

Spartan Elite and Corruption Scandals

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Abstract. *The article deals with cases of corruption in Sparta. The author shows that in the 5th century BC right up until the last decade of the Peloponnesian War it was mainly the Spartan kings and their closest relatives who were accused of corruption. But already at the turn of 5th–4th centuries BC almost all civil and military leaders of the country were involved in corruption scandals. At the end of the Peloponnesian War, the number of wealthy citizens who made their fortunes during military campaigns abroad sharply increased. The traditional moral values of equality and fraternity which the Spartans used to be brought up to believe quickly gave way to an unbridled thirst for profit. The author cites examples of corruption scandals in which both individual admirals and the entire Spartan government were embroiled. According to the author, moral corruption of the upper class led to the degradation of the whole society, dramatically increasing the social gap between the rich and the poor.*

Rezumat. *Articolul tratează cazurile de corupție din Sparta. Autorul arată că în secolul al V-lea î.Hr., până în ultimul deceniu al războiului peloponezic, regii spartani și apropiații lor au fost acuzați de corupție. La sfârșitul războiului peloponezic, numărul cetățenilor bogați care și-au făcut averi în timpul campaniilor militare din afara Spartei a crescut brusc. Valorile morale tradiționale de egalitate și fraternitate în care spartanii obișnuiau să creadă au făcut loc unei sete neînfrânate de profit. Autorul citează exemple de scandaluri de corupție în care au fost implicați atât amirali, cât și întregul guvern spartan.*

Keywords: Sparta, Spartan kings, ephors, Xenophon, Lysander, corruption.

As a rule, ancient writers, describing significant social changes that occurred in the late classical Sparta, associated them with moral decline and growing disbelief in traditional values. Even Xenophon, generally pro-Spartan, the friend and admirer of Spartan king Agesilaus, recognized that Sparta contemporary with him was significantly different from the ideal model that he himself portrayed in *Lacedaemonian Politeia*. Xenophon did not dare to completely ignore the fact that in his time the Spartan elite was thirsty for money and was involved in numerous corruption scandals. In the penultimate, 14th chapter of his tractate, where Xenophon criticizes contemporary Sparta,² he blames ‘the Spartans for their blatant

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² It is a common belief that Xenophon felt compelled to make such a realistic remark as a concession to his readers, well aware of the real state of Spartan society which was very far from the idyll depicted by him.

disobedience towards the god and the Lycurgan laws' in their desire to serve abroad and openly demonstrate the wealth acquired there' (*Lac. Pol.* 14, 7, hereinafter translated by M. Lipka). In this case, Xenophon had in mind those officers who, during the Peloponnesian War and Spartan hegemony, held the highest command posts in the army and were appointed *harmosts*³ in the allied cities. Their military and financial independence often led to all sorts of excesses. So, the *harmosts*, being *de facto* unlimited rulers in the cities under their jurisdiction, tended to become real tyrants, robbing the allies and enriching themselves at their expense (*Xen. Hell.* VI, 3, 8). An example of such a classic tyrant from among the military commanders is Clearchus, *harmost* of Byzantium. In 403 BC he unleashed real terror on the city with massacres, expulsions and confiscation of property (*Diod.* XIV, 12, 2-9). In his '*Hellenica*', Xenophon keeps silent about this side of the activities of Clearchus, who was well known to him, but in the *Lacedaemonian Politeia*, although without naming specific names, he complains that the Spartans now prefer 'to suffer corruption by flattery as *harmosts* in the cities' (14, 2). Xenophon is diligently looking for the cause of corruption of the military elite, not inside, but outside of Sparta. In his opinion, residing abroad had led the *Spartiates* to moral decay, because it was there that they had been infected by foreigners with audacity and levity (14, 4: ... ῥαιδιουργίας οἱ πολῖται ἀπὸ τῶν ξένων ἐμπίμπλαιντο). Xenophon bluntly says that first and foremost the Spartan elites sought to enrich themselves at the expense of the allies. According to him, 'those who are reputed to be the leading men are doing their best to continue to serve as *harmosts* abroad for the rest of their lives' (14, 4). So even from the brief and not detailed remarks of Xenophon about the state of society in Sparta he was contemporary with, there is a very clear conclusion: the Spartan elite *in corpore* had changed its former values. Now the upper stratum of society sought not so much to complete their careers as *gerontes*, but to serve abroad, spending time in looting and embezzlement. The cautious Xenophon, as it seems, told us more than he himself intended.

