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Chapter 9

MASSIMO NAFISSI, University of Perugia
massimo.nafissi@unipg.it

The 'Whip Agṓnes' for Orthia: Education, Religion, Memory and Identity in Sparta*

The sanctuary of Ortheia, the Limnaion,[1] in the Limnai area of Sparta, owes its fame primarily to the juvenile *agṓnes* that took place there, and above all to that 'whipping to the bitter end' on the altar of the goddess, the so-called *diamastígōsis,* of which late Hellenistic and imperial sources speak so much.[2] The *diamastígōsis* is, however, heir to an earlier *agṓn*, which we know about largely thanks to Xenophon:[3] for that event, the boys had to steal cheese intended for the goddess, and in attempting to do so were soundly whipped. We might well call these two *agṓnes* the 'whip *agṓnes*'. From at least the fourth century BC, however, another series of *agṓnes* was also held in honor of Ortheia, those known in imperial times by the general name of *paidikón* or *paidikhón*. The *agṓnes* of the *paidik(h)ón* comprised different kinds of contests, each then organized into competitions for the different age groups of Spartan ephebes between their seventeenth and nineteenth years of age. These competitions are best known to us through the series of famous stelae with sickles, the prizes that the winners dedicated to the goddess. Most of the stelae

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1 Strab. 8.4.9; Paus. 3.16.7.

2 Most of the literary evidence for the *diamastígōsis* is collected and translated by Kennell 1995: 149–161. In addition to the standard abbreviations, the following are adopted:
AO = Woodward 1929.
Plut. *inst. lac*. = Plutarchus instituta laconica.

3 Xen. Lac. 2.9.

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known to us today were found during excavations carried out in the sanctuary by the British School at Athens at the beginning of the twentieth century.[4]

The discoveries of the British School at the Limnaion revealed the millennial history of the sanctuary: worship had begun in the ninth or early eighth century BC, and the site underwent its last major building phase after the mid-third century AD, when an unusual theatre-type building was constructed, enclosing the area between the temple façade and the altar. This was intended, in fact, for viewing the *diamastígōsis* competition.[5]

Following the publications of the British excavations, the goddess of Limnaion is commonly known as Orthia by modern scholars. This spelling has been retained for the title of this study, despite it probably being incorrect.[6] Ortheia, the form used in the rest of the present text, is a graphic rendering common to two variants found in the two sets of names by which the goddess is designated: on the one hand (F)ορθαία, (F)ορθασία, (F)ορθεία, and on the other Ὀρθ(ε)ία. For a long time, the Spartans identified Ortheia by one of these terms, i.e., without adding the theonym Artemis, which only appears in dedications from the early imperial period.[7] For this reason, many believe – though it cannot be verified – that Ortheia was a local deity, originally distinct from Artemis.[8]

4 For dedications by *paidk(h)ón* winners, *AO* 285–353, no. 1–135 is a more recent and complete edition of *IG* V 1.255–356; Massaro 2018 includes only dedications for *móa* and *keloía* victories. Two stelae with sickles have now been published by Steinhauer 2022: II nos. 3–4, 172–173. These *agṓnes*, as well as other topics briefly touched on in this paper, are the subject of a detailed analysis in a work in preparation, *Il ritorno di Licurgo. Gli agoni di Artemis Orthia e altri studi su Sparta ellenistico-romana*.

5 The results of these excavations, carried out between 1906 and 1910, are presented systematically in Dawkins 1929a. For the chronology of the sanctuary and recent summaries of the evidence, see Boardman 1963, Zink Kaasgaard Falb 2009: 129–132, Johannessen 2021: 55–59 and *passim*. On the (amphi)theatre, see Dawkins 1929b: 37–47, Baudini 2013: 196–198. *IG* V 1.314 = *AO* 335, no. 71 sets the post quem date for its construction in the middle of the third century AD (cf. Rizakis et al. 2004: 95 no. 115); a date in the Tetrarchic period is suggested by Cartledge and Spawforth 1989: 122–123, 221 ([2]2002: 112, 203).

6 Cf. Jucker and Risch 1979.

7 On the name Ortheia in Sparta, see Woodward 1929: 293, Davison 1938: 457–458, Vegas Sansalvador 1996 and Alonso Déniz 2008: 42, 59–63 (according to the latter two, the adjectives of the first series derive from the root **u̯erdh-* and are associated with the notion of 'growth'; in contrast, Ὀρθία derives from **h3r-dh-*, cf. ὄρνυμι, and is associated with the notion of 'straightening', in the healing sense). The theonym Artemis Ortheia was thought to have appeared only in Flavian times: Steinhauer 2022: II no. 3, 172 has recently published a Tiberian inscription in which Ortheia is called Artemis.

8 See, e.g., Burkert[2] 2011: 190, 282, Larson 2007: 105. Conversely, the identification of the goddess with Artemis is central to the study by Johannessen 2021. As Parker 2017: 21n80 notes, outside Sparta (evidence in Kowalzig 2006) Ortheia (or variants) appears consistently as an epiclesis of Artemis (thus in the fifth century in Hdt. 4.87 and in Athens *IG* I[3] 1083), and simply as Ὀρθωσία only in Pind. *Ol*. 3.30; however, the mention of Taygeta, in the archaic tradition the mother of Lakedaimon through Zeus (Paus. 3.18.10 with Nafissi 2019: 40–42), leads the latter instance back to Sparta. In any case, the burden of proof should be on those who wish to prove the original distinction between Ortheia and Artemis. *IG* V 2.429, l. 11–12 = *IPArk* 27 from Phigalia, fourth century, is not a clear indication of this, despite Jost 1985: 91 and Vegas Sansalvador 1996: 279. There is more on this subject in Nafissi in preparation.

Ortheia is traditionally seen as a goddess of the wilderness and of margins; she has also been called a goddess of vegetation, and sometimes even, albeit without solid evidence, of agriculture. There is no doubt, however, that the goddess accompanied young people as they grew up, and it is generally accepted that the rituals and youthful trials organized in her honor at festivals were initiatory.[9] It seems certain that the rituals or *agṓnes* included forms of drama and the participation of virgins with choirs and dances: the available documentation, however, highlights the competitive activities of the boys.

This essay aims to offer a general examination of 'the *agṓnes* of the whip'. It will leave to one side the '*agṓnes* of the sickle' and those enigmatic literary and archaeological documents on Ortheia (some verses from Alcman's *Partheneion*, the famous terracotta masks and ancient reports on comic and mimetic dances in Laconia): these would expose one to the risk of explaining *obscura per obscuriora*.[10]

The discussion begins with two sections that examine the documentation for the two *agṓnes*: the earlier *agṓn* of the theft of cheese and the *diamastígōsis*. It will do this by examining their *aítia* and cultural significance, the conduct of the contests, and the honors bestowed upon both winners and victims of the *diamastígōsis*. The following section explores the chronology involved and the reasons why one the 'whip *agṓnes*' developed into the other; the differences between the two *agṓnes* are crucial to understanding the values and demands that motivated the reform of the contest. We then turn to the interaction between the competitors and spectators of the *diamastígōsis*, which

9 The relationship between Artemis and agriculture is mainly borne out by the choice of the sickle as a reward and votive. This hypothesis is already found in Rose 1929: 406 and expanded by Kron 1998: esp. 203–204, in a seminal work on sickles in myth and as votive dedications. Jeanmaire 1939: 523, in contrast, offers a ritual interpretation: the sickles were used to cut the trunk which was to be erected as a kind of May pole to celebrate the goddess (*orthós* - Orthia). Arguing against this 'natural' profiling of Ortheia is Des Bouvrie 2009. Ducat (2006: 212) is forthright in stating that the agrarian character of the goddess "is nowhere attested". The first to link Ortheia celebrations to initiations was, to my knowledge, Frazer 1898: III 341–343; generally cf. Nilsson 1906: 190–196, Jeanmaire 1939: 514–523, Brelich 1969: 130–138, Calame 1997: 156–169 (Calame 1977: I 276–281), Vernant 1984, Frontisi-Ducroux 1984, Graf 1985: 86–90, Vernant 1987, Ducat 1995, Kennell 1995: 70–97, Ducat 2006: 249–260, des Bouvrie 2009, Budin 2015: 24–31.

10 The identification of the Ὀρθρία of Alcm. 1 *PMGF* = fr. 3.61 Calame with Ortheia remains uncertain, despite the opinion of Aristophanes of Byzantium reported by Scholia A (and the arguments of Page 1951: 71–82 and Luginbill 2009: esp. 3940): see, e.g., Calame 1977: II 119–128, Id. 1997: 169, Ferrari 2008, Tsantsanoglou 2012: esp. 40, 68–69. Scholars often connect masks (Dickins 1929) with initiatory rituals, following the influential studies of Vernant (1987: 181–187 and Vernant 1984), and also discuss them in relation to the origin of dramatic forms of performance, as is also the case in Lloyd Rosenberg 2015; understanding them is not aided by the hypothesis of a derivation from Near Eastern models (Carter 1987: cf. Waugh 2012: 5–7). On comic performances probably related to masks, see Sosib. *FGrH* (= *BNJ*) 595 F 7 *ap.* Ath. 14.621d–f, Poll. 4.104–105, Hsch. s.vv. βρυδαλίχα, βρυλλιχισταί, δεικηλισταί, δίκηλον and other sources collected by Csapo and Wilson 2020: 502-509 Bx 1–13, with David 1989: esp. 8–11, Olson 2007: 4–6 Sonnino 2014: 130–134, Csapo and Wilson 2020: 509–514. On the choruses of young girls at the sanctuary of Ortheia, see Calame 1997: 158–161. For another unusual series, the lead votives, see Boss 2000, Fragkopoulou 2010, Lloyd 2021.

was strongly conditioned by the image of Sparta. The conclusions summarize the results of the previous sections.

