of the field, committed suicide, rather than return to Sparta alone (*Hdt.* 1. 82. 8).

at Lechaeum in 390 B.C. 250 out of 600 in the *mora* were killed, but Xenophon remarked that only those who were wounded and were ordered to be carried from the battlefield 'were truly saved' (*Hell.* 4. 5. 12, 17, 14): presumably the rest were treated as 'quakers'. To survive a lost battle was held to be equivalent to fleeing from the enemy (cf. *Hdt.* 9. 53. 2, 55. 2); the survivors of Leuctra were therefore 'quakers'. But this does not prove that they had not fought bravely or unworthily of the Spartan tradition at Leuctra. Only later did 'prudence' begin to show itself (cf. *Xen. Hell.* 7. 4. 25), an attitude against which the young Archidamus was made by Isocrates to argue (in *Oration* 7); even so Archidamus can claim that devotion to the original 'laws and practices' of the state is as strong as ever (§61). The Spartiates themselves had not gone 'soft'.

#### IV. THE DEFEAT AT LEUCTRA

But what of the Spartan army as a whole? The Spartiates, who devoted their whole time to training for war, may have been as good as ever, but, it is thought, they were so few in number that the Spartan army as a whole must have been weaker and the disaster was for that reason inevitable. It is the argument of this section that it was not the shortage of Spartiates that made the result of the battle inevitable. The right explanation is to be found in the Theban development of the art of war. Of course, there can be no proof that if there had been more Spartiates on the field of battle, the result would or would not have been the same. At First Mantinea the Spartan army had been outmanoeuvred but had survived by courage (*Thuc.* 5. 72. 2). Courage, however, is not always sufficient, as the battle on Sphacteria had shown (*Thuc.* 4. 40). At Leuctra the Spartan army was utterly out-generalled.

In considering the state of the Spartan military power in 371, the allies can be left out of account. It is indeed possible that the army of the Peloponnesian League as a whole was a more effective fighting force than it had been. The diffusion of Spartan methods and discipline through 'the foreigners of the so-called *trophimoi*' (*Xen. Hell.* 5. 3. 9), who were 'a really splendid sight and not without experience of the city's ideals', continued to leaven the whole.<sup>44</sup> The reform of the league in 378 B.C. (*Diod.* 15. 31. 1 f.) had perhaps secured that the league armies were larger, or at any rate better organised.<sup>45</sup> The system instituted in either 382 or 378, whereby members of the league could pay for the requisite number of troops instead of themselves providing them,<sup>46</sup> may in an age of ever-increasing professionalism have been an advantage. But all this was irrelevant to the battle of Leuctra; there were no members of the Peloponnesian League involved (cf. *Xen. Hell.* 6. 4. 18) and Epaminondas so contrived that none of Sparta's other allies there present had any part in the actual fighting (cf. *Paus.* 9. 13. 12). It is the Spartan army itself that must be considered.

Here a serious difficulty presents itself. We have no precise information on the amount of military training undergone by the non-Spartiates in the army. The Spartiates' whole lives were devoted to war and they were enabled to this because they and they alone had the leisure afforded by others' labour. But since non-Spartiates fought with them 'mixed up', the non-Spartiates must have had a great deal more

<sup>44</sup> The last clause of the first sentence of *Xen. Hell.* 5. 3. 9 is to be taken with all three categories.

<sup>45</sup> Agesilaus in 378 B.C., with five 'divisions' of the Spartans, had a larger army under his command than the presumably full force army of Nemea (*Diod.* 15. 32. 1, *Xen. Hell.* 4. 2. 16, though it should be noted that Xenophon omitted to count in the Tegeans who took part in the battle).

