

LITERACY IN THE SPARTAN OLIGARCHY*

I

SOMEWHERE in the first half of the eighth century B.C. the 'graphic counterpart of speech' (Diringer's nice expression) and a fully phonetic alphabetic script were respectively reintroduced and invented in Greek lands.¹ Thus the Greeks achieved the feat, unique among European peoples, of rediscovering (after an interval of more than four centuries) the literacy they had lost. The alphabet of course marked an enormous advance on the clumsy 'Linear B' syllabic script, in the sense that it made it possible 'to write easily and read unambiguously about anything which the society can talk about'.² However, as Harvey's exhaustive study demonstrated, even in Classical Athens, where popular literacy attained the highest level hitherto known in the Greek world, there were still significant areas of illiteracy or at best semi-literacy.³ Widespread literacy cannot simply be deduced (as it was by Goody and Watt) from the mere availability of a phonetic alphabetic script of the Greek type.⁴ Further factors must be taken into account. One of these, Harvey suggested, is the political system. For although 'democracy and literacy do not necessarily go hand in hand' (p. 590), the high level of literacy at Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries was perhaps 'not entirely unconnected with the fact that she was a democracy' (p. 623).

In order to test this postulated correlation, Harvey compared the case of Classical Sparta, which he saw as the opposite political pole to Athens and for whose degree of literacy there was a fair amount of literary and epigraphical evidence. His conclusion was that 'the average Athenian could read and write with greater facility than the average Spartiate' (p. 628). Harvey's main argument seems to me to be wholly cogent: but Sparta of course was only of indirect interest to him and for several reasons merits thorough examination from the standpoint of literacy in its own right.

First, it is time the belief (entertained, for example, by George Grote) that the Spartans were completely illiterate was reviewed. Secondly, what is probably the earliest example of Spartan writing so far discovered has been published very recently, raising afresh the question of Sparta's role in the development and diffusion of the alphabet in the Peloponnese and elsewhere. Thirdly, it is only against the backdrop of Spartan literacy that the proverbial 'laconic' speech can be properly evaluated. Finally, a just appreciation of the nature and level of literacy at Sparta can, I believe, make a significant contribution to the recently revived debate on the correct characterization of the Classical Spartan 'constitution'.

II

In 1975, two remarkable inscribed bronze artefacts were excavated at the Menelaion sanctuary near Sparta. One was a sacrificial meat-hook, inscribed simply 'to Helen' in lettering of the sixth century (probably late). The other, dedicated apparently to 'Helen wife of Menelaos' by a Deinis, was a pointed or ovoid *aryballos* of exceptional quality, whose shape—if it is appropriate to compare the Protocorinthian series in clay—should give it a firm approximate date of 650 B.C. If (as we must assume) the *aryballos* was dedicated soon after its manufacture, the incised lettering it bears constitutes the earliest known Spartan or—to employ the conventional regional nomenclature—Lakonian writing by a quarter of a century or more.⁵

* Dr R. R. Bolgar, Mr F. D. Harvey, Professor G. L. Huxley, Dr L. H. Jeffery and Mr P. J. Parsons made illuminating comments on earlier drafts of this article. To them I am indebted for such improvements as I have been able to effect. The remaining errors of fact and judgement are entirely my own responsibility.

¹ The finest discussion of the possible occasion and probable date of the invention of the Greek alphabet is L. H. Jeffery, *The Local Scripts of Archaic Greece* (Oxford 1961) 1–42 (hereafter Jeffery). See also below, n. 9.

² J. Goody/I. Watt, 'The Consequences of Literacy' (1962/3), reprinted in Goody (ed.), *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge 1968) 39.

³ F. D. Harvey, 'Literacy in the Athenian Democracy' in *REG* lxxix (1966) 585–635 (hereafter Harvey).

⁴ As it is by Goody/Watt, *art. cit.* (n. 2).

⁵ H. W. Catling/H. Cavanagh, 'Two inscribed bronzes from the Menelaion, Sparta', *Kadmos* xv (1976) 145–57.

We may indeed go further. It is far harder to inscribe bronze than ivory, clay or soft limestone (the materials carrying the earliest examples of the Lakonian script known hitherto).⁶ Yet the letter-forms on the *aryballos* are not merely recognizably 'Lakonian' but (given the constricted surface) remarkably clear and neat too. This one inscription, in other words, seems to presuppose a *tradition* of literacy of considerable duration. It therefore renders plausible the assumption that the alphabet had reached Lakonia within a couple of generations of the generally accepted approximate date of its invention (c. 775 B.C.)—in time, that is to say, for it to have been exported to Taras by Spartan colonists in c. 700.⁷ The new inscription may also have political implications, in the sense that it lends weight to the view that the so-called 'Great Rhetra' (Plut. *Lyk.* 6), whatever its precise nature or significance, was given written form as early as the first half of the seventh century.⁸

How then did the Greek alphabet reach Sparta in the first place? The possibility that it was actually invented on the island of Kythera, which lies off the Malea peninsula, was canvassed by Dr Jeffery. For Kythera was a known meeting-place of Greeks and Phoenicians (whose role in the transmission of 'letters' even the invention-conscious Greeks did not seek to deny) and a Spartan dependency by c. 545 at the latest.⁹ The possibility, however, was ruled out chiefly on the ground (not entirely cogent, see Thuc. iv 53.3) that Kythera did not lie on a regular trade-route. We can now add that the island has yielded no clear archaeological evidence of connections with mainland Lakonia before the second half of the seventh century, although Xenodamos, a Kytheran poet of the first half of the century, was said to have visited Sparta.

Instead, therefore, Dr Jeffery suggested two potential sources of a developed alphabet, Rhodes and Delphi. It is hard to decide between these alternatives, but on balance I prefer Delphi: negatively, because of the almost total absence of archaeological evidence for direct contact between Lakonia and Rhodes earlier than the sixth century; positively, because of the peculiarly close contact Sparta maintained officially with the Delphic Oracle from the eighth century onwards. We do not know when Pythioi (below, Section III) were first appointed in Sparta, but the asserted connection of the 'Great Rhetra' with Delphi and of both with Kings Theopompos and Polydoros implies for me a *terminus ante quem* of c. 675.¹⁰ Indeed, traditionally the first Delphic oracle given to Sparta was delivered to Kings Archelaos and Charillos, whose joint reign could have fallen between c. 775 and 760, satisfyingly adjacent to the suggested date for the invention of the alphabet itself and for the start of the oracle.¹¹ Archaeological confirmation of some form of official Spartan interest in Delphi before 700 may perhaps be derived from an exemplary 'Geometric' bronze horse-figurine of undoubtedly Lakonian style (and presumably manufacture) excavated in the area of the Roman agora.¹² Thus the close similarity between the Lakonian and Phokian local scripts is consistent with Dr Jeffery's suggestion that the Pythioi brought back from Delphi examples of alphabetic writing in the shape of oracles written perhaps on strips of leather (cf. Eur. *fr.* 627 Nauck).

Closely parallel literary and archaeological evidence attests an early and continuing Spartan interest in Olympia (the Oracle of Zeus as well as the Games).¹³ The discus inscribed with the name of Lykurgos, which Aristotle saw at Olympia and dated 776/3, must of course be dismissed

⁶ S. Casson, 'Early Greek inscriptions on metal', *AJA* xxxix (1935) 510–17.

⁷ On the Tarentine alphabet see Jeffery 279–82 (the only serious divergence from Lakonian is the absence of the multi-limbed sigma); equally close dependence on the metropolis is visible in religion and material culture.