A few decades later, Aristotle speaks absolutely directly about the same phenomenon – the corruption of the Spartan elite. For him, corruption was a long-established practice in Sparta that had spread across all social strata, especially the upper echelon. Aristotle, for example, mentions that in one scandalous story, unknown to us, but apparently, well-known to his readers, almost all the *ephors* were involved. According to him, in the affair at Andros 'certain *ephors* were corrupted with money and so far as lay in their power ruined the whole state' (*Pol.* II, 6, 14, 1270b, hereinafter translated by H. Rackham). Aristotle also recalls the *gerousia*, whose members, unlike the board of five *ephors*, were representatives solely of the Spartan elite. *Inter alia*, the *gerontes* were in charge of the state treasury.

³ Military governors who appeared during the Peloponnesian war and were sent together with the garrisons to the most important allied cities for the military support of the pro-Spartan governments. The office of *harmost* existed for about 30 years until the battle of Leuctra (*Xen. Hell.* VI. 3. 18; Paus. IX. 6. 4).

This, as Aristotle testifies, gave them an opportunity to dip their hands into the till: 'And it is known that those who have been admitted to this office take bribes and betray many of the public interests by favoritism' (*Pol. II, 6, 18, 1271a*). Since the *gerontes* were not controlled by society, then, according to Aristotle, their access to the treasury was contrary to the interests of the state and could even become a threat to the security of the country (*ibid.*).

According to Xenophon (*Lac. Pol. 14, 3*) and Aristotle (*Pol. II, 6, 5-7, 1269b*), if asceticism and poverty could still be found in classical Sparta, they existed only as slogans. Apparently, in the 4th century BC the unbridled passion of the Spartans for money and enrichment was already well known and was perceived in Greece as their national trait (*φιλαργυρία* and *φιλοχρηματία*) (*Isocr. VIII, 96; XI, 20; Arist. Pol. II, 6, 23, 1271b*). Of course, previously a number of the Spartans were involved in corruption scandals, but these *phenomena* had never been so widespread.

Until the last decade of the 5th century BC only the Spartan kings were accused of such frauds. Since the kings were not fully integrated into the structures required for all Spartans, such as the public education system (*agōgē*) or public dinners (*syssitia*), for example, they had a greater degree of freedom than their 'subjects'. Although it sounds paradoxical, the kings can be regarded as the only people in Sparta who actually did not belong to the number of equals (*homoioi*). Dissimilar standards of upbringing and education also formed a mentality different from that of their fellow citizens, and, consequently, a different behavioral pattern. At least some of the Spartan kings skillfully used all sorts of corrupt schemes in the fight against their political opponents, even resorting to bribing oracles. The kings used their position as commanders in chief of the Spartan army, receiving bribes from the enemy, mostly for abandoning military campaigns that had already begun. In this manner, they in certain respects were becoming the war criminals.