The Ancient *agṓn*

Xenophon describes the ancient *agṓn* when he discusses the theft of food as part of the education of young Spartans:

> And Lycurgus, having proposed as a point of honour (for the young men) the stealing of as many cheeses [*tyroús* (τυρούς)] as possible from Ortheia, ordered others to strike them with the whip: his intention was to show that one can enjoy lasting fame by enduring short-lived suffering; which also shows that in cases where speed of execution is required, the indolent have the least advantage and the most discomfort.[11]

The contest was probably also mentioned by Plato in the *Laws* among the practices of pain endurance that Lycurgus devised to train the Spartans in warrior virtue. Plato simply recalled "some thefts practised each time among many beatings".[12]

A vague idea of what must have happened can also be gleaned from a passage in Plutarch. Plutarch presents it as an *aítion* for the *diamastígōsis*, although his narrative, it is usually conceded, seems to describe the *agṓn* of theft. Plutarch writes:

> Some say that as Pausanias was sacrificing and praying, a little to one side of his line of battle, some Lydians suddenly fell upon him and rudely hurled away the sacrificial offerings; and that Pausanias and his attendants, being without weapons, smote the intruders with the sacrificial staves and goads.

Things are thus quite complicated, though we will see that this passage is a very important source for the history of the 'whip *agṓnes*'.[13]

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11 Xen. *Lac*. 2.9: καὶ ὡς πλείστους δὴ ἁρπάσαι τυροὺς παρ᾽ Ὀρθίας καλὸν θείς, μαστιγοῦν τούτους ἄλλοις ἐπέταξε, τοῦτο δηλῶσαι καὶ ἐν τούτῳ βουλόμενος ὅτι ἔστιν ὀλίγον χρόνον ἀλγήσαντα πολὺν χρόνον εὐδοκιμοῦντα εὐφραίνεσθαι. δηλοῦται δὲ ἐν τούτῳ ὅτι καὶ ὅπου τάχους δεῖ ὁ βλακεύων ἐλάχιστα μὲν ὠφελεῖται, πλεῖστα δὲ πράγματα λαμβάνει.

12 Pl. *Leg*. 1.633b: Ἔτι τοίνυν καὶ τὸ τέταρτον ἔγωγε πειρῴμην ἂν λέγειν, τὸ περὶ τὰς καρτερήσεις τῶν ἀλγηδόνων πολὺ παρ᾽ ἡμῖν γιγνόμενον, ἔν τε ταῖς πρὸς ἀλλήλους ταῖς χερσὶ μάχαις καὶ ἐν ἁρπαγαῖς τισιν διὰ πολλῶν πληγῶν ἑκάστοτε γιγνομένων· ἔτι δὲ καὶ κρυπτεία τις…. It has been suggested that Plato is referring to the everyday practice of stealing and not to the competition; however, in saying "every time" (ἑκάστοτε), Plato is alluding to a punishment that could not be avoided, an inevitable result that did not characterise the daily robbery practised by boys (Paradiso 2007: 313; cf. also Lipka 2002: 127).

13 Plut. *Arist*. 17.10 (transl. B. Perrin): ἔνιοι δέ φασι τῷ Παυσανίᾳ μικρὸν ἔξω τῆς παρατάξεως θύοντι καὶ κατευχομένῳ τῶν Λυδῶν τινας ἄφνω προσπεσόντας ἁρπάζειν καὶ διαρρίπτειν τὰ περὶ τὴν θυσίαν, τὸν δὲ Παυσανίαν καὶ τοὺς περὶ αὐτὸν οὐκ ἔχοντας ὅπλα ῥάβδοις καὶ μάστιξι παίειν. *Aition* of the *agṓn* of theft: Bonnechère 1993: 16;

Annalisa Paradiso has raised a thorny textual question as to whether the boys actually stole wheat rather than cheese. Some codices of Xenophon's *Politeia* present the lesson *pyroús* (πυρούς: 'wheat') as an alternative to *tyroús* (τυρούς: 'cheese'). Neither the manuscript tradition, nor an examination of the relationship between Artemis and cheese making and cereals, nor the material from the Ortheia excavation allow one hypothesis to prevail over the other,[14] and a simple search of the keywords *pyrós* and *tyrós* in the *Collection of Greek Ritual Norms* shows that both wheat (in the form of grain or flour) and cheese were frequent offerings. However, we can assume that the boys were trying to steal cheese, a much more delicious and nutritious temptation than wheat (after all, the competition at the sanctuary of Ortheia dramatised the everyday practice of stealing food), and at the same time a much easier object to count in order to determine a winner!

Nonetheless, we know very little about this competition. Young people were assigned the task of stealing as many cheeses as possible, while others tried to prevent them from doing so with their whips. Perhaps these were the *mastigóphoroi*, the young men (*hēbôntes*) who assisted the magistrate responsible for supervising the youth of Sparta, the *paidonómos*. Xenophon makes it clear that the contest brought honor and fame to the winner.[15] On the whole it must have been a violent game, "a rough game", as Herbert Jennings Rose once termed it, but the Spartans were accustomed to the brutalities of their upbringing, and it is not hard to imagine that they found it amusing. Attack and withdrawal must have alternated swiftly in the contest. The astuteness and speed of the boys would have aroused the enthusiasm and admiring cheers of the onlookers, although they would have also burst into laughter every time the whip struck.[16]

All the *agṓnes* of Ortheia were closely connected with specific Spartan educational practices,[17] but this was particularly the case with the cheese stealing *agṓn*. Indeed, stealing was one of the activities that characterized Spartan education in the Classical period and

Ducat 1995: 357; Ducat 2006: 252. Roy 2019: § 28–29 draws attention to the events that immediately preceded the episode, highlighting details that refer to the *agṓn* of *diamastígōsis* (see below).

14 Paradiso 2007; cf. Ducat 2006: 253. However, Muratore 2022: 235, 293, accepts τυρούς: 'cheese'. The most common reference is to the goddess (despite Aristid. *or*. 41.7) making cheese from lion's milk in Alcm. 56 *PMGF* = fr. 125 Calame.

15 Xen. *Lac*. 2.2. On the *mastigóphoroi*, see Ducat 2006: 253. Many scholars claim that the cheese-stealing contest involved two groups and was a team event: For cheese-stealing as a team competition see e.g. Nilsson 1967–1974: 488, Graf 1993: 115; Hodkinson 1999: 148, Luginbill 2009: 31. Rzepka 2020: 61–62. The accusative singular participles of Xen. Lac. 2.9 provide strong evidence to the contrary. Rose 1929: 405, had left the alternative open: it could have been an individual or team event.

16 Rose 1929: 405; more generally, see Ducat 2006: 249–252. Spartan tastes are revealed by two comic scenes: the fruit thief and the thief caught red-handed stealing rotten meat, recalled by Sosibios *FGrH* (= *BNJ*) 595 F 7 ap. Ath. 14.621d–f and Poll. 4.105 respectively.

17 On the '*agṓnes* of the sickle', see Nafissi in preparation.

that differentiated Sparta from other Greek cities.[18] The practice obviously aroused censure. Isocrates observes that the sons of the Spartans behaved unworthily and stole from the people in the fields, i.e., from the helots.[19] Such criticism took root on fertile ground, since the Spartans were often accused of *pleonexía* ('greed'). An echo of critical voices can already be heard in the *Anabasis*, in a playful dialogue between Xenophon and the Spartan Cheirisophos. The two blame each other for the faults of their respective cities: the Spartans teach their children to steal, the Athenians elect as magistrates those who steal the most public money.[20] In the *Politeia*, Xenophon thus handles the subject with the apologetic tone characteristic of his treatise: stealing is limited to food, it is necessary to supplement a deliberately and healthily reduced diet, it requires hard work and, above all, it prepares boys for military life, sharpening their cunning and teaching them to be vigilant and resistant to sleep.[21] Later we find mention of theft in the 'Aristotle' of the *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians*[22] and Plutarch.[23] Essentially, the picture is clear: stealing food was permitted, indeed encouraged, but boys had to be careful not to be caught in the act. If they were, they were punished with lashes.

The competition at Limnaion was clearly inspired by the stealing that the boys were encouraged to practice to supplement their meals. In the *agṓn* the boys were called upon to prove their stealing skills. The food was, however, an offering to the goddess, and was therefore well protected by men armed with whips. Consequently, in order to win, the boys had to prove that they could steal and also endure pain, another major goal of the Spartan *paideía*.