<sup>46</sup> There is no formal conflict between *Xen. Hell.* 5. 2. 21 ff. (of 382 B.C.) and *Diod.* 15. 31. 2 (of 378 B.C.), but Xenophon may have misremembered the date of the institution.

military training than was usual elsewhere in the fifth century. For even if the Spartiates were vastly superior in physical fitness and in weapon training, for drill the whole army would have had to practise. The Greeks generally thought the Spartan drills very complicated ([Xen.] *RL* 11. 5, 8) and the author of *The Constitution of the Spartans* felt it necessary to explain them. The non-Spartiates in the army needed to be well practised in them, if confusion was to be avoided. The manoeuvre ordered by Agis at Mantinea during the advance into action (Thuc. 5. 71. 3, 72. 1) was only conceivable if all parts of his army were well trained in it. So the non-Spartiates must have been involved in regular and unusually frequent training. To some extent this must be true of weapons drill too. If Perioecs occasionally fought in the front rank as Isocrates asserts (12. 180), they must have been well enough trained in weapons drill if they were not to let the side down and expose those they fought beside to danger, but even when there were ample Spartiates to fill the front rank, it would have been necessary to have the non-Spartiates sufficiently drilled for critical moments. All members of the Spartan army were required by law to keep fit and train while on campaign ([Xen.] *RL* 12. 5), but fitness could not be maintained if what happened on campaign was exceptional. Indeed excellent physical condition is ascribed to various kinds of non-Spartiates (Xen. *Hell.* 5. 3. 9, 17, Plut. *Agis* 8. 3), and not just that, but a share of Spartan valour as well. Herodotus (7. 234. 2) speaks of the Perioecs as 'good' (ἀγαθοί); Xenophon (*Hell.* 5. 3. 9) says that the many Perioecs who volunteered for service under Agesipolis were 'noble and good', and that the *trophimoi* and bastard sons of the Spartiates were 'not without experience of the city's ideals'. All in all, it seems likely that the non-Spartiates had a considerable amount of training in both weapons drill and tactics, and more importantly had become to no small degree copies of Spartiate virtue. Spartiates and non-Spartiates seem to have looked alike on the battlefield, purple-clad and long-haired.<sup>47</sup> In the course of time there may not have been a very marked difference in their fighting.

Time may have blurred the difference in fighting fitness and in valour between Spartiate and non-Spartiate. It had certainly blurred the difference between Sparta and the rest of the Greek world.<sup>48</sup> The days had passed when others were mere 'improvisers of military things' and the Spartans alone 'craftsmen of war' [Xen.] *RL* 13. 5). As Aristotle remarked (*Pol.* 1338b24–38), Spartan superiority had in the past derived from the fact that Spartans alone trained for war, whereas latterly others had matched their professionalism: 'now they have rivals in their education; formerly they had none'. The days had passed when, as at First Mantinea, superior courage could make up for failures in command. In particular the Thebans under Epaminondas seem to have set about military training with Spartan zeal. His own concern is explicitly attested (Nepos, *Epam.* 2. 4 f.). He insisted that those who were to be hoplites had to train not just as athletes but as soldiers (Plut. *Mor.* 192c). Xenophon noted (*Hell.* 6. 5. 23) that the Thebans in Arcadia in winter 370/69 B.C. regularly trained (cf. Plut. *Mor.* 788a);<sup>49</sup> the complicated tactic adopted at Leuctra argues that the army was uncommonly well trained from an earlier date. When he became Boeotarch, he

<sup>47</sup> None of the bits of evidence about dress or hair distinguish between Spartiates and non-Spartiates; cf. Hdt. 1. 82. 8, [Xen.] *RL* 11. 3, Arist. frag. 499. Thucydides surprisingly was not exact about the number of Spartiates captured on Sphacteria (4. 38. 5) as he would have been if their dress and hair had been distinctive; he did not deal in round numbers for the total. There may have been some distinguishing marks, but not so obvious as hair and dress, to judge by [Xen.] *RL* 11. 6.

<sup>48</sup> cf. W. K. Pritchett, *The Greek State at War* II, Ch. 11.