⁸ Jeffery, *Archaic Greece. The City-States c. 700–500 B.C.* (London 1976) 117 raises the possibility of 'the inscribing of a *rhetra*, perhaps on a bronze plaque like the sixth-century examples of *rhetrai* found at Olympia' (cf. 42, 169). But see below, n. 69.

⁹ Jeffery 8. On the connections of the Phoenicians with Kythera see now J. N. Coldstream/G. L. Huxley (eds.), *Kythera* (London 1972) 36. On the transmission of 'letters' to the Greeks by the Phoenicians see Jeffery, 'Ἀρχαία γράμματα: some ancient Greek views', *Fest. E. Grumach* (Berlin 1967) 152–4. See also below, n. 80.

¹⁰ Cf. W. G. Forrest, 'The Date of the Lykourgan Reforms at Sparta', *Phoenix* xvii (1963) 158 f., 166–8; M. L. West, *Studies in Greek Elegy and Iambus* (Berlin/New York 1974) 184–6.

¹¹ H. W. Parke/D. E. W. Wormell, *The Delphic Oracle*² (Oxford 1956) i 83 f.; ii no. 539. For the suggested dates of Archelaos and Charillos see Forrest, *A History of Sparta 950–192* (London 1968) 21.

¹² Cl. Rolley, *Fouilles de Delphes V². Monuments figurés: les statuettes de bronze* (Paris 1969) 61 f., no. 61. For a possible dedication at Delphi by a Pythios see below, n. 32.

¹³ A. Hönle, *Olympia in der Politik der griechischen Staatenwelt, von 776 bis zum Ende des 5. Jahrhunderts* (Diss. Tübingen 1968) 19–24.

as a 'forgery'. But Dr Jeffery's suggestion that the alphabet was transmitted to Olympia from Sparta is, if anything, strengthened by the new *aryballos* inscription.¹⁴ However that may be, the debt of Messenia to Sparta for its alphabet is not controversial, although the earliest known inscriptions from Messenia itself are not earlier than the sixth century, and diaspora Messenians (whether former Helots or other expatriates) are not attested epigraphically before the fifth.¹⁵

III

So much for what we might loosely call the 'prehistory' of Spartan literacy. Hereafter, although most of what I say will have implications for the earlier period, and although I shall return in various connections to the epigraphical evidence of the sixth century, I shall be primarily concerned to discuss Spartan literacy in the fifth and fourth centuries. I should also make it quite clear that by 'literacy' I mean simply what Trollope called 'the absolute faculty of reading' (and writing) rather than 'the adequate use of a book' or any deeper sensitivity to literary creations (although I shall shortly be considering the transmission of seventh-century Spartan poetry to writers of the fifth and fourth centuries). Since I am concerned exclusively with Spartans of citizen status, and not with the other free inhabitants of Lakonia, I shall draw my evidence solely from literary texts pertaining to Spartans and (with a few justified exceptions) from inscriptions found on territory directly held by the Spartan State. In this Section I shall attempt to answer the straightforward question: were the Spartans, or any Spartans, literate in the basic sense outlined above?

First, the literary sources. According to the 'Dissoi Logoi' (90 F 2.10 DK), to Sokrates in Plato's *Protagoras* (342a ff.), and to Isokrates (*Panath.* 209; cf. 251), all Spartans were illiterate. Pseudo-Plato (*Hipp. Ma.* 285c) adds that many were also innumerate; and if a man brought onto the stage by the comic poet Philyllios (*fr.* 11 Kock) was both an illiterate (which is not certain) and a Spartan (which is merely a guess), this may be further evidence at least of Athenian beliefs. We should not, I think, take these passages *au pied de la lettre*. The *Protagoras* passage is a joke, as to some extent is the one from the Pseudo-Platonic *Hippias Major*. Isokrates was a rhetorician and an Athenian cultural chauvinist to boot.¹⁶ The 'Dissoi Logoi', finally, spoils its effect by including an alleged Spartan hostility to music. In short, what these sources are doing is producing yet another variation on the well-worn theme that, in comparison to the cultivated Athenians of the Periklean Funeral Speech, the Spartans were unlettered philistines (cf. Plut. *Lyk.* 20.8; *Mor.* 192b, 217d, 226d, 231d, 239b).

This was of course a charge which the most rabid 'Lakonizer' of the late fifth or fourth centuries would have been hard put to it to deny, even in the unlikely event of his wishing to do so. There was no market in Sparta, as there was in Athens, for the works of such as Anaxagoras—or for any other *βίβλοι γεγραμμένοι* for that matter.¹⁷ We should not, however, misread the significance of this contrast by projecting it back into the seventh and sixth centuries, when there was no 'market' in books anywhere in the Greek world and when Sparta was a leading patron of creative literature. Apart from Tyrtaios and Alkman (who, I believe, were both seventh-century Spartans born and bred), a succession of foreign poets from Terpander in the early seventh century to Simonides in the early fifth found Sparta a congenial—and no doubt lucrative—field for the display of their talents. Whether or not this justifies the description of Archaic Sparta as in any sense 'remarkably literate' (Davison) I am unclear; but it does at least raise

¹⁴ Discus: G. L. Huxley, 'Aristotle as Antiquary', *GRBS* xiv (1973) 281 f. Transmission of alphabet to Olympia: Jeffery 185. For Lykurgos' alleged literacy see also below, n. 50.

¹⁵ Jeffery 202–6.

¹⁶ G. Grote, *History of Greece*² ii (12-vol. ed., London 1884) 390 n. 2 argued that Isokrates should be taken literally, since the second passage cited contains 'an expression dropt almost unconsciously which confirms it. "The most rational Spartans (he says) will appreciate this

discourse, if they *find any one to read it to them*"' (Grote's italics). I do not see why this expression should be exempted from the charge generally accepted as valid by Grote, that Isokrates preferred rhetoric to factual accuracy; cf. C. B. Welles, 'Isokrates' view of history' in *Fest. H. Caplan* (Ithaca 1966) 3–25.

¹⁷ Harvey 633–5. Compare the alleged banning of sophists from Sparta (Plut. *Mor.* 226d); but see Harvey 627 n. 29.

the questions of how Tyrtaios and Alkman (to ignore the practically unknown Kinaithon, Spendon and Gitiadas) acquired their familiarity with the leading literary *Kunstsprachen* and how their work was transmitted to Classical Athens. In other words, did Tyrtaios and Alkman practise their craft (if only in part) through the medium of the written text?

It should be stressed at once that, even after the inauguration of a 'market' in books, most Greeks typically recited from memory or heard, rather than read, their literature, and that the process whereby ancient Greek literature was disseminated or handed down in written form was always more akin to *samizdat* than to publication in the post-printing sense. Thus poems of Tyrtaios were sung by the Spartans on campaign (Lykurgos *Leokr.* 107; Philochoros *FGrH* 328 F 216), while those of Alkman received an annual airing at the Gymnopaediai festival (Sosibios *FGrH* 595 F 5). By the fifth century, however, Alkman was known to Eupolis (*fr.* 139 Kock) and perhaps Aristophanes, and in the fourth Tyrtaios could be quoted *in extenso* by Lykurgos. Hence, since 'any book that was well known at Athens in the fourth century is likely to have been known at Alexandria in the third' (West), it is not surprising that our earliest book-text of Tyrtaios should belong to the latter century or that Alkman should have excited the scholarly curiosity of no less a critic than Aristarchos. For the seventh century, however, we are reduced to inference. Thus, given the close verbal dependence of Tyrtaios on the *Iliad* and of Alkman on the *Odyssey* (or at least an *Odyssey*), it is quite possible—though by no means inevitable—that they had access to a text of the poems, as is implied by the story that 'Lykurgos' had Homer copied (Plut. *Lyk.* 4.4). Again, although we have no specific evidence that Alkman caused written versions of his own poems to be produced, it is at least conceivable that those most interested in their verbally faithful preservation (one or both of the Spartan royal families, for example) would have had them committed to papyrus.¹⁸

Nevertheless, despite this evidence for literary creativity (and perhaps literate poets) in Archaic Sparta, it must be admitted that the character of Spartan public education does not automatically rule out the imputation of illiteracy to the Spartans of the Classical period. For the *ἀγωγή* was, at best, 'educational' only in an extended sense and is more fruitfully regarded as a comprehensive means of socialization.¹⁹ Thus in the developed system of the fifth and fourth centuries the more orthodox musical and gymnastic exercises were combined with social institutions like age-classes and common meals and with *rites de passage* to produce tough, self-disciplined and unquestioningly obedient military men. Furthermore, Spartan supremacy abroad, which depended on repression of the Helots (and to a lesser extent the Perioikoi) at home, was not either won or maintained by skills and techniques involving a developed level of popular literacy.