Not surprisingly, the very first king, about whom the rich written tradition⁴ has been preserved, turned out to be a corrupt man. Thanks to Herodotus, we are quite well aware of the activities of Cleomenes I (520–487). According to the tradition, he was suspected of corruption at least twice during his reign. So, in 494 BC he was accused of receiving a bribe from the Argeians for abandoning the assault on their city (*VI, 82, 1*), and in 491 BC of accepting a bribe from the Athenians for organizing a military campaign against Aegina (*VI, 50*). But in the latter case, Herodotus does not rule out the possibility that Cleomenes was deliberately slandered by his co-ruler Demaratus (*VI, 64*). Whether Cleomenes was a

⁴ Although according to the calculations of the ancient chronographs, in particular Eusebius, the first kings in Sparta had already ruled at the beginning of the 10th century BC, we know almost nothing about them, apart from their names and sometimes the duration of their rule. We know very little even about the kings who were the immediate predecessors of Cleomenes I and his co-ruler Demaratus.

bribe-taker or not is still the subject of scientific disputes.⁵ However, it is important for us that in Sparta at the beginning of the 5th century BC similar charges, apparently, were not perceived as something out of the ordinary. After the trials of Cleomenes, charges of accepting a bribe by officials of even the highest rank will become commonplace in Sparta.

The next king, already convicted of bribery without any doubt, is Leotychides II (491–469). Herodotus reports that during the campaign in Thessaly (476 BC), the king received a bribe from the Thessalian Alevadae for the cessation of hostilities against them (VI, 72). In Sparta, Leotychides was sentenced to death, but he was given an opportunity to flee to Tegea (Paus. III, 7, 9).

Thucydides supplements the list of Herodotus with several more names of high-born bribe-takers. The first on his list is the regent Pausanias. But in the case of this man, Thucydides is not entirely objective: he strives to blackwash the hero of Plataea. In the depiction by Thucydides, Pausanias appears as a corrupt tyrant and traitor, who for his own ends was ready to subjugate all Hellas to Persia (I, 128–134). Of course, a lot of colorful details in Thucydides' story about the regent seem to be greatly exaggerated⁶, but one thing is indisputable: Pausanias compromised himself abroad so much that the Spartan authorities voluntarily renounced their hegemony and handed over the leadership of the allied fleet to Athens around 477 BC. Thucydides explains this act of the forced peacefulness of the ruling elite as follows: '... Lacedaemonians sent out no other commanders thereafter, fearing that any who went out might be corrupted, as they saw had happened in the case of Pausanias' (I, 95, 7, hereinafter translated by Ch.F. Smith; see also: Plut. *Arist.* 23). The Spartan authorities were indeed alarmed and frightened by the too active and unpredictable practices of their royal commanders both abroad and at home. For them it was worse than routine embezzlement. Pausanias was not permitted to flee abroad, as the bribe-taker king Leotychides was allowed to do at about the same time. Pausanias was not even tried. The authorities were so afraid of him that they committed terrible blasphemy: he was walled up in the temple, where he died of hunger and thirst (Thuc. I, 134; Nep. Paus. 4–5; Paus. III, 17, 7–9)⁷.

⁵ Some historians, e.g. R. Parker, are convinced that in the case of Argos at least, bribery did occur (PARKER 1989, 142–173, esp. 156).

⁶ Since the 70s of the 20th century, when a whole series of articles about Pausanias appeared, and until now there has been a clear tendency towards a more critical attitude towards Thucydides' story about Pausanias. I will refer in particular to the opinions of G. Cawkwell, P. Powell, M. Nafissi, M. Lupi (CAWKWELL 1997, 11, 124 f., n. 35; POWELL 2001, 223; NAFISSI 2004, 147–180, esp. 160; LUPI 2018, 271–290, esp. 283).

⁷ As far as we know, the Spartan authorities turned a blind eye to the escape abroad of high-ranking *Spartiates* who had already been sentenced to death or were still awaiting a trial. As a rule, they were not prosecuted and the authorities did not demand their extradition. But this rule concerned only corrupt officials or unlucky commanders. For example, in 395 BC the king Pausanias was allowed to flee to Tegea, although he had been previously sentenced to death for the failure of a military expedition and the death of Lysander (Xen. *Hell.* III, 5, 6–7; 17–25; Paus. III, 5, 6–7; Plut. *Lys.* 28–29; Diod. XIV, 89). But the same practice did not apply to dissidents whose activities seriously affected