We do not know the relationship between the stealing *agṓn* and the *paidik(h)ón* contests, but we can perhaps assume that it was integrated into them. It is likely that only this event, among the many minor ones held at Limnaion in classical times, drew the attention of ancient authors, as it was linked to a sensitive issue that attracted the criticism of Sparta's detractors. The other contests, however, remained unnoticed in the literary

18 Ducat 2006: 201–207, emphasizes its enigmatic character at the outset and clarifies many of its cultural implications (e.g., its relation to hunting) and its role in the socialization of boys. For boys, stealing is more than a necessity: in a certain sense it is an obligation. It is a pseudo-game because adult control turns it into a test of ability with very serious consequences for the social standing of the individual boy. Risking what might appear to be an overly naive or passive attitude to ancient tradition, I believe that stealing was considered and developed as a culturally appropriate initiation practice for those who had to conduct a military campaign and sustain themselves in enemy territory. Whether this practice derived from more ancient initiatory trials, as Ducat (2006: 205–207) suggests, remains, in my opinion, impossible to prove.

19 Isoc. *Panath*. 211–214.

20 Xen. *An*. 4.6.14–16

21 Ducat 2006: 9–10, 21–22, 202–206.

22 Fr. 611.13 Rose = *Exc. Polit*. 13 Dilts.

23 Plut. *Lyc*. 17.5–18.2, *inst. lac*. 12 (*Mor*. 237d–e).

tradition. The whip *agṓn* took on completely different connotations when it was celebrated in the form of the *diamastígōsis*.

In 1929, in the final publication of the Ortheia excavations, Herbert Jennings Rose, as we saw above, defined cheese stealing a "rough game". Later on, in 1941, in a paper entitled "Greek Rites of Stealing",[24] Rose felt he had to go back on this original idea, redefining the event as a "rite" or a "ritual". Nowadays too, the cheese-stealing event is very often referred to as a (religious) "ritual".

In a similar vein, scholars have sought religious *comparanda* for the Spartan event described by Xenophon. Reference has been made here to *bōmolochía* (βωμολοχία), understood as 'ambushing and stealing food from the altar'. In the light of a study by Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux,[25] the *bōmolóchos* is seen as a buffoonish beggar, who lurks at the altar ready to grab food; for this reason, a certain relationship between the famous masks of Ortheia and the rituals of theft has also been argued. This argument, however, does not hold up: Stephen Kidd has shown that in classical times the term *bōmolóchos*, when referring to a person, simply meant 'jester' or 'fool'.[26] In fact, *bōmolóchos* was originally a bird,[27] but the name also described someone prone to empty chatter and silly jokes. Only in the grammatical culture of the imperial period did *bōmolóchos* come to mean 'a person lurking by the altar',[28] a misinterpretation of certain puns made by fifth-century comedians.[29] The cheese *agṓn* has nothing to do with the human *bōmolochía*.

Most scholars emphasize the religious nature of the Spartan *agṓn* by comparing it with a Samian ritual for Artemis mentioned by Herodotus.[30] Herodotus tells the story behind the ritual: the tyrant of Corinth, Periander, sent three hundred young boys from Corcyra to Alyattes, the king of Lydia, to have them emasculated. On reaching Samos, the Samians learned of the boys' sad fate and arranged for the young Corcyraeans to take refuge as supplicants in the sanctuary of Artemis. In response to this, the Corinthians who were transporting the boys to Lydia tried to seize them from the sanctuary and prevent any food from being taken to them. At night the Samians sent out dancing groups of boys and girls to offer sesame sweets and honey to the goddess. The Corcyraean boys took the

24 Rose 1941: 1–2.
25 Frontisi-Ducroux 1984.
26 Kidd 2012.
27 Arist. *Hist. an.* 617b; Attic vases depict birds perched on altars.
28 Harpocr. s.v. *bōmolócheuesthai* (76.9-17 D. = β 27 Keaney).
29 Pherec. fr. 150 K.–A., Aristoph. *Equ.* 1194.
30 Hdt. 3.48. Just a few of the most important studies include Rose 1941, Sourvinou-Inwood 1991: 249–250nn32–34, Ducat 1995, Bonnechère 1998, Ducat 2006: 256–260. See also Vernant 1987: 197n58.

food by force [*harpázontes* (ἁρπάζοντες)] and were able to feed themselves. The festival, says Herodotus, continued in the same way in his own time.

This comparison has led some to regard the competitive nature of the Spartan event as 'secondary', and to postulate ritual origins for the practice we know. Jean Ducat, for example, suggests that the Spartans added a competitive element to an older ritual, perhaps in the seventh century BC.[31] This genetic and ritual perspective seems unconvincing. There is no reason to assume that cheese stealing derives from the religious rituals of taking offerings to the deity, and it has no affinity with them.

While the comparative perspective is valuable, it should not lead us to separate the Spartan *agṓn* from the forms and intentions of the educational practice that determined its extraordinary specificity. The singularity of the cheese-stealing *agṓn* actually reflects a no less striking feature of Spartan *paideía*: theft. The comparison with Herodotus' account of the Corcyraean boys on Samos is instructive for another reason. Ritual or agonistic behavior involving the theft of food intended for a god aroused unease. In Herodotus' *aítion*, the theft is justified by a moral obligation to save the young men: they are seriously threatened by the cruelty of a tyrant who has condemned them to barbaric and degrading mistreatment. In the case of Plutarch's foundation story of the Spartan *agṓn*,[32] the tale attributes the theft of the offerings to the barbarians' disrespect for the gods and *nómos*. The defense of the altar, on the other hand, recalls one of the most glorious moments in Spartan history, the Battle of Plataiai.

To sum up, we have here a rather extraordinary *agṓn*, and the actions of the young men, though certainly authorized, might almost seem sacrilegious, so much so that their origins are associated with the action of barbarians.

The *diamastígōsis: tâs karterías agṓn*

Pausanias gives perhaps the most horrific, and certainly the best-known description of this infamous event.[33] The boys were flogged, and the altar was covered with their blood as the priestess held the statue of the goddess. When the blows became less severe, "out of respect for the beauty or rank of the young man", the priestess would declare that the statue had become heavier and reprimand the floggers.

31 Ducat 2006: 254.
32 Plut. *Arist*. 17.10. See above, n. 13.
33 Paus. 3.16.10–11.

The Late Hellenistic-Imperial flogging contest is often explicitly referred to as an *agṓn*.[34] Ancient authors often call it *(dia)mastígōsis/diamastigṓseis* [(δια)μαστίγωσις/ διαμαστιγώσεις: "whipping(s)"] and also *mástix/mástiges* [μάστιξ/μάστιγες: "the whip(s)"]. Plutarch seems to imply that *diamastígōsis* is the formal local name of the contest.[35] However, the only name known from local epigraphic evidence, *tâs karterías agṓn* (τᾶς καρτερίας ἀγών: 'contest of endurance'), is less descriptive and focuses more on the virtue of the young competitors. Epigraphic and literary texts contain adjectives, nouns and verbs derived from *karterós* to emphasize that the young Spartans were strong enough to 'withstand' and 'endure'.[36] The winners were called *bōmoníkai* (βωμονίκαι: 'the winners of the altar contest').[37] The earliest mention of the contest – which can be dated with any certainty – is to be found in Cicero, who probably attended the *diamastígōsis* in 79 BC.[38] Plutarch, Pausanias, Lucian and Philostratus probably also witnessed the contest, and they all mention or imply that Greeks flocked to the Limnaion to view the *agṓn*. As far as we know, Libanius is the last ancient author to have witnessed the *agṓn*, sometime between AD 336 and 340.[39]

34 Nic. Dam. *FGrH* (= *BNJ*) 90 F 103z11, Hyg. *Fab*. 261, Plut. *inst. lac*. 40 (*Mor*. 329c–d), Stat. *Theb*. 4.231–233, Lucian. *Anach*. 38, Them. *Or*. 21.250A, Ps.-Nonnus in Greg. Naz. *Or*. 4.11, 4.58 (Nimmo Smith), Simpl. *in Epict*. 5 and 8.

35 Plut. *inst. lac*. 40 (*Mor*. 329c–d). *Mastigṓseis*: Charikles *FGrH* (= *BNJ*) 367 F 1 ap. Ath. 8.350c. *Diamastígōsis/diamastigṓseis*: Tert. *mart*. 4.8, Sch. Pl. *Leg*. 1.633a (pl.), 633b (pl.), Ps.-Nonnus in Greg. Naz. *Or*. 4.58 (Nimmo Smith) (pl.), Suda *s.v*. Lykoûrgos. *Mástix/mástiges*: Philostr. *V A* 6.20, Paus. 3.16.9 (pl.), Lib. *Or*. 1.23 (pl.).