However, despite the evidence of the 'Dissoi Logoi', Plato and Isokrates, and despite the character of Spartan education and society, the selection of the literary and epigraphical evidence set out below is, I think, sufficient to refute the charge of total illiteracy, even in the case of the humblest Spartan ranker.

1. *Kings*²⁰

We are bound to infer from Plutarch (*Ages.* 1.1) that the heir-apparent was normally released from the universal obligation to go through the *ἀγωγή*. This inference is apparently contradicted by Teles (*fr.* 3 Hense), but he is not a particularly trustworthy witness and anyway may only mean that a king's sons other than the heir-apparent were not so exempted. However, we need not in

¹⁸ On the transmission of Archaic Greek poetry in general see J. A. Davison, 'Literature and Literacy in Ancient Greece', *From Archilochus to Pindar* (London, etc. 1968) 86–128 (my quotation, however, is from p. 184); the *samizdat* simile is borrowed from M. I. Finley, 'Censorship in Classical Antiquity', *TLS* 29 July 1977, 923. The quotation from West is from his *op. cit.* (n. 10) 57. Alexandrian commentaries on Alkman include R. A. Pack, *The Greek and Latin Literary Texts from Greco-Roman Egypt*² (Ann Arbor 1965) nos. 81, 1950. On the language of Tyrtaios see B. Snell, *Tyrtaios u. die Sprache*

des Epos (Göttingen 1969); on that of Alkman see E. Risch, *MH* xi (1954) 20–37.

¹⁹ The standard modern treatment is H.-I. Marrou, *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'antiquité*⁷ (Paris 1971) 45–60; but see also R. R. Bolgar, 'The training of élites in Greek education' in R. Wilkinson (ed.), *Governing Elites. Studies in Training and Selection* (New York 1969) 23–49, esp. 30–5. Cf. my remarks in 'Toward the Spartan revolution', *Arethusa* viii (1975) 75.

²⁰ See in general G. Gilbert, *Greek Constitutional Antiquities* i² (London 1895) 42–7 (hereafter Gilbert).

any case conclude from this exemption that the kings were typically illiterate, since the teaching of literacy could hardly have been an integral part of the *ἀγωγή*.

It is of course true that the stories and anecdotes which involve kings sending letters (e.g. Hdt. vi 50.3; Thuc. i 128 ff.; 132.5; 133.1; Plut. *Mor.* 211b, 212e, 219a, 222a–b, 225c–d) or receiving letters (Plut. *Lys.* 28.2; Athen. vii 289e) could all be interpreted in terms of dictation to or recitation by a literate person, as indeed could the political tract composed by the exiled Pausanias (*FGrH* 582); and we do once hear of a king (Agesilaos) being accompanied on campaign by a personal private secretary (*γραφεύς*; Xen. *Hell.* iv 1.39; Plut. *Ages.* 13.2).²¹ On the other hand, there are three anecdotes in which literacy is explicitly attributed to a Spartan king.

In the first (Hdt. vii 239) the exiled Damaratos for reasons of secrecy and diplomacy scraped the wax off a wooden tablet, wrote his message to the Spartans on the wood and then re-covered the tablet with blank wax.²² Aeneas ‘Tacticus’ (31.14) would have approved the strategem, but the Spartans who received the tablet were baffled until Gorgo, daughter of Kleomenes I and wife of Leonidas, advised them to scrape off the wax.²³ The whole passage has in fact been suspected (probably unjustly) of being an interpolation in Herodotus, but at least its author did not find anything unusual or extraordinary in the literacy of Damaratos. It is only unfortunate that he was not more explicit about the identity of ‘the Spartans’ (Ephors and Gerousia?) who eventually read Damaratos’ message. The two other anecdotes (Plut. *Mor.* 214e–f: writing; Ephoros *FGrHist* 70 F 207: reading) both concern Agesilaos, who, incidentally, did participate in the *ἀγωγή*.

Those are the only explicit pieces of evidence, but the use of the *σκυτάλη*, whatever its exact nature, seems to demand that any king (or other commander) could, unaided, write and read at least simple messages, which would naturally be expressed as laconically as possible.²⁴ Finally, it seems legitimate to infer from the fact that the kings had custody of Delphic oracles (Hdt. vi 57.4) that they could at least read (*cf.* Hdt. v 90 f.; and perhaps Plut. *Lys.* 26.2).

Monarchy, even in a literate society, does not of course connote literacy on the part of the monarch. But the Lakonian alphabet was infinitely simpler to master than, say, the script which the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal triumphantly claimed to have learned. Besides, Ashurbanipal could rely on an elaborate scribal bureaucracy, somewhat as the mediaeval English kings could employ a literate clerical élite. Neither of these props was available to a Spartan king—although there was perhaps someone in Sparta competent to decipher Ἀσσύρια γράμματα (Thuc. iv 50), i.e. Aramaic script.²⁵ On the whole it seems reasonable to conclude that Spartan kings could both read and write.

2. Other Commanders

In some respects (dispatches, letters, *σκυτάλη*) the remarks on the literacy of the kings apply here too. Indeed, the Spartan *ἐπιστολεύς* (Vice-Admiral) may have acquired his title from his function as *ἐπιστολιαφόρος* (Xen. *Hell.* vi 2.25). The bulk of the explicit evidence, however, concerns the *roi manqué* Lysander (Xen. *Hell.* i 1.23; Plut. *Lys.* 14.6, with *Mor.* 229b; *Lys.* 16.2, 19.8–12, 20.1–4, 28.3, 30.4); but note also, for example, Thuc. viii 33.3.

3. Ephors

The five members of the annual board of Ephors were also presumably literate.²⁶ For apart

²¹ *Idaios* is not otherwise mentioned, and his name may indicate that he was an Asiatic Greek or even a Hellenized oriental.

²² For the kind of tablet Damaratos would have used see T. Birt, *Das Antike Buchwesen* (Munich 1913) 259–63.

²³ It is not stated whether Gorgo herself was literate, but if I am right about Spartan women in general (see below) she was.

²⁴ The evidence for the *σκυτάλη* is collected in Jeffery 57 f. According to the *New Encyclopaedia Britannica* (*Macropaedia* v 332), it represents both ‘the first recorded use of cryptography for correspondence’ and ‘the first transposition system’!

²⁵ The old view (that ‘Assyrian letters’ meant Persian cuneiform) was refuted by C. Nylander, *Op. Ath.* viii (1968) 119–36, esp. 123 f. (I owe this reference to Robin Lane-Fox).