King Pleistoanax, the son of the regent Pausanius, did not escape accusations either; although he only faced corruption charges. According to Thucydides, he was accused of the fact that in 446 BC he, along with the *ephor* Cleandridas, his companion, had received the bribe of 10 talents from Pericles for withdrawing his troops from Attica. In Sparta, the king was tried and sentenced to a large fine of 15 talents (Schol. ad Ar. Nub. 858f). Pleistoanax, without having paid the fine, decided to leave the country, and no one prevented him from doing so (Thuc. II, 21, 1; V, 16, 3).

The next episode, reported by Thucydides, occurred already during the Peloponnesian War. In 419 BC the Spartan king Agis II led the campaign against Argos. However, for some unknown reason, perhaps having received a large bribe, the king withdrew from the decisive battle and returned home. For this offense, Agis was convicted and sentenced to a fine of 17 talents. However, the king later secured an acquittal. Apparently, the court did not have reliable evidence of his guilt, or his supporters were able to somehow hush up the case (Thuc. V, 63; see also: Diod. XII, 78).

But not only kings in this early period (from the beginning of the 5th century to 419 BC) were accused of corruption. Among the bribe-takers there were also people of non-royal origin. However, they were usually connected with kings and participated in the same corruption schemes as royalty. So, for example, two kings, namely Pleistoanax and Agis II, who were convicted of receiving money from the enemy, had not acted on their own, but in collusion with their advisers, the *ephors*.⁸ Moreover, for the same crimes the *ephors* were sentenced to severer punishments than their accomplices — kings. For example, the *ephor* Cleandridas, the companion of Pleistoanax, was sentenced to death, and he only managed to escape his fate by fleeing prudently (Diod. XIII, 106, 10; Plut. *Per.* 22; Nic. 28, 5).



The number and status of Spartan citizens accused of corruption changes from the second half of the Peloponnesian War, when Sparta begins to receive financial assistance from the Persians⁹ and conduct active military operations against Athens abroad, especially

the state interests. The authorities dealt with them mercilessly. So, in 487 BC the king Cleomenes seems to have been forced to commit suicide, although the sources do not confirm this version (Hdt. VI, 75; Plut. *Mor.* 224a) (For political suicides in Sparta, see: DAVID 2004, 25–47). In 241 BC the *ephors* themselves executed in prison the king Agis IV, his mother and grandmother (Plut. *Agis* 19; 21).

⁸ *Ephors*, as a rule, remained anonymous to the ancient historians. However, there were exceptions. For example, the *ephor* Cleandridas, the father of Gylippus. He was tried for the same crime as Pleistoanax and sentenced *in absentia* to death (Diod. XIII, 106, 10; Plut. *Per.* 22; Nic. 28, 5). Apparently, in this case, the name of *ephor* was preserved only because Cleandridas was not an ordinary *Spartiate*, but belonged to a noble family.

⁹ In 412–411 BC Sparta signed three treaties with Persia, the texts of which are quoted in the eighth book of Thucydides (VIII, 18; 37; 58). Under the terms of these treaties, Persia promised to support the Spartan fleet with money. Subsidies from the Persians, especially from Cyrus the Younger, were the first big money the Spartans had ever seen.

in Asia Minor. Money began to come both from the Persians and from the Allies; a significant part of it ended up lining the pockets of the ruling elite (Xen. *Lac. pol.* 14, 3; Plut. *Lys.* 17; 18). A careful study of the sources shows that in the last decade of the Peloponnesian War almost all high-ranking officers who served abroad and had at least some access to state money were embroiled in corruption. After 413 BC, when the fleet was created with the Persian money, almost all the Spartan admirals, with rare exceptions, were convicted of corruption. The list opens with the naval officer Therimenes, who probably in 412 BC received from Tissaphernes, the Persian satrap, a bribe for agreeing to maintain the fleet at a lower cost than was required by the contract (Thuc. VIII, 29, 2; 45, 3). Astyochus, the *nauarch* (navy commander) in 412/411 BC, followed the same pattern. Thucydides bluntly states that Astyochus was bribed by Tissaphernes and ‘for his own private gain’ (ἐπὶ ἰδίοις κέρδεσι) was ready to put his entire fleet on short rations (VIII. 50, 3).