36 *Tâs karterías agṓn* is attested in the dedication of a victor (*IG* V 1.290 = *AO* 316–317, no. 37) and in Philostr. *V A* 6.20; a statue honors a young man *epiphanṓr karteṓanta* (ἐπιφανῶρ καρτερήαντα, i.e., ἐπιφανῶς καρτερήσαντα: "having distinguished himself in resistance"): *IG* V 1.653a = *AO* 356, no. 142 (on the occasion of the dedication of the statue, see below). "Strength to resist" and "to resist" (καρτερία and καρτερεῖν, διακαρτερεῖν, ἐγκαρτερεῖν): Plut. *inst. lac*. 40 (*Mor*. 239c–d), Lucian. *Anach*. 38, Max. Tyr. 19.5E (90B) Hobein, Philostr. *Gym*. 58 p. 293, Sch. Lib. *Or*. 1.23, Simpl. *in Epict*. 5, Sch. *Od*. 4.425 Dindorf]: the young are thus "very strong in resistance" [καρτερικώτατοι: Lucian. *Anach*. 38), they learn to be "strong to endure" [καρτερικοί: Ps.-Nonnus in Greg. Naz. *Or*. 4.58 (Nimmo Smith)], and to "behave with strength and endurance" (καρτερικῶς ἔχειν: ibid. 39.8). These Greek terms are reminiscent of the "proofs of endurance" (*karteṓseis*, καρτερήσεις) in Pl. *Leg*. 1.633b. Latin authors refer to the same virtue with terms such as *patiens* (Hor. carm. 1.7.10) or *tolerantia* (Tert. *Apol*. 50.9).

37 The title of *bōmoníkēs/ās* is attested by *IG* V 1.554 (Severan period), *IG* V 1.652 (second century AD), *IG* V 1.653 [after AD 212], *IG* V 1.653b = *AO* 357-358, no. 143 pl. CCI, b (after AD 212), *AO* 358, no. 144 (first quarter of the third century AD), in Latin by Serv. *Aen.* 2.116, Hyg. *fab.* 261 and in Greek by *Myth. Vat.* II 202; the verb *bōmonikéō* is attested by *IG* V 1.654 (late second century AD).

38 Cic. *Tusc*. 2.34, see also 2.46, 5.77. It is generally accepted that Cicero was in Sparta in 79 BC, sometime during the first of the two years he spent between Athens, Rhodes and Asia Minor (e.g., Gelzer 1939: 838, Büchner 1964: 101, Gelzer 1969: 24n57, Rawson 1975: 27, Cartledge and Spawforth 1989: 94 [^{2} 2002: 86]). Another possibility would have been almost totally impractical: on his return journey from the proconsulate in Cilicia in 50 BC Cicero was on a very tight schedule (cf. Marinone ^{2}2004: 158–159). Kennell 1995: 21–23 dates the source of Plut. *inst. lac*. 40 (*Mor*. 239c–d) shortly after 146 BC. Plutarch's source is certainly relatively old, but we do not know how old.

39 Liban. *Or*. 1.23, Cic. *Tusc*. 2.34, Plut. *Lyc*. 18.1–2, Lucian. *Anach*. 38–39, Paus. 3.16.9–11, Philostr. *V A* 6.20, Favorin. *de exilio* 21, col. 20 Barigazzi. Libanius does not describe the event, but in his *Autobiography* he claims to have gone to Sparta to attend it. On the date, cf. Tigerstedt 1965–1978: II 549n1278.

Before considering how the *agṓn* took place, it is useful to recall its *aítion*, which is found in Pausanias and other ancient authors. In Sparta it was claimed that the statue of the goddess was that of Artemis Taurica and that it was Orestes who brought it to the city. The story told by the Spartans is a development of the well-known myth of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*. Euripides links the cult of Artemis Tauropolos of Halai Araphenides in Attica – where human blood is shed – with the bloodthirsty Taurian goddess.[40] As we know from Pausanias[41] and other sources, many communities claimed to possess the statue of the Taurian goddess. The cults associated with the Taurian Artemis usually involved ceremonies of a particularly violent and bloody nature. A case in point is Diana Aricina and the killing of the *rex nemorensis*. The violent and threatening character of the Tauropolos also explains why the goddess was prominently included among the oath deities in international treaties, as was often the case in Hellenistic times.[42]

According to Pausanias,[43] the statue of Taurian Artemis was brought to Sparta by Orestes, who had fled Tauris with Iphigenia. Much later, two brothers, Alopekos and Astrabakos, found the simulacrum on the banks of the Eurotas, standing upright and bound with willow branches. Once freed, the goddess unleashed her power and drove the two young men mad. Later, during a sacrifice, fratricidal fights broke out between the members of the city's subdivisions, and the survivors fell ill. An oracle then ordered the altar to be bathed in human blood. Human sacrifice was introduced, which Lycurgus eventually replaced with the more civilized *diamastígōsis*.

While the earliest reference to this story is in the *Periḗgesis*,[44] we do not know when the story told by Pausanias originated. However, it would be rash to assume that it dates from the time of the reformation of the *agṓn*. One might assume that the myth identifying Ortheia with the Taurian Artemis contributed to the custom of naming the goddess *Artemis* Ortheia, rather than simply Ortheia (or a variant of Ortheia) as before. This custom is first documented in inscriptions of the Tiberian period and in the literary

40 Eur. *IT* 1450–1461.

41 Paus. 3.16.7–8.

42 Pausanias acknowledges Sparta's claim over that of the Athenians – and indeed over that of Laodikeia in Syria, where the statue of the sanctuary of Artemis Brauronia would eventually be found – although many other communities claimed to possess the goddess's statue: cf. Graf 1979: 37–38, Braund 2018: 61–95, Lo Monaco 2018: 440–446 and *passim*. Tauropolos and treaty oaths: Scharff 2016: 136–137; Scharff forthcoming.

43 Paus. 3.16.7–11.

44 Some scholars date the tradition of the Artemis Taurica in Sparta to the Augustan age on the basis of Hyg. *Fab*. 261. However, the *fabula* is taken from Servius' commentary on Virgil (*Aen.* 2.116; for the derivation of chapters 258–261 from Servius, see Schmidt 1872: xxviiin). The attribution of parts of the stratified mythographic manual to the Augustan grammarian C. Julius Hyginus is controversial. Many believe it to be a second-century AD work wrongly attributed to him: see Cameron 2004: 11n36, Smith and Trzaskoma 2007: xlii–lv. Flavius Philostratus (*V A* 6.20), Gregorius Nazianzenus (*Or*. 39.4 and 4.103) and Synesius (*Ep*. 41) clearly knew that the Spartan goddess was identified with the Taurian.

tradition in Plutarch[45] (and perhaps in his sources). If this assumption were correct, the story of the arrival of the Taurian statue in Sparta would have been invented at least in the early imperial period. However, the time gap between Pausanias and the first mention of Ortheia as Artemis Ortheia in the epigraphic evidence is so great that it might be preferable to see the development of the tradition of also calling Ortheia by the divine name Artemis in socio-linguistic terms. The supra-local significance that the sanctuary acquired through the influx of distinguished foreigners who attended the spectacle of the *karterías agṓn* led to the use of a less parochial and more dignified Panhellenic term to refer to the goddess. The existence of descriptions, such as that in the Scholia to Plato's *Leges* (633B Greene), which are incompatible with the idea that the flogging took place to appease the bloodthirsty goddess, is probably an indication that for some time the *diamastígōsis* was not associated with the Taurian deity.[46] Even the fact that an author as learned as Plutarch, who even visited Sparta and showed some interest in the *agṓn*, made no mention of Ortheia's history as Artemis Taurian and gave a different account of its origins,[47] suggests that this was the case and should not be dismissed as a weak *argumentum e silentio*.

The most substantial attempts to reconstruct the *agṓn* have been made by Jean Ducat and Nigel Kennell.[48] We can only speculate on important features such as its place in the festival calendar[49] or the exact age of the participants. However, Ducat and Kennell reasonably suggest that the young Spartans faced the *karterías agṓn* as a final moment of their *paideía* when on the threshold of their entry into adulthood.[50]

The ancient descriptions of the *agṓn* present us with two sets of divergences. The first is difficult to explain satisfactorily. Two of the oldest testimonies in our possession

45 Inscriptions above n. 7. Plut. *inst. lac*. 40 (*Mor*. 239c–d): in any case Plutarch's sources also knew of the *diamastígōsis*.

46 "Endurances: He (*scil.* Plato) means the Flagellations. They took place at the altar of Artemis Orthosia, who restores the constitution. Nearby stood her priestess carrying in her hand something hidden, which remains unknown until now. And if the person being flogged was whipped less than he should (for he was not allowed to move his hands, which he held on his head), she was weighed down by what she was holding, but if he suffered the proper punishment, the priestess felt a light weight." (transl. Kennell, with slight changes) καρτερήσεις. τὰς διαμαστιγώσεις φησί. ἐγένοντο δ' αὗται πρὸς τῷ βωμῷ τῆς Ὀρθωσίας Ἀρτέμιδος, τῆς τὴν πολιτείαν ἀνορθούσης. παρειστήκει γὰρ ἡ ταύτης ἱέρεια φέρουσά τι ἐπὶ τῆς χειρὸς κεκρυμμένον, ὃ μέχρι τοῦ νῦν ἄγνωστόν ἐστι, καὶ εἰ μὲν ἧττον τοῦ δέοντος ἐμαστιγοῦτο· κινεῖν γὰρ τὰς χεῖρας οὐκ ἐτόλμα, ἔχων ταύτας ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς ὁ μαστιζόμενος· ἐβαρεῖτο ἐκείνη ὑπὸ τοῦ φερομένου, δεόντως δὲ τὴν δίκην εἰ ὑπεῖχεν, κούφως ἡ ἱέρεια διετίθετο. Compare Pausanias' description of the priestess carrying the image of the goddess (above). The etymology of Orthosia given by the scholium is not attested elsewhere.