²⁶ See generally Gilbert 52–9. The Chief Ephor is explicitly credited with the ability to read in the second of the anecdotes involving Agesilaos quoted above; the same goes for the Ephors as a whole in Plut. *Lys.* 20. *Cf.* Thuc. i 128 ff. (letter of Pausanias the Regent to the Great King) and Xenophon, *Hell.* iii 3.4–11 (further discussed below), which strongly suggest but do not state that the Ephors were literate.

from exercising a general supervision of the laws of Sparta, which were unwritten (Section V),²⁷ and a particular watching brief over the conduct of royalty, they played a key role in foreign affairs, which involved the sending and receiving of dispatches and the drafting of treaties (Section V). At least by the fourth century the Ephors were elected 'from all the *damos*' (Arist. *Pol.* ii, 1265b39 f., 1270b25–28 [the selection-procedure is here stigmatized as 'extremely childish', 1272a31 f.]). But this is not unfortunately the convincing proof we are seeking that all Spartans were functionally literate, for presumably only qualified personnel would have put themselves forward for election in the first place.

4. *Gerousia*²⁸

It may be doubted whether the *γέροντες*, who of course counted in their number the kings *ex officio*, had to produce either their *προβουλεύματα* or their legal judgments in writing. But since they co-operated closely with the Ephors, for example when sitting as the Spartan 'Supreme Court', they are unlikely to have been less literate than they. A fourth-century B.C. inscription from the oracular shrine of Ino-Pasiphaë at Perioikic Thalamai, which records a dedication by a member of the Spartan *Gerousia* (*IG* v 1.1317), may support this assumption.

5. *Envoys*

In the fifth and fourth centuries diplomacy was a relatively underdeveloped aspect of Greek statecraft.²⁹ Sparta, however, took more trouble than most Greek states to get its diplomacy right.³⁰ For, since war is one expression of failed diplomacy, part of the explanation of the Spartans' diplomatic finesse is, somewhat paradoxically, their general unwillingness after the sixth century to become involved in a fight. It would be surprising if Spartan envoys were not required to be literate (and possibly multilingual).³¹

As an extension of their interstate diplomacy Sparta devised a special kind of envoy, the four Pythioi, whose possible role in the introduction of the alphabet to Lakonia in the eighth century and the preservation of a text of the 'Great Rhētra' we have already noticed (Section II). The Pythioi were permanent delegates to the Oracle at Delphi, two being selected on a hereditary basis by each of the kings (Hdt. vi 57.2, 4; Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 1.5.5; Cic. *De div.* i 43.95; Suda s.v.).³² They may also have played a wider role in Sparta. As we shall see, the Greeks in general did not acquire the habit of keeping documentary records until fairly late. But if there was ever anything like a Spartan Public Record Office, the Pythioi are possible candidates for the role of archivists. The records, however, are unlikely to have consisted of much more than Delphic (and other?) oracles, royal pedigrees, and lists of kings, Ephors and perhaps the victors at the *Karneia* and other festivals.³³

6. *ὑπομείονες and ἵππεις*³⁴

Xenophon's account (*Hell.* iii 3.4–11) of the abortive conspiracy organized by Kinadon in c. 398 is remarkable in several ways, but it has not in the past been treated from the standpoint of

²⁷ It was presumably in this connection that the *Politeia* of Dikaiarchos (*fr.* 1 Wehrli) was allegedly read out annually to the youngest warriors in the Ephors' *ἀρχεῖον*.

²⁸ Gilbert 47–9. Aristotle (*Pol.* ii 1271a9 f.) found the method of their election 'childish' too; presumably the marks scratched on *γραμματεῖα* by the election 'jury' did not call for any greater degree of literacy than those made by Athenian jurors in *δίκαι τιμητοί*.

²⁹ See my review in *TLS* 24 November 1975, 1348, of F. E. Adcock/D. J. Mosley, *Diplomacy in Ancient Greece* (London 1975). For the Hellenistic and Roman periods see D. Kienast, *RE* Supp. xiii (1973) s.v. 'Presbeia'.

³⁰ See in general Adcock, 'The development of Ancient Greek Diplomacy' in *AC* xvii (1948) 1–12, esp. p. 5; cf. *id.*, 'Some Aspects of Ancient Greek Diplomacy' in *PCA* xxi (1924) 92–116, esp. p. 113. Of the 232 treaties collected in H. Bengtson (ed.), *Die Staatsverträge des Alter-*

tums ii² (Munich 1975) nearly one fifth involve Sparta or Spartans. In fifth-century Sparta heralds constituted one of the three hereditary professions (Hdt. vi 60).

³¹ See below p. 35.

³² Jeffery 190 suggests that the '-das, son of Dexippos' who dedicated a bronze *lebes* at Delphi in the first half of the sixth century (Jeffery 199, no. 11) may have been a Pythios.

³³ Plutarch (*Ages* 19.6) refers to the *ἀναγραφαί* in which he discovered the names of Agesilaos' wife and two daughters. The list of victors at the *Karneia* was 'published' by Hellanikos (*FGrH* 4 F 85–6; cf. Jeffery 59 f., 195). Private inscriptions commemorating Spartan Olympic victors are *IG* v 1.649, 708; note also the victor-lists on stone cited below, n. 79.

³⁴ *ὑπομείονες*: Gilbert 39 f.; *ἵππεις* (an élite corps of 300 drawn from the younger adult warriors): Gilbert 60 f.

literacy.³⁵ Kinadon himself, who is expressly said to have been able both to read and write, is especially interesting as belonging to the status of *ὑπομείονες* ('Inferiors') not that of *ὄμοιοι* ('Peers'). Thus if the 'Inferiors' were lapsed 'Peers', this would strongly suggest that the average full Spartan citizen was functionally literate. Alternatively, though, we might suppose that Kinadon had been specially selected and trained for his role as secret agent.

In the same story the eldest of the *ἱππαγρέται* and the 'younger men' (presumably *ἵππεις*) detailed to arrest Kinadon are also said to be literate. An inscribed relief in honour of a Thioles was erected by the *ἵππεις* (here called *κοροί*) at Sparta in the sixth century.³⁶

7. Ordinary Spartans

The statement of Justin/Trogus (iii 5.10 f.) that during the Messenian War of the seventh century the Spartan soldiers wrote their names and patronymics on wooden plaques (*tesserae*) which they then tied to their arms cannot be disproved, at least not on purely chronological grounds; but it can never be positively verified either. Nor can we say who was responsible for drawing up the presumably written wills referred to by Aristotle (*Pol.* ii 1270a28) or the certainly written mortgage-deeds (*κλάρια*) mentioned in a third-century context by Plutarch (*Agis* 13.3). In the second century B.C., however, a Spartan turns up unexpectedly on a papyrus as party to a written contract.³⁷

8. Women

It is well known that Spartan girls received an education equal to, though separate from, that accorded their male counterparts. Much of this was allegedly designed to produce robust mothers of sturdy male offspring, though no doubt it also served to socialize the politically disfranchised half of the citizen population. However, Plato in the *Laws* (806a) speaks also of a 'compulsory education in the arts' and earlier, in the *Protagoras* (342d), had made Sokrates refer to Spartan women who were 'proud of their intellectual culture'. Plato is admittedly a tendentious witness, but Aristophanes (*Lys.* 1237) apparently mentions a Spartan poetess, and Iamblichos (*Vita Pyth.* 267) several female Spartan Pythagoreans. We need not take literally the anecdotes in which Spartan mothers write to their warrior sons (Plut. *Mor.* 241a, d, d-e), but the slight epigraphical evidence (dedications by women, not specifically cited below) at least does not contradict the view that some Spartan women were basically literate.³⁸

So much for the literary evidence; let us now turn to the epigraphical. This, however, is not as helpful as we might have hoped, for two main reasons. First, all known private Spartan inscriptions have accrued from formal, religious contexts. The vast majority of them is made up of ex-votos, mainly of the type of those offered to Helen with which we began (Section II), but including also a significant quantity of victory-dedications. To these can be added a handful of inscribed gravestones and funerary reliefs.³⁹ Naturally, writing on perishable materials like leather, papyrus and wax has not survived the Lakonian climate and soil-conditions.⁴⁰ But it is still disappointing to have nothing comparable to, for example, the informal note scratched on a potsherd in sixth-century Athens, in which the author (probably a Megarian) instructs someone to 'put the saw under the threshold of the garden gate'.⁴¹ Excavation in a settlement-area of

³⁵ See now P. Oliva, *Sparta and its Social Problems* (Amsterdam 1971) 192 f.; M. Austin/P. Vidal-Naquet, *Economies et sociétés en Grèce ancienne*² (Paris 1972) 106 f., 279-82, no. 59.