Perhaps Pasippidas, the *nauarch* in 410/409 BC, also received a bribe from the same satrap Tissaphernes. In any case, he was suddenly removed from command, recalled to Sparta and subjected to trial (Xen. *Hell.* I, 1, 32). But, apparently, Pasippidas was soon acquitted, because later in 409/408 BC we see him already serving as an ambassador (I, 3, 13). The successor to Pasippidas, the *nauarch* in 409/408 BC Cratesippidas also turned out to be a corrupt official. Being bribed, he allowed the oligarchs previously expelled from Chios return to their homeland (Diod. XIII, 65, 3–4). The sources, naturally, retained information only about senior naval officers—*nauarches*—, but their subordinates acted in the same way. Many of the fortunes in Sparta seem to have originated from the bribes received by Spartan officers in the last decade of the Peloponnesian War.

The most famous *peculator*, whose ‘feat’ apparently made a strong impression on the whole Greek world, was Gylippus, the hero of the Sicilian campaign and friend of Lysander. In 404 BC he tried to steal a huge amount — 300 talents from the 1500 talents that Lysander had ordered him to deliver to Sparta (Diod. XIII, 106, 8–10; Plut. *Lys.* 16). When the case was solved, Gylippus fled and was sentenced to death *in absentia* (Diod. XIII, 106, 8–10; Posidon. *ap. Athen.* VI, 234a; Plut. *Lys.* 16–17).

At the very end of the Peloponnesian War, when the cash flow to Sparta increased significantly, embezzlement and bribery became even more widespread. At this time, Sparta was shocked not so much by the numerous facts of corruption, but by its scale, which had never been seen before. No wonder Plutarch claimed ‘that the Lacedaemonian state began to suffer distemper and corruption soon after its subversion of the Athenian...’ (*Agis* 5, 1, translated by B. Perrin). The sudden emergence of huge fortunes apparently made a shocking impression on the part of society that had not received any substantial advantages from the Spartan victories. Most likely, the highest Spartan magistrates who were not directly connected with the war (some of the *ephors* and *gerontes*) stood up to protect their interests. They rightly feared that the quick growth of economic inequality would counter all state

propaganda based on the idea of economic, political and legal equality of all citizens. The conservative opposition resisted any innovations that undermined the state's monopoly in the field of finance and expanded the economic freedoms of private citizens. The noble conservatives, who wanted to enlist the support of poorly educated Spartan *plebes*, traditionally used the most convincing arguments for the crowd – divine sayings. At that time, they either unearthed an ancient dictum, or invented a suitable one for this occasion, proclaiming that Sparta would be destroyed by nothing more than greed (ἄ φιλοχρηματία Σπάρταν ὀλεῖ ἄλλο δὲ οὐδέν) (Zenob. *Prov.* II, 24 = Schol. ad Eurip. *Androm.* 446 = Arist. fr. 544 Rose³)¹⁰. Such oracles reinforced official propaganda and contributed to the manipulation of the public's mind.