47 Plut. *Arist*. 17.10, cf. *Lyc*. 18.2 and *inst. lac.* 40 (*Mor*. 329c–d): more on Plutarch's account of the *aítion* is found below.

48 Ducat 1995: 347–354 and Kennell 1995: 70–78.

49 The *diamastígōsis* was celebrated annually (Plut. *inst. lac*. 40 [*Mor*. 239C]), supposedly between the end of May and the beginning of June, and it took up a considerable part of the day (the whole day, according to the same passage): cf. Kennell 1995: 71–72, for the date 195n6.

50 In literary sources the participants in the *agṓn* are sometimes called *paîdes*, sometimes *éphēboi*: on their age, see Ducat 1995: 348, Kennell 1995: 76. We are rather in the dark as to who the floggers were.

apparently contradict each other irreconcilably as to the conclusion of the contest. Nicolaus of Damascus speaks of several victors,[51] while Plutarch, in a passage (*Instituta laconica* 40 = *Mor*. 239c), which undoubtedly goes back to a relatively old source, declares that the greatest glory belongs to "the one who lasts longest and most". Other ancient authors also imply that there was a single victor.[52] Ducat stresses that the two results correspond to the two radically different models of trial and *agṓn*. He rightly believes that the *diamastígōsis* was a contest and that there was only one winner, as suggested by the epigraphic documentation, which we will examine in a while.[53]

The second set of divergences concerns how the action actually developed, and, to some extent, the spectacular quality of the event. The main body of sources refers to the beatings inflicted on the young men "on the altar" or "by the altar" and mentions the blood they shed, sometimes noting explicitly how the altar was bathed in it. Furthermore, the importance of the altar is underlined by the use of *bōmoníkai* for the victors, which is attested from the middle of the second century AD.[54] However, the descriptions – even the famous, or infamous, one given by Pausanias – are all too general in describing how the boys were flogged. The scholia on Horace seem to offer valuable but anomalous information by describing a single (!) young man being whipped while his hands were resting on the altar.[55] Nicolaus of Damascus, on the other hand, makes no mention of blood and depicts "the boys who, according to the law, are flogged while circling an altar until the few who still resist are crowned".[56]

The conflicting accounts of Nicolaus of Damascus and Ps. Acro led Ducat to suppose that there were two successive forms of *diamastígōsis*. In the earlier period, boys would have been whipped as they circled the altar with their arms raised (Lucian. *Anach*. 38; Sch. Pl.

51 *FGrH* (= *BNJ*) 90 F 103z11.

52 See also, for instance, Ps.-Nonnus in Greg. Naz. *Or*. 4.11, 4.58 (Nimmo Smith).

53 Ducat 1995: 351–353.

54 Flagellation "on the altar" is alluded to by ἐπὶ τοῦ βωμοῦ, ἐπὶ τῷ βωμῷ, ἐπὶ τὸν βωμόν, πρὸς βωμόν, παρὰ τοὺς βωμούς, sometimes with a reference to blood, Favorin. *de exilio* 21, col. 20 Barigazzi, Plut. *Lyc*. 18.2, *inst. lac*. 40 (*Mor*. 239c), Lucian. *Anach*. 38, Sext. Emp. *Pyr*. 3.208, Alciphr. *Ep.* 3.18.3, Philostr. *Gym*. 58 p. 293, Themist. *Or*. 21.250a, Sch. Pl. *Leg*. 1.633b, Ps.-Nonn. in Greg. Naz. *Or*. 4.58. Slightly more explicit variants, also often with reference to blood, are found in Paus. 3.16.10, Philostr. *V A* 6.20, Greg. Naz. *Or*. 4.70 and 39.4, 4.103, *carmina* 2.2.7.273. Mentions of the altar in Latin authors can be found in Cic. *Tusc*. 2.34, Hyg. *Fab*. 261, Tert. *Ad Mart*. 4.8. Plutarch also speaks of blows received "by the altar": *Arist*. 17.10. On blood on the altar and/or for the goddess, see Paus. 3.16.10, Sext. Emp. *Pyr*. 3.208, Philostr. *V A* 6.20, Ps.-Acro 1.7.10; Greg. Naz. *Or.* 4.70, 4.103, 39.4; Synes. *Ep.* 41 (αἵματι … ἐτίμησαν Ἄρτεμιν). For the sources on *bōmoníkai* cf. n. 37.

55 Ps.-Acro 1.7.10: "They decreed that a young man should go up to the altar, lay his hands on it and be whipped by another young man until the altar was bathed in blood and the god was appeased." (*statuerunt hoc, ut iuvenis aras ascenderet, superimponet manus et tamdiu loris c<a>ederetur ab alio iuvene, quamdiu sanguis de vibicibus in aram manaret et satisfieret numini*). Young people are also "placed on the altars" (*aris superpositi*) in Hyg. *Fab*. 261.

56 *FGrH* (= *BNJ*) 90 F 103z11 οἱ δὲ παῖδες νομίμως περί τινα βωμὸν περιιόντες μαστιγοῦνται, ἕως ἂν ὀλίγοι λειφθέντες στεφανωθῶσιν.

Leg. 1.633b), while in the imperial period, around AD 150, the custom of whipping boys on the altar to bathe it in blood was established.

Perhaps it is not necessary to distinguish between these two types of flogging. In fact, in order to cover an altar with blood it was not necessary for someone to drip blood directly onto the altar (by bending over it, for example).[57] It also goes without saying that when the young men were near the altar, some of the blood that was dripping from their bodies and from the whips might have simply splashed onto the *bōmós* or fallen onto the platform of the *próthysis*. Moreover, it would have been enough to rest or wipe blood-stained whips on the altar in order to bathe it in blood. Vases from the classical period show altars with deliberately bloodied sides, apparently applied using various instruments including branches and sticks.[58] Moreover, Ps.-Acro's description of just one man bent over the altar seems more like a dramatic antiquarian-mythographic fantasy than reliable evidence. The sources identifying Ortheia with Artemis Taurica emphasize that the blood bathes the altar, although earlier than these Cicero had also mentioned the altar and noted the blood shed by the boys (Tusc. 2.34: "*ut multus e visceribus sanguis exeat*").[59] Ducat considers the possibility that the tradition of the Taurian origin of the goddess may have been decisive in how the event was described, i.e., with its emphasis on the blood on the altar, but he does not choose this line of interpretation. Indeed, while this tradition may have led the Spartans to ensure that the blood of the young men copiously bathed the altar, it also led to a different way of seeing and describing the *agṓn*, i.e., with attention now focused on the blood on the altar.

I would therefore suggest that the two ideas of the boys circling the altar and being beaten on the altar are not incompatible. Cicero speaks of the blows that fell on the young men as they approached the altar ("they are received at the altar");[60] these words seem to refer to the initial procession, but they could allude to the blows the young men received each time they drew near the altar while "circling" it.

I would therefore not suggest that there were two successive types of *diamastígōsis*. On the contrary, we can imagine that the youths walked slowly in a wide circle around the altar and that in groups, one after the other, they stopped in front of it. Those closest to the altar, were flogged while still standing, with their arms raised and their hands on their heads.[61]

57 As Ducat 1995: 350 suggests.
58 Ekroth 2005: especially 19–23.
59 Probably a tragic fragment of unknown authorship and subject: inc. inc. *TRF* 209 R.2-3 = Adesp. 53 Schauer.
60 Cic. *Tusc*. 2.34: *ad aram … accipiuntur*.
61 Lucian. *Anach*. 38, Sch. Pl. *Leg*. 1.633b.

This hypothesis solves a problem that has already been addressed by Kennell. The altar at Ortheia is relatively small (8.20m × 2.60m in Roman times) and Kennell rightly suggests that the boys, probably about 70 boys per year, were divided into groups (it is less certain that these were the *bouaí* and that there were five *bouaí* of around fifteen boys).[62] The different groups competed on equal terms and at the same time, so it was possible to identify the boy who had lasted the longest. The boys moved in a circle around the area between the altar and the front of the temple, with regular pauses marked by the time when all the individual young men of each group, who had taken their turn at the altar, were subjected to the lashes. Here some of their blood would have splashed onto the *bōmós* or dripped onto the platform. More blood may have been deliberately spilled on the altar by placing or wiping the whips on it. As far as the number of young participants in the games is concerned, the 'arena' of the (amphi)theatre, with a diameter of about 20m,[63] must have been deliberately designed to accommodate all the boys. It is almost certain that, due to the demographic crisis of the time, there was a significant decline after the middle of the third century AD.

The solemn pace of the youths in the area between the front of the temple and the altar, and later, when the theatre had been built, along the circumference of the 'orchestra', gives a decidedly dramatic edge to this cruel *agṓn*. The riotous dash to steal the cheese was replaced by the calm and disciplined demeanor of the young men determined to endure the pain. The new *agṓn* was above all an exemplary compendium and display of Spartan virtues. The young men submitted in silence to the lashes of the whip in an act of endurance that is expressed in the very names given to the contest: the term *kartería* (καρτερία) recalls the strength of their resistance, and the preposition *dia-* (as a prefix to *mastígōsis*) emphasizes the intensity and relentlessness of the action and their ability to overcome it.