³⁶ IG v 1.457, discussed by E. Bourguet, *Le dialecte laconien* (Paris 1927) 35 f.

³⁷ P. Berl. 5883 + 5853; see now G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, 'Ancient Greek and Roman Maritime Loans' in H. Edey/B. S. Yamey (eds.), *Debits, Credits, Finance and Profits. Studies in Honour of W. T. Baxter* (London 1974) 53 f.

³⁸ None of the more recent discussions of Spartan women raises the question of their literacy, but see briefly

Harvey 625.

³⁹ Victory-dedications: Jeffery 199-201, nos. 22, 23(?), 28, 31, 41, 42, 48, 50, 51, 52 (stele of Damonon). Gravestones and funerary reliefs: IG v 1.699, 713, 824(?); Jeffery 200 f., nos. 26, 29, 57, 59. Cf. below, n. 71.

⁴⁰ Leather: Birt, *op. cit.* (n. 22) 254-6. Papyrus: N. Lewis, *Papyrus in Classical Antiquity* (Oxford 1974) esp. 84-8. Wax: Birt, *loc. cit.* (n. 22).

⁴¹ M. Lang, *Graffiti in the Athenian Agora* (Agora Picture Book, Princeton 1974) no. 18. For Athenian writing in private life see Harvey 615-17.

Classical Sparta might conceivably transform our picture of Spartan literacy. To the fifth-century Athenian ostraka, however, which have figured prominently in the arguments for widespread Athenian popular literacy, there could of course be no Spartan counterpart.

Secondly, even if we adopt the useful distinction between 'formal' inscriptions executed by professionals (whether incised on stone and bronze or painted on pottery before firing) and 'informal' cursive inscriptions, we can never be sure whether the professional in any particular instance was a Spartan citizen. The point of difficulty here is the widespread belief, amounting to a dogma, that no full Spartan citizen ever practised a manual *techne*. I have questioned this belief elsewhere,⁴² but in any case the scholarly tendency to make Spartan society unique in all particulars at all periods (a legacy from antiquity) rather than as a whole in specific periods should be firmly resisted.⁴³ If I were to hazard a guess at a possible division of labour, I would tentatively assign at least the public (and possibly all) formal inscriptions on stone (*cf.* Section V) to the hands of Perioikoi, who may have organized their profession on a hereditary basis.⁴⁴

What then are we to make of the informal cursive graffiti? Those certainly produced by craftsmen—the doodles on scrap pieces of soft limestone from the Orthia sanctuary, the 'ossified' abecedarium on the neck of the Vix *krater* (if the alphabet is indeed Lakonian) and the masons' signatures at Amyklai⁴⁵—involve the ambiguity just discussed. But the graffito dedications incised on fired pottery, of which there is a fair number (though fewer than those painted on before firing), could well be the work of Spartan citizens.⁴⁶ At least, the frequency of error is perhaps sufficient to exclude the possibility that they were all the work of professionals, while it also suggests that orthography, let alone calligraphy, was not highly esteemed in Sparta.⁴⁷ Even if, strictly speaking, such graffito inscriptions imply no more than that Spartans could read, I am prepared to take them as evidence that they could write too.⁴⁸ I am fortified in this inference by a remarkable graffito of *c.* 500 on a sherd from the Spartan akropolis, whose author was presumably an illiterate trying to keep up with the literate Joneses.⁴⁹

That then is the sum of evidence from literature and private epigraphy for Classical Spartan literacy, considerably eked out by inference.⁵⁰ Though rather paltry, it is still, I believe, adequate to refute the imputations of illiteracy cited at the beginning of this section and so to support the unequivocal statement of Plutarch (*Lyk.* 16.10; *Mor.* 237a) that the Spartans—like the Cretans (Arist. *fr.* 611.15 Rose)—were taught as much reading and writing as was needful (*cf.* generally Thuc. i 84.3 f.).⁵¹ For then to make sense of the evidence set out above we need only suppose that for most Spartans the needs were ordinarily neither many nor pressing and that only public

⁴² 'Did Spartan citizens ever practise a manual *tekhne?*', *Liverpool Class. Monthly* i (1976) 115–19. The useful remarks of Jeffery, *op. cit.* (n. 8) 31 f. apply chiefly to international star craftsmen rather than the anonymous members of the supporting cast.

⁴³ *Cf.* M. I. Finley, 'Sparta' (1968), reprinted with some changes in his *Use and Abuse of History* (London 1975) ch. 10, p. 162.

⁴⁴ Jeffery 187.

⁴⁵ Limestone doodles: Jeffery 188, 198, no. 6. Vix abecedarium: Jeffery 183, 191 f., 202, no. 66, 375; but see Rolley, 'Hydries de bronze dans le Péloponèse du Nord', *BCH* lxxxvii (1963) 483 n. 1. Masons' graffiti: Jeffery 194, 200, no. 32 (one at least may not have been a Lakonian: Jeffery 183).

⁴⁶ Spartan akropolis: A. M. Woodward, *BSA* xxx (1928/9) 241–52. Orthia sanctuary: *id.* in R. M. Dawkins (ed.), *Artemis Orthia* (*JHS* Supp. v, London 1929) 371–4. Eleusinion south of Sparta: R. V. Nicholls, *BSA* xlv (1950) 297, nos. 53–4. Note also the inscribed bone flutes at the Orthia sanctuary, appropriate offerings for contemporaries of Alkman: Jeffery 188, 198, no. 3.

⁴⁷ Spartan epigraphic orthography moved Bourguet (n. 36) 8 to exclaim, 'je crois que nulle part n'est attesté un

usage aussi peu tyrannique'; *cf. ibid.* 19 f., 27, 140 ('la fantaisie de l'écriture').

⁴⁸ It is probably true that in all societies more people have been able to read than write. As is noted by E. G. Turner, *Greek Manuscripts of the Ancient World* (Oxford 1971) 7, representations of people reading were far commoner in Greek art than those of people writing.

⁴⁹ Woodward, *BSA* xxx (1928/9) 247, no. 5, fig. 4 ('presumably a votive inscription by an illiterate person'). Dr Jeffery, however, has suggested to me that this may be a trial piece.

⁵⁰ For the sake of completeness I note that 'Lykurgos', besides having had the Homeric poems copied (Plut. *Lyk.* 4.4), was reported to have transcribed personally a final Delphic oracle sanctioning the 'Great Rhetra' (*Lyk.* 29.4).