The sharp economic and social polarization of society at the turn of the 5th–4th centuries BC led to attempts by the ruling elite to rectify the situation through the adoption of a number of new laws. However, these were only palliative measures, since the ruling elite wanted to achieve impossible things: on the one hand, they wanted to maintain the former unity and consent of the civic community; on the other hand, they intended to continue amassing wealth buying up the lands from impoverished fellow citizens. Therefore, the fight against corruption waged by the civil authorities was more of a decorative nature and was associated, as a rule, with political clashes within the elites. So, at the turn of the 5th–4th centuries BC either a new law was adopted, or some ancient rule was enacted, according to which citizens were forbidden, under pain of death, to keep gold and silver coins at home¹¹ (Plut. *Lys.* 17). St. Hodgkinson rightly suspected that this law was initiated by the enemies of Lysander and was a response to the corruption scandals that were directly related to the immediate circle of the disgraced *nauarch*. According to the British scientist, such a law was applied exclusively *ad hoc* and was never widely used in Spartan practice¹². Indeed, as far as we know, the only person who in 403 BC was not only sentenced to death in accordance with the law, but actually executed, was Thorax, the *harmost* of Samos (Diod. XIV, 3, 5; Plut. *Lys.* 19). Perhaps if Thorax had not been a close friend of Lysander, who was then in disgrace, the Spartan authorities would have turned a blind eye to the violation of financial discipline by Thorax.

¹⁰ Ephorus, and Plutarch after him, considered this text as an ancient Delphic oracle (Ephor. ap. Diod. VII, 14, 5; Plut. *Mor.* 239f.; *Agis* 9). But according to Ed. Meyer, this dictum emerged not earlier than the end of the 5th century BC and was but one element of the ideological struggle that the king Pausanias and his supporters waged against dangerous innovations. To give this political slogan special weight, the oracle was deliberately made archaic and given out as a product of a very early time (MEYER 1892, 211–286, esp. 226–227). Following Ed. Meyer, most scholars agree that this hexameter is a proverb of the Classical period, and in no way refers to Archaic Sparta. See a review of opinions: VAN WEES 1999, 1–41, esp. 3, n. 2.

¹¹ According to A. Powell, private housing in Sparta was considered the most suitable place to store illegal cash and treasures (POWELL 2001, 247).

¹² HODKINSON 1996, 85–101, esp. 88.

Justice in Sparta was always selective and based on case-law. And a lot of decisions depended not so much on principles but on personal relationships of all interested parties. It is enough to recall the collision associated with the paradoxical justification of Sphodrias. This Spartiate, being the *harmost* of the Boeotian Thespieae, apparently received a bribe from the Thebans for organizing a provocation against Athens, with which Sparta was then at peace (Xen. *Hell.* V, 4, 20; Plut. *Ages.* 24, 4; *Pelop.* 14, 2). In 378 BC he undertook to attack the Athenian harbor Piraeus with his detachment. The attack on Piraeus failed, and Sphodrias was tried *in absentia* in Sparta as a bribe-taker and war criminal. But the king Agesilaus, solely thanks to his authority, secured an acquittal of Sphodrias, cynically stating ‘that it is impossible that Sphodrias is not guilty of wrong-doing; but that when, as child, boy, and young man, one has continually performed all the duties of a Spartan, it is a hard thing to put such a man to death; for Sparta has need of such soldiers’ (Xen. *Hell.* V, 4, 32, translated by C.L. Brownson; see also Plut. *Ages.* 25, 5). The fate of Sphodrias was essentially decided by one person¹³.

According to the Greeks themselves, Sparta at the end of the 5th century BC turned into the richest state after Persia (Plat. *Alc.* I, 122c–123a). The funds collected from the allies, the robbery and confiscation of property in the conquered territories, on the one hand, replenished the treasury, and on the other hand, provided the Spartan military officers with an opportunity to accumulate huge fortunes.

Significant funds, apparently, lined the pockets of the elite, so that it became even more alienated from the bulk of the citizens than before. At the turn of the 5th–4th centuries BC the new nobility arose from the top military leadership and allied with the old aristocratic families. It is very likely that hidden buying and selling of posts began during this period. The will of the majority could be easily ‘corrected’ thanks to the intentional preservation of the very ancient and primitive election method, which Aristotle defined as “childish” (*Pol.* II, 6, 18, 1271a10). Thus, without any particular hassle, it became possible to recruit those candidates to *Gerousia* and *Ephorate* who were ready to secure their elections with contributions and valuable gifts.