But how far did these challenges go? Cicero claims to have heard of Spartan boys dying from the blows,[64] Lucian mentions it as a fact,[65] and Plutarch seems to assume widespread contemporary knowledge of such deaths.[66] While these sources should certainly be treated with some caution, they seem to be generally reliable.[67]

62 Kennell 1995: 72–74. On the number of youths, see also ibid. 63. On *bouaí* below n. 127.
63 Dawkins 1929b: 39 and tab. 3.
64 Cic. *Tusc*. 2.74.
65 Lucian. *Anach*. 38.
66 Plut. *Lyc*. 18.1–2.
67 On this subject, see Ducat 1995: 348, 352 and Kennell 1995: 26, 73–74. The latter is overly cautious about these deaths.

This is further supported by Lucian, who mentions statues of young men who died in the *diamastígōsis*, stating that they were erected by the city.[68] Honorary statues in imperial Sparta, granted by polis decree, were usually erected at the expense of private individuals.[69] Lucian, however, would have seen these evergetic acts for what they were: gestures of private devotion to the community that in no way diminished the public dimension of the honor bestowed.

What has not been noted previously is that it is likely that the base of one of these statues has come down to us. This is *IG* V 1.653a = *AO* 356, no. 142 tab. CCI, a, found in the substructure of the theatre of Ortheia. The text, which probably dates from after the *Constitutio Antoniniana* (AD 212), reads:

> The city (honors) Markos Aurēlios Euarestos, son of Zōilos, companion in the education of M(arkos) Aurēlios Aristokratēs, son of Damainetos, and of Tiberios Claudios Eiraniōn, son of Hyginos, for his admirable resistance; the *bouagoí* have borne the expenses.[70]

The statue certainly honors a participant in the *diamastígōsis*, the *agṓn tâs karterías* ("having admirably resisted", l. 8: ἐπιφανῶρ *καρτερήαντα*!). Most interpreters believe that M. Aurēlios Euarestos was a *bōmoníkas*,[71] but this hardly seems to be the case. Why should the victory not have been openly boasted of? Why avoid the high-sounding title of *bōmoníkas*, which had long been in use when the statue was dedicated? Kennell, on the other hand, suggests that the young man was not a winner, but had finished the contest on his feet.[72] To support this interpretation, we might be tempted to recall what Nicolaus of Damascus had to say about the recognition reserved for the "few" who excelled in such a trial. However, even this interpretation is not very plausible. Not only is a contest leaving just one competitor the victor incompatible with a test that allows more than one, but it is also most unlikely that the city would reserve the same great honor for both the winner and those (albeit few) who simply endured.

It is more likely that the young man did not win, but allowed himself to be flogged to death, and that the locution ἐπιφανῶρ καρτερήαντα ("having admirably resisted") refers

68 Lucian. *Anach*. 38.

69 Camia 2017: 129–137, 142.

70 ἁ πόλιρ | Μᾶρκον Αὐρῆλιν | Εὐάρεστον Ζωΐλω, | συνέφηβον Μ(άρκω) Αὐρηλίω || Ἀριστοκράτηρ τῶ Δαμαι|νέτω καὶ Τιβερίω Κλαυδίω | Εἰρανίων{ο}ορ τῶ Ὑγείνω, | ἐπιφανῶρ καρτερήαντα, | ποδδεξαμένων τὸ || ἀνάλωμα τῶν βουαγῶν.

71 Kolbe in *IG* V 1, *ad loc*., Woodward 1929: 356, and later, e.g., Brelich 1969: 173, Rizakis et al. 2004: 133 (with discussion of the date), Newby 2005: 159–160.

72 Kennell 1995: 77.

to death using a restrained, but highly charged, euphemism. A statue in his honor would therefore be entirely appropriate, as Lucian states.[73]

The *diamastígōsis* presented the young men with the supreme alternative of victory or death. Each participant had to bear the full weight of the ideals and the glory of Sparta, the social pressures,[74] as well as the fear of his own fears, including the fear of physical suffering.

Reforming the *agṓn*: When and How

The case of the two whipping contests is the clearest example of the transformation of Spartan educational institutions between the Classical and Roman eras, a transformation that Nigel Kennell, in his seminal work *The Gymnasium of Virtue*, urges us to examine with great care.[75] But when did the change from the cheese-stealing *agṓn* to the *agṓn tâs karterías* take place? Opinions are divided.

Kennell himself attributes the change to the *agōgḗ* reforms implemented by Kleomenes III on the advice of the Stoic Sphairos of Borysthenes.[76] In contrast, Jean Ducat dates this change to the revival of Spartan institutions in the second century BC after the Achaian parenthesis.[77] Antony Spawforth, on the other hand, believes that the *diamastígōsis* was introduced in the Augustan period, an admittedly unlikely hypothesis since it conflicts with the testimony of Cicero, who undoubtedly witnessed the *diamastígōsis* in 79 BC.[78] Indeed, since Cicero recalls having heard of deaths in Sparta in the past,[79] the *agṓn* must have been reformed at least a few decades before his visit to the city.

The dating proposed by Kennell and Ducat brings into play the complex issues of the decline, abolition and restoration of the Lycurgan laws and the discontinuity between classical and Roman education. The terms of this debate deserve careful consideration.

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73 Lucian. *Anach*. 38.

74 The mothers and fathers present showed that they were faithful upholders of the Spartan tradition and urged the young people to resist: Sen. *dial*. 1.4.11, Stat. *Theb.* 4.231–233, 8.436–437, Mart. 7.80.10, Lucian. *Anach*. 38, Tert. *Apol*. 50.9, *mart*. 4.8.

75 Kennell 1995.

76 Kennell 1995: 111–113 (which is also partly based on the controversial chronology he proposed for the *Instituta laconica*); earlier Cartledge and Spawforth 1989: 207 (^{2}2002: 191–192).

77 Ducat 1995: 357–358 (earlier Rose 1929: 305).

78 Spawforth 2012: 92–95. According to Rzepka 2020, the *diamastígōsis* was an ancient secondary contest that became the pivot of the Ortheia contests when the team contest of stealing cheeses ceased to be practiced because *oliganthropia* prevented the gathering of groups above a certain number. This thesis is based on unverifiable and partly on probably erroneous assumptions (see above n. 15 on the stealing of cheeses as an individual contest).

79 Cic. *Tusc*. 2.34.

As is well known, Kennell has emphasized the great differences between the Spartan educational system of the Classical period and that of the Roman period. The vicissitudes of Spartan education in the Hellenistic period would have been crucial to the development of these differences. According to Kennell, Spartan *paideía* underwent two profound and prolonged breaks in the third and second centuries BC. The first break would have begun in the second quarter of the third century. Kleomenes III would have then renewed the Spartan *paideía* thoroughly, this Kleomenean phase of the institution lasting from about 226 to 188 BC. The abolition of Lycurgus' laws by Philopoimen in 188 BC[80] would have caused another rupture: the 'Lycurgan customs' restored by Kleomenes would have been abandoned and Achaian institutions imposed. A new period of rupture would have thus begun, ending with the reintroduction of the 'laws of Lycurgus' in 146 BC.[81]

It should be noted, however, that the concept of Lycurgus' laws is very vague. They covered almost every aspect of public life, from political and social institutions to traditional customs and education. Moreover, the ancestral Lycurgan *nómoi* were a cultural, political and identity asset of great, and even emotional, worth. As such, they lent themselves to instrumental use. Since Lycurgus' norms affected personal behavior, infidelity to the strict spirit of traditional norms (particularly to what may have happened in the third century BC) could be seen as the neglect and abandonment of the *nómoi*, even if certain traditional practices were formally still in place. Moreover, in both the third and second centuries BC, such persistence, and this is a detail of specific interest to us here, might also have been fostered by the integration of educational practices into religious institutions. The extension and plasticity of the notion of the 'laws of Lycurgus' further facilitated the instrumental use of both the intention to reintroduce such *nómoi* and the accusation of having betrayed them, an accusation made by both contending parties in the course of the revolution of the third century BC.[82] It is therefore unclear to what extent the rites, organization and practices of traditional education had fallen into disuse when Agis IV and Kleomenes III set out to restore them. [83]

Similar issues regard the interruption of Spartan education in the second century BC.[84] According to ancient sources, Philopoimen abolished Lycurgus' institutions after his violent intervention in Sparta in 188 BC.[85] There has been much debate about the extent

80 See below.
81 Kennell 1995: 7–14.
82 Plut. *Agis* 10. Even the same political institutions were subject to different, partisan reconstructions (e.g., Kleomenes III is said to have justified the abolition of the Ephorate as non-Lycurgan: Plut. *Cleom*. 10.1–3).
83 Plut. *Agis* 4.2, *Cleom*. 11.3–4, 18.4. Cf. Lévy 1997: 152, Ducat 2006: x.
84 On this topic, see Nafissi forthcoming.
85 Liv. 38.34.2 and 9, Plut. *Phil*. 16.7–9, Paus. 7.8.5, 8.51.3.

and length of this break. The debate is mostly based on Livy's mention of L. Aemilius Paullus' visit in 167 BC to a Sparta "notable … for its discipline and institutions" [86] and on the role the sources attribute to Rome in the restoration of the educational institutions themselves.[87] The traditional view is that educational institutions at least – if not all political and social institutions – had already been restored by the time of L. Aemilius Paullus' visit to Sparta, while the city remained a member of the Achaian League.[88] Today, however, many scholars, including Kennell, argue that Sparta only returned to its traditional laws when it became a *civitas libera* in 146 BC.[89]

In this discussion, the historicity of the accounts of Philopoimen's abolition of Spartan educational institutions was not questioned until relatively recently,[90] when Jean-Georges Texier argued that the suspension of Lycurgus' laws was primarily a propaganda issue.[91] In a paper now in press, I have taken up Texier's suggestion and examined the historiographical tradition of Philopoimen's intervention and its reverberations.[92] I will briefly summarize my main conclusions below.