⁵¹ The process of instruction need not have taken long: see Plato *Laws* 809e–810a for the distinction between functional literacy and fluent calligraphy. For the further distinction between 'slow' and 'retarded' hands at the level of functional literacy in Ptolemaic Egypt see H. C. Youtie, 'βραδέως γράφωv: between literacy and illiteracy', *GRBS* xii (1971) 239–61, esp. 252 f., 256 n. 78 (reprinted in his *Scriptiunculae* II [Amsterdam 1973] 611–27).

functionaries were called upon to perform routine acts of literacy on a day-to-day basis. The Spartans, that is to say, dwelt primarily in a world of oral discourse, a world in which they were well fitted to survive.

IV

For the reverse side of limited Spartan literacy is the premium placed by that society on the ability to converse in a succinct and stimulating manner, employing the ἀφέλης βραχυλογία (Sextus Emp. *Adv. Math.* ii 21) immortalized in the Spartans' honour as 'laconic'.⁵² Rather than this necessarily being a sign that they had nothing worthwhile to say,⁵³ it implied a rejection of the customary Greek idolatry of the spoken word, which could lead, if not to inaction, at least to an exaggeration of form at the expense of content. Herodotus (iv 77) was of course right to pour scorn on the story that the Scythian Anacharsis had found only the conversation of the Spartans to be 'sensible', but at least in this instance the inventor of the fiction was basing himself on a genuine distinction between Spartan and general Greek practice. Well was the Spartan Chilon, the reputed author of memorably gnomic utterances, accounted one of the 'Seven Sages' of ancient Greece.

However, our specific information about the conversational topics covered in high and low Spartan society suggests a level well below that of these lofty dicta. In an intentionally humorous passage in a pseudo-Platonic dialogue (*Hipp. Ma.* 285d) we are told that the (presumably ordinary) Spartans listened 'most readily to tales about the generations of heroes and men, the ancient foundations of cities, and in general to the whole range of stories about the distant past (ἀρχαιολογία)'.⁵⁴ As for the Spartan aristocracy, represented here by its most blue-blooded members, the doubtless well-informed Xenophon (*Hell.* v 3.20) relates that 'Agesipolis was well suited to share with Agesilaos in conversation about youthful exploits, hunting, riding, and homosexual love-affairs'. This tallies well with Plutarch's list (*Lyk.* 24.5) of favourite Spartan 'out-of-hours' activities: dancing, feasting, festivals, athletic exercise and . . . conversation.⁵⁵

V

Thus we come to the last of the particular problems we set out to tackle: does an understanding of the nature of literacy at Sparta help us to characterize correctly the Spartan 'constitution'? The study of the Spartan polity has been described as a form of 'intellectual gymnastics',⁵⁶ but an outsider might be pardoned for using a less friendly metaphor after contemplating the voluminous modern literature on Sparta's 'constitutional antiquities', much of it scarcely more than free invention, the remainder at best intelligent speculation sometimes distorted by ancient theory.⁵⁷ Matters, however, could hardly have been otherwise: two partly overlapping and mutually reinforcing aspects of the 'Spartan mirage'⁵⁸ saw to that.

The first in point of time and significance was the 'Lykurgos-legend', which treated Sparta as the paradigm of a state that owed all its economic, social and political institutions to the

⁵² The earliest source is either Ion of Chios (*fr.* 107 von Blumenthal) or Herodotus (iii 48, dramatic date c. 525). For a curious (and painful) method of inculcating laconic brief (*fr. com. adesp.* 417–19 Kock). The quintessentially Spartan letters were said to be comparably brief (*fr. com. adesp.* 417–19 Kock). The quintessentially Spartan apophthegms are of course of highly dubious authenticity: see now E. N. Tigerstedt, *The Legend of Sparta in Classical Antiquity* ii (Stockholm 1974) 16–30.

⁵³ M. I. Finley, *The Ancient Greeks* (rev. ed. Harmondsworth 1975) 83. For the view expressed in the text see M. B. Sakellariou in *History of the Hellenic World* ii. *The Archaic Period* (Athens and London 1975) 275.

⁵⁴ As suggested by E. Norden, *Agnostos Theos. Unter-*

suchungen zur Formengeschichte religiöser Rede (Leipzig 1913) 372 f., the word ἀρχαιολογία could be a Sophistic invention.

⁵⁵ On the role of conversation in education cf. Sosi-krates, *FGrH* 461 F 1 (Crete).

⁵⁶ V. Ehrenberg, *From Solon to Socrates*² (London 1973) 389.

⁵⁷ The earlier literature is assembled in G. Busolt, *Griechische Geschichte* i² (Gotha 1893) 510–79; add Gilbert. More recent studies are amassed in the footnotes to Oliva, *op. cit.* (n. 35) 71–102.

⁵⁸ F. Ollier, *Le mirage spartiate* (Paris 1933, 1943); for its continuation to the present century see E. Rawson, *The Spartan Tradition in European Thought* (Oxford 1969).

enactments of a single lawgiver—in this case to the wondrously omniprovident Lykurgos.⁵⁹ The ancient controversies over who or what (and even how many) Lykurgos was, when he lived, and precisely what he did and why still rage today; but for my limited purposes Lykurgos is a side-issue, no matter how much colour he might have added to the picture.⁶⁰ Nor is this the place to enter the minefield of ‘Great Rhetra’ *Forschung*. Suffice it to say here that in my view this document represents the essence of the complex political solution wrongly attributed *en bloc* to ‘Lykurgos’ and that it should be dated somewhere in the first half of the seventh century.

The second distorting aspect of the ‘mirage’ was the theory of the ‘mixed constitution’ (μικτή), developed perhaps in the fifth century but not apparently applied to Sparta until the fourth.⁶¹ This theory held that the best (because most stable) form of political system was either one which combined in a harmonious whole ingredients from each of the three basic ‘constitutions’ (monarchy, aristocracy/oligarchy, democracy)⁶² or one in which the different elements acted as checks and balances to each other. The ‘mixed constitution’ theory overlaps and reinforces the ‘Lykurgos-legend’ most insistently in its stress on the supposed absence of *stasis* in Sparta after Lykurgos’ reforms.

Happily for us, however, not all the ancient sources were equally persuaded of the truth of every aspect of the ‘mirage’, and, since Sparta did in fact experience severe *stasis*, the ancient explanation of its supposed absence in terms of the ‘mixed’ nature of Sparta’s ‘constitution’ is hardly cogent. There have, nonetheless, been isolated defences of the ancient view in more recent times,⁶³ but today it is usually denied that such an entity as a ‘mixed constitution’ is theoretically possible. Sparta, at any rate, is no longer analysed in such terms. Thus, to take a representative modern statement, A. W. Gomme could describe Sparta’s political system as being ‘of a normal aristocratic type’ apart from ‘the anomaly of the two kings’.⁶⁴ It is unclear whether Gomme thought the anomaly consisted in their being *two* Spartan kings or in the survival of the monarchy itself, but he obviously considered his description to be uncontroversial. In 1966, however, A. Andrewes re-opened the question in a powerfully succinct article.⁶⁵ After giving what I would regard as a very acceptable picture of the Spartan political system (‘an oligarchy notorious for its discipline and respect for age and authority’) he concluded from the relative prominence of the Ephors and Assembly and correspondingly low profile of the Gerousia in the period on which we are best informed (roughly the lifetime of Xenophon) that Sparta had ‘in some ways a more open constitution than most oligarchies’.