The huge income gap between the wealthy Spartan elite and ordinary citizens led to their actual alienation from each other and to a serious deformation of the moral principles of the whole society. The rich did not hesitate to demonstrate their wealth, and their fellow citizens—impoverished *Spartiates*—gradually fell and turned into outcasts (Plut. *Agis* 5, 6–7). Moral decline affected all sectors of society. Bribes started to be taken not only by individual officials, but by entire *collegia* in a body. Corruption also fully affected the *ephorate*, to which ordinary citizens had access. Aristotle even believed that the *Ephorate* was the most corrupt institution in Sparta, because ‘the *Ephors* are appointed from the entire people, so that quite

¹³ For an analysis of the ancient tradition regarding Sphodrias’ raid and the paradoxical defense of his actions in court, see esp.: PARKER 2007, 13–33; HODKINSON 1999, 43–66; DAVIES 2018, 480–499, esp. 480–486.

poor men often happen to get into the office, who owing to their poverty used to be easily bought' (*Pol.* II, 6, 14, 1270b). Moreover, Aristotle spoke not only about contemporary cases, he argued that 'this was often manifested in earlier times...' (II, 6, 14, 1270b).

We find a classic example of rampant corruption among the Spartan authorities in the writings of Pausanias *Periegetes*. He talks about the events of 346 BC when the Spartans as allies of the Phocians took part in the capture of Delphi: '... when the Phocian leaders had seized the temple at Delphi, the kings and every Spartan of repute privately, and the board of *ephors* and senate publicly, had a share of the god's property' (IV, 5, 4, translated by W.H.S. Jones and H.A. Ormerod).

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Finally, we must add that the Spartans not only willingly took bribes, but also often acted as bribe-givers. But until the last decade of the 5th century BC this was mainly done by the kings and their immediate family. So, at the beginning of the 5th century BC king Cleomenes I even decided to bribe the Delphic priests so that they would declare his opponent Demaratus illegitimate. Herodotus, familiar with the inner life of the Delphic Sanctuary,¹⁴ talks in detail about Cleomenes' collusion with the Delphic priests and the subsequent scandal (VI, 66). Herodotus does not say directly how Cleomenes managed to enlist the support of an influential Delphic priest. Most likely, there was an instance of bribery¹⁵. Pausanias in connection with this story claimed that the Spartans were the only ones who dared to bribe the Pythia (III, 4, 5–6).

While it is the late and not very reliable writer Pausanias, an antiquarian and travel-writer of the second century AD, who labelled Cleomenes as a bribe-giver, the information about the regent Pausanias came from a much more reliable source – from Thucydides himself. The Athenian historian in his narrative about the fate of Pausanias remarks that the regent, at the call of the *ephors*, returned from Asia Minor to Sparta only because he hoped to 'dispose of the charge by the use of money' (I, 131, 2). We trust the Thucydides' report regarding Pausanias' intention to 'resolve issues' through bribes. The regent possessed great material resources¹⁶, belonged to the royal family and knew perfectly well about the attractiveness of wealth for his fellow citizens. Apparently, his confidence in impunity was based on these very grounds.

¹⁴ On the close ties of Herodotus with Delphi see in particular: COMPTON 1994, 217–223.

¹⁵ In the scientific literature, the version of Pythia's bribing is the main one. See: CARTLEDGE 1979, 146; KULISHOVA 2003, 65–88, esp. 85 f.

¹⁶ Inherited capital, considerable military revenues (Hdt. IX, 81) and, possibly, Persian subsidies made him one of the richest people in Sparta. So, Pseudo-Plutarch, with reference to Chrysermus, reports that Xerxes transferred to Pausanias 500 talents in gold (Chriserm. *ap.* Ps.-Plut. *Parallela minora*. 10 = Stob. *Flor.* III, 39, 31), and Diodorus claims that Artabazos secretly transferred a lot of money to Pausanias to bribe the Hellenes (XI, 44, 4).