<sup>49</sup> cf. Xen. *Hell.* 7. 5. 19.

warned his countrymen that he was bent on war, that Boeotia would be 'the dancing-floor of war' (Plut. *Mor.* 193d). Doubtless he took pains to train his 'dancers' well. As far as training was concerned, at Leuctra the Spartans met their match. In describing the preparations for Leuctra Diodorus (15. 50. 5) wrote of the Thebans: 'With constant exercise in the gymnasia, they were strong in body, and being by nature given to war, they were the inferiors in courage of no Greek people.' The Spartans no longer had a monopoly of valour. The battle would be decided by what Thucydides (5. 72. 2) had termed *ἐμπερία*.

Xenophon's remark (*Hell.* 4. 3. 16) about the uniqueness of the battle of Coronea could with justice have been repeated about any of the subsequent military engagements in the period he covered. The Pathos in Lechaeum of 390 B.C., which was the most startling demonstration of the new importance of the light-armed, was unique in the severity of the casualties inflicted by light-armed on hoplites. The operations in Boeotia in the 370s manifested new techniques in the defence of territory.<sup>50</sup> The battle of Tegyra of 375 B.C., admittedly a somewhat dark affair since Xenophon preferred not to mention it,<sup>51</sup> involved a joint action of cavalry and the professional infantry of the Sacred Band, probably unprecedented. The truth is that the art of war was developing so fast that every battle was in some sense novel. Of particular relevance to Leuctra, however, was the battle of Nemea in 394 B.C. In this action the right wings of both armies began by moving to the right (Xen. *Hell.* 4. 2. 18 f.) with the aim of encircling their opponents. Encirclement was not new, but the deliberate attempt to prepare for it in the approach march certainly was. Furthermore Theban conceptions of depth prevailed on the Allied side. Before the battle it was agreed to draw up the army sixteen deep; when the Thebans' turn to command came round, they made their army 'thoroughly deep' (Xen. *Hell.* 4. 2. 13, 18), which may mean that they adopted the formation of the battle of Delium (Thuc. 4. 93. 4). So when the Spartans came to Leuctra, they probably expected to face something similar. They therefore abandoned their ancient favoured depth of eight and formed up twelve deep (Xen. *Hell.* 6. 4. 12), and sought to move to their right (Plut. *Pel.* 23. 2). The Thebans did not act as expected. They concentrated themselves fifty deep (Xen. *Hell.* 6. 4. 12) on the left wing, an unheard-of thing, advanced to battle 'obliquely', i.e. in such a way that the Thebans would engage the Spartans before contact was possible elsewhere, ensured protection for the rest of the army by advancing while the cavalry action was still in progress, and finally prevented the Spartan encircling movement.<sup>52</sup> How exactly the engagement went between the twelve-deep Spartans and the fifty-deep Thebans is a matter for speculation. Epaminondas hardly adopted such a depth to spare the men in the rear an active share in the battle, but one can only guess. But it is clear that the Spartans were confronted by a wholly novel tactical situation. They fought with great bravery but were utterly out-generalled. New ways of war had undone them.

## V. THE FAILURE OF SPARTA

In the fifty years before Leuctra Spartan society changed remarkably, but the formal constitution of the state did not. In particular, the Kings remained the hereditary generals, and although they performed this function as adequately as their predecessors, they were not the men to experiment and innovate. At a time when the art of war

<sup>50</sup> Note the use of trenches and palisades (Xen. *Hell.* 5. 4. 38).

<sup>51</sup> Diod. 15. 37. 1 is the merest notice, Plut. *Pel.* 17 very imprecise.

<sup>52</sup> cf. *CQ* n.s. 22 (1972), 260-2.

was developing so rapidly in the rest of the Greek world, Spartan methods remained essentially the same. Hence the disaster of Leuctra.

The failure of Sparta is the analogue of the failure of Greece. It was not due to moral decline. It was not due to mistakes of policy abroad or internal corruption. In each case it was the triumph of military genius. Epaminondas was too good for Sparta, just as Philip was to prove too good for Greece.

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