This conclusion has not passed unchallenged,⁶⁶ but to the arguments against it that fall within Andrewes’ own immediate frame of reference can be added those arising from the study of literacy at Sparta. To summarise the former, whatever view we take of the political competence of the *damoi* under the terms of the ‘Great Rhetra’, it is extremely doubtful whether there was ever much debate in the Assembly. At any rate, *ὁ βουλόμενος* was almost certainly not permitted (even if he had the courage and motivation) to speak as and when he pleased. On the one occasion on which we know the Spartans held ‘frequent assemblies’ (Hdt. vii 134.2: *ἀλίης πολλάκις συλλεγομένης*) the agenda was ‘Does any Spartan wish to die for the fatherland?’ The distance in atmosphere and conception between this and, for example, the Mytilene debate at Athens in 427 is absolutely unbridgeable. Voting in the Assembly was conducted according to an archaic procedure ‘by shouting and not by ballot’ (Thuc. i 87); in other words, there was no theory of ‘one man, one vote’ with everyone counting for one and no one for more than one. Moreover, as

⁵⁹ Cf. Arist. *Pol.* ii 1274a29 for some others (though Solon of course is substantially a historical figure).

⁶⁰ On the historicity of Lykurgos (as opposed to ‘his’ laws) see A. J. Toynbee, *Some Problems of Greek History* (Oxford 1969) 274–83; Oliva, *op. cit.* 63–70.

⁶¹ G. J. D. Aalders, *Die Theorie der gemischten Verfassung im Altertum* (Amsterdam 1968); Rawson, *op. cit.* (n. 58) Index, s.v. ‘Mixed Constitution’.

⁶² J. de Romilly, ‘Le classement des constitutions d’Hérodote à Aristote’ in *REG* lxxii (1959) 81–99; F. Lasserre, ‘Hérodote et Protagoras: le débat sur les constitutions’ in *MH* xxxiii (1976) 65–84.

⁶³ For example, A. H. J. Greenidge, *Handbook of Greek*

Constitutional History (London 1896) 74–107; but even he ends by adopting a position not dissimilar to that of Andrewes (below).

⁶⁴ *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides* i (Oxford 1945) 129 (*ad* Thuc. i 18.1).

⁶⁵ ‘The Government of Classical Sparta’ in E. Badian (ed.), *Ancient Society and Institutions. Fest. V. Ehrenberg* (Oxford 1966) 1–20 (my quotations are from p. 1; the comparison with the Athenian democracy is broached on p. 16).

⁶⁶ G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (London 1972) 125 ff.

we have noted, the methods of electing Ephors and Gerontes were in both instances dismissed by Aristotle as 'childish', presumably because they were so easily manipulated. Once elected, the members of the Gerousia were non-responsible (Arist. *Pol.* ii 1271a5 f.), although they together with the Ephors constituted the Spartan 'Supreme Court'. It cannot be stressed too much that there was no popular judiciary in Sparta.⁶⁷

We come now to the arguments against 'openness' drawn from a consideration of literacy. First, there were no written rules governing the conduct of lawsuits heard before the Ephors (Arist. *Pol.* ii 1270b28–31). Secondly, and yet more importantly, legislation was not a typical feature of the ordinary Spartan's political experience,⁶⁸ and even such laws as were passed were not committed to writing (hence perhaps their 'laconic' expression: Plato *Laws* 721e). Indeed, according to a doubtless apocryphal and inevitably 'Lykurgan' *rhetra* (Plut. *Lyk.* 13.1 ff.; cf. *Mor.* 227b), it was forbidden to inscribe laws in Sparta, on the unimpeachably correct psychological ground that *paideia* was a better teacher of obedience and discipline than external legal compulsion.⁶⁹ The same leitmotif lies behind the explanation attributed to Zeuxidamos son of Latychidas II (Plut. *Mor.* 221b) for the fact that Spartan laws on bravery were unwritten. The one possible contravention of this prohibition, interpreted as a sixth- or fifth-century sacred law regulating the cult of Demeter, is of highly dubious status and value.⁷⁰ Indeed, the general prohibition of named tombstones at Sparta (Plut. *Lyk.* 27.3), at least after c. 500, might be taken to imply that some areas of Spartan experience the written word was endowed with a quasi-magical potency.⁷¹

However that may be, a cursory survey of Spartan epigraphical evidence reveals at once a dearth of official State documents of any kind. It was known from literary sources that treaties were drafted at Sparta and publicly displayed there—or rather in the chief sanctuary of Sparta's fifth constituent village, the Apollonion at Amyklai.⁷² But only one actual example on stone is known to have survived from Sparta, a fifth-century treaty of offensive and defensive alliance with the hitherto unattested Aitolian Erxadieis.⁷³ Since the latter were presumably not admitted to membership of what we call the 'Peloponnesian League', it is uncertain what relation the terms of this treaty bear to those of what was probably the earliest building-block of the 'League', the treaty with Tegea of c. 550.⁷⁴ The only other extant State inscription known from Sparta lists contributions by various individuals and states to a war-fund (*IG* v 1.1).⁷⁵

Apart from these two from Sparta itself, public inscriptions in the Lakonian script include only four from Olympia (a dedication of a bronze *lebes* by *τοῖς Σπαρτιαταῖς*; two marble seats occupied by Spartan *proxenoi* of Elis in the sixth century; and the base of an offering to Zeus by the

⁶⁷ No *isegoria*: M. I. Finley, 'The Freedom of the Citizen in the Greek World', *Talanta* vii (1976) 9. Voting and elections: de Ste. Croix, *op. cit.* 348 f. (on Thuc. i 87); E. S. Staveley, *Greek and Roman Voting and Elections* (London 1972) 73–6. No popular judiciary: de Ste. Croix, *op. cit.* 133, 349 f.; cf. 'generally R. J. Bonner/G. Smith, *CPh* xxxvii (1942) 113–29.

⁶⁸ K. O. Müller, *The History and Antiquities of the Doric Race*² ii (London 1839) 91; cf. his correct description of 'the aristocratical spirit of the constitution, which feared nothing so much as the passionate and turbulent haste of the populace in decreeing and deciding' (p. 87).

⁶⁹ For the range of meanings of *rhetra* see F. Quass, *Nomos und Psephisma* (Munich 1971) 7–11. If it meant 'law' in the case of the 'Great Rhetra', then *ex hypothesi* this document was never inscribed.

⁷⁰ *IG* v 1.722 = F. Sokolowski, *Lois sacrées des cités grecques (Suppl.)* (Paris 1962) no. 28. This may, however, have been inscribed for the benefit of Perioikoi, whose literacy need carry no implications for Spartan literacy, given the profoundly different social organization of the two groups.

⁷¹ According to the MSS. of Plutarch, *loc. cit.*, there were two classes of Spartans exempted from the prohibition on named gravestones: men who died in war and priestesses who died in office. For the former see Jeffery

197, 201, nos. 57, 59; for the latter perhaps *IG* v 1.824 (all three cited above, n. 39). R. Flacelière in *REG* lxi (1948) 403–5, has argued from *IG* v 1.713 that the text for the latter exemption should be emended to read 'women in childbed'.

⁷² Thuc. v 77, 79; 18.10 = Bengtson, *op. cit.* (n. 30) nos. 194, 188. For some illuminating remarks on their transcription and dialect see Bourguet, *op. cit.* (n. 36) 148–50. Note also Thuc. v 41.3 = Bengtson no. 192 (unratified treaty of 420 between Argos and Sparta, which the Spartans *ξυνεγράψαντο*).

⁷³ W. Peek, 'Ein neuer Spartanischer Staatsvertrag', *Abh. Sächs. Akad. Wiss. Leipzig, phil.-hist. Kl.* lxx 3 (1974) 3–15; cf., however, my article in *Liverpool Class. Monthly* i (1976) 87–92.