Sparta's integration into the Achaian League certainly entailed changes in the city's weights, measures, currency, and political institutions. Undoubtedly, during the period when Sparta was a member of the league (192–146 BC),[93] it adopted some Achaian-type institutions. Two proxeny decrees dating from the period of league membership clearly show that there were Achaian-type magistrates,[94] and the city minted silver coins using the types and the weight system of the Achaian League, switching from the Attic to the reduced Egyptian standard.[95] However, greater caution must be exercised in the face of statements by Livy, Plutarch and Pausanias regarding the abolition of Sparta's educational

86 Liv. 45.28.4: *disciplina institutisque memorabilem* (transl. A.C. Schlesinger).
87 Plut. *Phil*. 16.9, Paus. 8.51.3.
88 Tigerstedt 1965–1978: II, 344 n130, and Kennell 1995: 173n24 with bibliography; later Lévy 1997: 153, Ducat 2006: xi, Dmitriev 2011: 323 and now Steinhauer 2022: I 151–154; cf. Texier 2018: 202n61, 203, 212n114. I also argued for a similar solution in Nafissi 2018: 94–95. These scholars date the restoration of traditional institutions as 183 or 179 BC. Paus. 7.14.2 (see below n. 103) is significant, though he testifies more to Spartan attachment to their own identity than to the vitality of any particular traditional political or social institutions.
89 Cartledge and Spawforth 1989: 198 ([2] 2002: 77, 183), Kennell 1992a: 201–202, Kennell 1992b, Kennell 1995: 9–10, Kennell 2008, Spawforth 2012: 91–92, Kennell 2018: 646. On Sparta's new status after 146 BC, see Strab. 8.5.5, Paus. 7.16.10.
90 Lévy 1997: 153: "Quant à la deuxième interruption de l'agogè, qui, elle, est assurée, elle paraît moins longue que ne l'avait supposé Kennell"; Ducat 2006, xi: "in 189/8, … the reality of an interruption seems to be indisputable."
91 Texier 2014: 259-268.
92 Nafissi forthcoming.
93 I accept the traditional date for Sparta's integration into the koinon. Texier 2014: 242–252 has suggested that Sparta only became an ally of the league in 192 and was subject to it from 188, becoming a full member from 182. However, cf. Nafissi forthcoming: n5.
94 *IG* V 1.4 and 5. See, in general, Nafissi forthcoming: n6. Particularly significant is the mention of the *synarchía* in *IG* V 1.4, l. 4 and the *epidamiorgós IG* V 1.5, l. 18.
95 Thompson 1968: 48–49, Grandjean 2019.

institutions.[96] One might certainly assume that integration into the Achaian League required some adaptation of the latter, but there is no direct or even indirect evidence of such adaptations. Moreover, the information on *ephēbeía* in Achaian cities is so scarce and uneven in form that it is plausible to assume that the League did not have a coherent *ephēbeía* program imposed by federal regulations on its member cities, as something that occurred, for example, in the Boiotian League.[97]

One should also be aware that the ancient texts that speak of the abolition of the Lycurgus discipline by Philopoimen are the result of complex cultural-historical and historiographical developments. In general, the idea that Philopoimen had abolished the laws of Lycurgus only became a fact for sources writing from a philo-Spartan and pro-Roman perspective after the liberation of Sparta in 146 BC and the simultaneous restoration to the city of its ancestral laws. Polybius, given his general convictions about the history of Spartan institutions and his judgment of Philopoimen's intervention,[98] clearly did not present the abolition of Lycurgus' laws by Philopoimen as a fact, but only as an argument adopted by the Spartans in their protests. As for the specific issue of the abolition of traditional Spartan education, we certainly find it in the *Histories* of Polybius as a rhetorical argument used by the Romans.[99] The argument was an offshoot of a broader Spartan theme, the protest against the abolition of Lycurgus' *politeía* and laws:[100] since Lycurgus' institutions had been replaced by Achaian ones, the same must have been true of *paideía*. Subsequent historiographical reflection adopts the theme of the abolition of the *agōgḗ* of youth to explain the steep decline in Sparta's capacity to react, and its inability to oppose Achaian rule effectively. By making Sparta's political nadir correspond to the abolition of Lycurgus' laws, Livy and Plutarch reproduce a widespread historiographical and philosophical-political topos. On the one hand, this links the city's power to Lycurgus and his laws and its decline to their abandonment;[101] on the other, it recognizes in Lycurgus' education the basis of its citizens' bravery.[102] For ancient scholars, such a reading of historical events must have been very attractive and almost instinctive. It should be added that education was the most characteristic feature of Spartan civic culture in late Hellenistic and Imperial times and the keen interest it aroused in contemporary educated elites certainly contributed to the success of this interpretation.

96 Liv. 38.34. 2 and 9, Plut. *Phil*. 16.7–9, Paus. 7.8.5, 8.51.3.
97 McAuley 2018: especially 229–230.
98 Polyb. 4.81.12–14, cf. Liv. 39.37.1–7.
99 Cf. Liv. 39.36.4.
100 Polyb. 22.7.6, Liv. 39.33.6–7, 36.4, cf. Liv. 39.37.1–7 and see Nafissi forthcoming.
101 Sources in Nafissi forthcoming; cf. n. 54.
102 Sources in Nafissi forthcoming; cf. n. 55.

It is therefore not possible to accept the strict black and white picture suggested by Livy, Plutarch and Pausanias and imagine that a radical suspension of Spartan *disciplina* and Lycurgan *paideía* took place on the orders of Philopoimen. Two questions suffice to demonstrate the implausibility of a sudden radical erasure of Lycurgus' customs and paideutic traditions. How could norms that underpinned the entire way of life in the city be abolished by law? How was it possible, when intervening in educational practices, to cut the Gordian knot that bound them to religious practices?[103]

The reasons for the decline of the traditional educational system in Sparta were far more complex than any authoritative decision by the Achaian confederation. Extremely strong community cohesion and a committed adherence to traditional values were required to survive the unique dynamics of the Spartan public *paideía*, i.e., the fierce rivalry between individuals living together in grueling conditions, and practices that violated private property (e.g., boys indulging in thieving). These socio-cultural characteristics had certainly already been severely tested by the deepening economic disparities of third-century Sparta. Kleomenes III promoted a more rigorous education system and the restoration of traditional customs, but even then, and even more so after him, massive disenfranchisement and the large-scale registration of new citizens, frequent *stásis* and exile profoundly disrupted the continuity of Spartan *anthrōpopoíēsis* and communal solidarity. Some remnants of traditional education (certainly partly modified by Kleomenes) would have survived into the reign of Nabis and the Achaian Sparta period, but it is hard to say how many and which ones. They may well have included the cheese-stealing contest at the Limnaion.

It seems clear, indeed, that whenever the *diamastígōsis* was introduced, whether by Kleomenes III or by the free republican city after 146 BC, the Spartans certainly had the cheese-stealing *agṓn* very much in mind: the similarities between the two *agṓnes* (the whips, the centrality of the altar) suggest this. The creation of the *agṓn tâs karterías* was not a consequence of forgetting and breaking with traditional educational practices, but a product of intentional imagination.

Comparison with the older whip *agṓn* allows us to assess 'how' the *agṓn tâs karterías* was reformed, or, one might say, conceived. The reform must have been proposed by the king or by influential individuals in accordance with shared values. Even though they

103 It is difficult to imagine that the annexation of Sparta by the Achaian League could have led to "wiping out everything that made Sparta a distinct society" (Ager 2019: 187). Pausanias should avert us to this. In 147 BC, the Spartans in Corinth were recognizable by their appearance: "(The Achaians) arrested everyone, not only those whom they knew for certain to be Lacedaemonians, but also all those they suspected to be such from the cut of their hair, or because of their shoes, their clothes or even their names." (7.14.2, transl. W.H.S. Jones).

might have been more than willing to follow the proposals of a *basileús* like Kleomenes, the approval of the reform by civic political bodies brought into play demands for individual and collective self-representation. Decrees approving religious reform were usually motivated by the desire of the polis to honor the gods in a more appropriate and splendid way, while at the same time acting in a manner that was worthy of itself.