Perhaps, with the help of big money donated to the Delphic Apollo, the disgraced king Pleistoanax in 427 BC was able to return to his homeland after nearly twenty years of exile (Thuc. V, 16). In this case, Thucydides does not directly say that the priests acted in favor of the king, being bribed by him, but certain details make us think about a very high probability that Pleistoanax found sympathy with the oracle at Delphi solely through bribes and gifts¹⁷. According to Thucydides, rumors circulated in Sparta for a long time that his return was illegal (V, 16, 1).

At the turn of the 5th–4th centuries BC, when the circle of wealthy people expanded due to senior officers, among them also appeared people who were trying to solve their problems with the help of bribes. The most striking example of such behavior was shown by the famous Spartan admiral and the winner in the Peloponnesian war Lysander. Through his emissaries he tried to bribe the most respected Greek shrines in order to get from the priests the oracle he needed (Diod. XIV, 13, 3–7; Plut. *Lys.* 25, 3–4; *Nep. Lys.* 3, 1–4). Lysander dreamed of royal power and hoped that the priests would help him to acquire it¹⁸. Ephorus speaks of the large sums that Lysander and his agents used in unsuccessful attempts to bribe the oracles at Delphi, Dodona, and the Libyan oasis of Zeus-Ammon (Ephor. ap. Plut. *Lys.* 25, 3–4; Diod. XIV, 13, 33–7). The fact that the priests refused to help Lysander testifies not so much to their incorruptibility as to the fact that they preferred to distance themselves from the disgraced *nauarch*, who had become the enemy of the king Agesilaus.

About cases of corruption among the rest of the Spartans—contemporaries of Lysander—we know much less. This is due to the peculiarities of the tradition. *Laconophil* Xenophon, our main source for this era, carefully avoided any mention of disgraceful behavior of Spartans. But based on the little data that we have at our disposal we can make a very clear conclusion: corruption in Spartan society had spread wide. Now, not only the kings were involved in it, but the entire leadership of the country — the *gerontes*, the *ephors* and the highest military command. By the end of the 5th century BC corruption in Sparta reached such proportions that it began to exert its negative impact on all spheres of life in civil society, including dramatically worsening the moral climate in it. The old ‘*code of Spartiate*’, which included contempt for money, trade and enrichment, was forgotten and gave way to an unbridled thirst for profit. Numerous corruption scandals, the participants of which were, as a rule, representatives of the elites, undermined the moral foundations of society, destroying citizens’ faith in the equitable distribution of wealth, and increasing inequality

¹⁷ It was probably not only money that played a role in Delphi's long-standing efforts to restore Pleistoanax to the throne (for the influence of Delphi on the fate of Pleistoanax see: POWELL 2009, 35–82, esp. 55–62). The Spartan kings, especially the *Agidai*, had close centuries-old ties with the Delphic oracle, which were reinforced by large donations from the kings. So, for example, the king Agesilaus donated a decent sum of over a hundred talents to the Delphic Sanctuary for two years (Xen. *Hell.* IV, 3, 21; *Ages.* I, 34).

¹⁸ For a possible plot of Lysander against the hereditary *dyarchy* and his manipulation with oracles, see: POWELL 2009, 73–77.

widened the gap between the rich and the poor. Corruption, which especially intensified at the end of the 5th century BC, had a negative impact on the whole society, contributing to the collapse of the previously unified body of citizens. And the preservation of an archaic qualifying system resulted in the exclusion of impoverished *Spartiates* from the ranks of full citizens. Most of the Spartans, who had become outcasts, no longer wanted to defend the state, which had become alien to them. As a result, Sparta, after three decades, lost all the advantages that it had gained from the victory in the Peloponnesian War; and in 371 BC it was defeated at the battle of Leuctra turning from a great power into an ordinary *polis*.

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