⁷⁴ Bengtson no. 112. However, we should probably distinguish between the stele set up 'on the (banks of the) Alpheios' (Aristotle *fr.* 592 Rose) and the treaty of alliance. Such a stele, with its injunction to the Tegeans not to make Messenians citizens, does not of course prove that Messenian Helots were typically literate in the mid-sixth century.

⁷⁵ R. Meiggs/D. M. Lewis, *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions to the End of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford 1969) no. 67; C. W. Fornara (ed.), *Archaic Times to the End of the Peloponnesian War* (1977) no. 132.

Spartans c. 490/80);⁷⁶ one from Athens (polyandron of the Spartans buried in the Kerameikos in 403);⁷⁷ and one from Delos (stele recording a decree of protection granted to the Delians by Sparta between 403 and 399).⁷⁸ For the sake of completeness we could perhaps add to the tally of known public inscriptions two victor-lists from Sparta, five manumission-stelai from Tainaron (*IG v 1.1228–32*), the stele inscribed with the name of those who fell at Thermopylai in 480 (Paus. 3.14.1; cf. Hdt. vii 224.1), the boastful epigram which Pausanias the Regent had inscribed at Delphi (perhaps on the limestone base of the Serpent Column), and the inscribed stelai marking the site of the official reburial of the same Pausanias (Thuc. i 134.4; Paus. iii 14.1).⁷⁹ This is a poor harvest indeed, and the fact that six of them (the dedications and the funerary inscriptions) do not differ in kind from private inscriptions serves to underline the absence of documents with political implications of the sort a law or other public ordinance would have had.

Thus far then the contrast between Spartan and democratic Athenian practice in respect of public documentation is stark. We should not, however, distort its significance. In the first place, Athens, possibly following the example of those inveterate publishers of lawcodes, the Cretans, had published laws more than a century before the democracy was established in 508/7, the initial impetus being the growth of the coercive power of the *polis* at the expense of, and in open opposition to, the self-help justice of feuding aristocratic families.⁸⁰ Secondly, although no ancient state, democratic or otherwise, could rival democratic Athens in the publication of documents affecting the common weal, even Athens did not set up a central archive until the last decade of the fifth century (in what later became the Metroön).⁸¹ Finally, on present evidence it is hard to draw a sharp distinction in regard to public documentation between Sparta and, say, Corinth.⁸²

Despite these necessary qualifications, however, we need not, I think, go so far as M. I. Finley has recently,⁸³ in denying that the publication of documents by the Athenian democracy meant anything more than a claim to 'open' (rather than closed, aristocratic) government. For at Athens the connection between the publication of political documents in permanent form and the development of democratic institutions and practice is apparent, not only chronologically but also from, for example, ideological statements emphasizing the radically different underpinnings of written and unwritten lawcodes in terms of social class and political power (esp. Eur. *Supp.* 433–7; cf. Gorgias *fr.* 11a, 30 DK; Diod. xii 13.1). Especially noteworthy is the insertion in published documents of a clause to the effect that *ὁ βουλόμενος* may read them.⁸⁴

It is of course true that written definition of rights and duties will not automatically secure their effective exercise for all alike, whether rich or poor, strong or weak. But there seems equally to be something approaching a general rule that, to paraphrase Euripides, written definition marks an indispensable step on the road towards achieving this objective. Thus since even the notoriously oligarchic Roman Republic (another favoured candidate for the 'mixed constitution' treatment, incidentally) had its Twelve Tables, there is a strong presumption that the Spartan

⁷⁶ *Lebes*: Jeffery 190, 199, no. 10 (c. 600–550?). Seats: (1) Jeffery *loc. cit.*, no. 15 (c. 600–550?—perhaps too high); (2) A. Mallwitz, *Arch. Delt.* 27, Chron. (1972, publ. 1976) 275, pl. 212a (c. 500). Offering: Jeffery 195 f., 201, no. 49 (republished by Meiggs/Lewis, *op. cit.* no. 22, cf. Fornara, *op. cit.* no. 38).

⁷⁷ M. N. Tod, 'A Spartan Grave on Attic Soil', *G&R* ii (1933) 108–11; Jeffery 198, 202, no. 61.

⁷⁸ Jeffery *loc. cit.*, no. 62.

⁷⁹ Victor-lists: Jeffery 195, 201, nos. 44, 47 (the precise nature of no. 44 is unclear, and the last of the four pairs of names is written in a different hand from that of the others). Manumission-stelai: the sanctuary of Pohoidan (Poseidon) is known to have been an asylum for fugitive Helots (Thuc. i 131.1), but, despite the use of Ephor-dates, it is uncertain whether the manumitted are Helots or private slaves (whether of Spartans or Perioikoi). The Thermopylai list is discussed in connection with the relevant poem(s) of Simonides by A. J. Podlecki, 'Simonides: 480', *Hist.* xvii (1968) 257–75, esp. 257–62, 274 f. Pau-

sanias' epigram: Meiggs/Lewis, *op. cit.* no. 27, p. 60. The stelai marking his official reburial presumably fell outside the scope of the prohibition discussed in n. 71.

⁸⁰ R. S. Stroud, *Drakon's Law on Homicide* (Berkeley 1968). Cretan precedent: Meiggs/Lewis, *op. cit.* no. 2; cf. J. Boardman, *The Greeks Overseas*² (Harmondsworth 1973) 60; Jeffery, *op. cit.* (n. 8) 43, 194.

⁸¹ A. L. Boegehold in *AJA* lxxvi (1972) 23–30; cf. Welles, *art. cit.* (n. 16) 6 n. 16. But see below, n. 84.

⁸² Using Jeffery's catalogues as rough samples, we find that in the Corinthian alphabet there are 7 public inscriptions out of the 40, in the Lakonian (counting only those from Sparta and Amyklai) 1 out of the 32, or (counting them all wherever found) 6 out of the 67.

⁸³ *Art. cit.* (n. 18) 924.

⁸⁴ Harvey 600 f. This implies that the absence of a central archive need not have prevented persons from perusing any document in which they were particularly interested.

political system, which eschewed even as much 'open government' as the publication of the Twelve Tables may have implied, was yet more oligarchic still. Indeed Spartans were reportedly not permitted so much as to criticize the laws.

To conclude, the alleged 'openness' of the Spartan 'constitution' is merely apparent and stems from the peculiarly Spartan feature that the Assembly was simply the army of adult male hoplite warriors in civilian dress. It naturally therefore had to rubber-stamp, in an open demonstration of solidarity and token sovereignty, decisions which in practice had already been taken elsewhere.

VI

If we return finally to the broader question with which we began, the role of literacy in social organization, we must at least conclude that the Spartan evidence does not support the technological determinism implicit in the simple deduction by Goody and Watt of widespread popular literacy from the mere availability of a version of the Greek alphabet. Certainly, the simplicity of the alphabet made it possible for the ordinary Spartan man (and probably woman) to acquire a rudimentary knowledge of reading and writing. Yet at the same time literacy in Sparta remained very thinly spread, and deep literacy was the preserve of an élite operating at the highest levels of state.

On the other hand, to say, as does H.-I. Marrou,⁸⁵ that Sparta made it 'son point d'honneur à rester une ville de semi-illettrés' is to introduce a false note of conscious planning. Rather, the nature of the development of Spartan society from the eighth century B.C. onwards, above all its oligarchic political system and the relationship of the citizen-body to the Helots, did not either necessitate or even encourage the development of those social arts whose successful performance is dependent on a high level of popular literacy.

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⁸⁵ *Op. cit.* (n. 19) 45.