When young people took part in the *diamastígōsis*, they no longer practiced the theft that had characterized the competition described by Xenophon.[104] However, we are not dealing here with the simple moralization of competition and – perhaps contextually – of Spartan educational practices. Indeed, it is fair to assume that Spartan boys in imperial times were still expected to steal as part of their education, at least during the *phoúaxir*, the relatively short period of preparation for the *diamastígōsis*, known to us thanks to some lemmas of Hesychius.[105]

The reform was aimed at doing away with a specific type of theft: the Spartans eliminated *sacrilegious* theft. With the *diamastígōsis*, the test of resistance to pain not only became more demanding, but also took on religious concerns and connotations.

The boys were whipped on the altar and the altar was bathed in their blood. These religious implications, inherent in the new contest from the beginning, were further emphasized by the tradition of the goddess' Taurian origins, which gave the contest a 'para-sacrificial' edge. From then on, the Spartans would have seen the *diamastígōsis* and the blood of the young men as a substitute for the human sacrifices that had once been made to ensure the benevolence of Artemis and the welfare of the city.

The proposal to turn the theft of cheese into the *agṓn tâs karterías* must therefore have been based, at least in part, on the demands of religious piety. This should come as no surprise, given the importance the Spartans traditionally attached to maintaining a proper relationship with the divine.[106] It also seems important to recall "the readiness with which they (the Spartans) attributed their own misfortunes to religious causes, and in particular to divine displeasure".[107] Whatever the exact context of the reform, it is likely that when

104 Xen. *Lac*. 2.9.

105 On *phoúaxir* – in which theft was practiced – as an imperial period practice, cf. Nafissi in preparation. That young people stole during *phoúaxir* can be inferred from the famous anecdote, commonly associated with *phoúaxir* itself, about the child who died from the bites of a fox that he had stolen and kept hidden in silence (Plut. *Apophthegmata laconica anon*. 35 [*Mor*. 234a–b] and *Lyc*. 18.1).

106 As Flower 2009: 193 puts it, "the Spartans arguably paid a more scrupulous attention to religious rituals and acted more often from religious motives than did any of the other Greeks". More extensively, see Flower 2018: 428–430. Cf. Hdt. 5.63, 6.106, 7.206, 9.7, Thuc. 5.82, Xen. *An*. 2.5.7–8, *Lac*. 13.2–3, *Hell*. 4.5.11, *Ages*. 11.1–2.

107 Flower 2018: 430, who recalls, among other things, how the Spartans associated the great earthquake with Poseidon's violent wrath against the supplicant helots of his sanctuary (Thuc. 1.128.1) and felt the need to atone for the wrath of Talthybios (Hdt. 7.134).

the Spartans carried it out they were aware of the city's decline from the splendor of a more or less distant past. Therefore, they looked critically at the way the community addressed its gods on certain occasions and sought to 'improve' the relationship with them in order to honor them more worthily.

What is more remarkable is the iconic value of the *diamastígōsis*, which embodies the essential values of Spartan discipline: a high tolerance of pain, the ability to face death with courage,[108] and generally to act with dignity. The contest took on an ethically irreproachable character that was in keeping with the traditional *semnótēs* of the city. The calm, disciplined and determined bearing of young men who stepped forward and endured the beatings in silence replaced the noisy dashing of the cheese thieves – who, like barbarians, had rushed to the altar for scraps of food and were whipped like slaves or thugs.

Here we return to the story told by Plutarch in the *Life of Aristides*,[109] which seems to encapsulate the anxieties and values that we have evidenced so far. The narrative artfully reworks Herodotus,[110] and presumably other sources from the Classical and Hellenistic periods, although it also takes into account Spartan information from a more recent period when the *diamastígōsis* was already in force.

I would suggest that Plutarch's account still reflected the 'historical' and 'rhetorical' arguments that were raised when the *agṓn* was reformed. The origins of the stealing *agṓn* were explained: it had been established to commemorate a glorious episode in Spartan history, the Battle of Plataiai. Pausanias and the men in his entourage had been looking for favorable signs for the battle when some barbarians attacked them and caused outrage by throwing the sacrificial offerings. The Spartans fought their enemies with daggers and whips, as they had no weapons. The young men who ran to steal the cheese were thus likened to barbarians who had committed an impious act against the deity.[111] However, there is another important detail in the account. The other Spartan warriors, patiently

108 If we accept that the *agṓn* of the Platanistas was conceived with the rule against surrender (and, consequently, against participation in pancratium and boxing contests) in mind, it can be said to resemble the *agṓn tâs karterías* in at least two respects. Indeed, the rule against surrender is the precondition of the obligation to win or die, and the team *agṓn* of the Platanistas is, like the *agṓn* of *diamastígōsis*, an iconic and concise illustration of the virtues of Spartan youth. Platanistas: Paus. 3.14.8–10, Lukian. *Anach*. 38, cf. Pl. *Leg*. 1.633b, Cic. *Tusc.* 5.77, Lucian. *Salt*. 10–11, Plut. *Mor*. 290d; among the most recent studies on the Platanistas *agṓn* see: Kennell 1995: 55–59, Gengler 2005, Ducat 2006: 208–209, Sanders 2009, Richer 2012: 457–545, Fornis 2020, 9–10). Rule against surrender: Plut. *Lyc*. 19.9, *Regum et imperatorum apophthegmata Lyc*. 4 (*Mor.* 189e), *Apophth. lac. Lyc*. 23 (*Mor*. 228d), Sen. *Ben.* 5.3.1, Philostr. *Gym*. 9 p. 265 and 58 p. 293; recent studies: Hodkinson 1999: 157–160, cf. now Scharff 2024: 153–154 and Fornis 2020: 3–4.

109 Plut. *Arist*. 17.8–10.

110 Hdt. 9.61.2-3; on the sources of the *Life of Aristides*, see Calabi Limentani 1964: ix–xxxvii.

111 Plut. *Arist*. 17.10, see above n. 13.

awaiting the outcome of the sacrifice and their general's order to fight, were struck down by enemy missiles.[112]

> By this time the horsemen were charging upon them; presently their missiles actually reached them, and many a Spartan was smitten.[113] Their experience was indeed a terrible one, but the restraint of the men was wonderful. They did not try to repel the enemy who were attacking them, but awaited from their god and their general the favorable instant, while they endured wounds and death at their posts.[114]

As Romain Roy has astutely noted, this seems to refer to the *agṓn* of *diamastígōsis*.[115] I would add that it was suggested, that the Spartans should draw inspiration from this noble example, which was also the one most suited to their youth. The boys would no longer imitate the behavior of the barbarians, but the wonderful *enkráteia* of their forefathers, the Spartan warriors of Plataiai.[116]

With a predictable result, the boys became victims of their own illusion of emulating the heroism of their ancestors. Their flesh martyrized, the Spartans proved themselves worthy descendants of the fighters of Plataiai and Thermopylai, whom Herodotus in his narrative, and through the voice of Demaratus, had made lasting embodiments of the rule of victory or death.[117]

To conclude, I would like to move from the 'how' back to the 'when'. When did the Spartans make the decision to subject their male offspring to the pain and danger of the *diamastígōsis*? Such an extreme choice is difficult to comprehend unless it was motivated by genuine religious concerns and perhaps, above all, by an incredibly determined desire to assert the excellence of traditional Spartan education. If the question of the chronology of the reform of the *agṓn* is reconsidered in this light, it may well be linked to Kleomenes III and his restoration of Lycurgan norms. However, it seems that a more stable situation, free from social and military worries, plus the chauvinistic mood that must have prevailed

112 Plut. *Arist*. 17.8–9.

113 At this moment, one of them – Kallikrates, the finest of them all – died. Cf. Hdt. 9.72.

114 Plut. *Arist*. 17.8–9 (transl. B. Perrin): αὐτὸς δὲ πάλιν ἐσφαγιάζετο. καὶ προσέπιπτον οἱ ἱππεῖς· ἤδη δὲ καὶ βέλος ἐξικνεῖτο καί τις ἐπέπληκτο τῶν Σπαρτιατῶν. ἐν τούτῳ δὲ καὶ Καλλικράτης (…) ἦν οὖν τὸ μὲν πάθος δεινόν, ἡ δ' ἐγκράτεια θαυμαστὴ τῶν ἀνδρῶν. οὐ γὰρ ἠμύνοντο τοὺς πολεμίους ἐπιβαίνοντας, ἀλλὰ τὸν παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ στρατηγοῦ καιρὸν ἀναμένοντες ἠνείχοντο βαλλόμενοι καὶ πίπτοντες ἐν ταῖς τάξεσιν.

115 Roy 2019: § 28–29.

116 Note the rationale that underpins the stages of the boys' development: at this crucial stage of passage to adult status, their models are warriors. One should not take this description too literally and imagine that the young men of the *diamastígōsis* were standing still around the altar [on the contrary, they were "moving around the altar", περί τινα βωμὸν περιιόντες, as Nicolaus of Damascus *FGrH* (= *BNJ*) 90 F 103z11 says]. The *aítion* suggests a behavioral and ethical paradigm from a situation that is evocative and generally similar, but to a certain extent objectively different.

117 Hdt. 7.104.4–5.

in Sparta when its sovereignty was restored after 146 BC, provide the most appropriate context for the emergence of a competition that was as consciously self-representative as the *diamastígōsis*.

The *diamastígōsis* and Its Public. Spartans and the Greco-Roman Elite at the Sanctuary of Orthia

The *diamastígōsis* evokes instinctive revulsion in the modern mind: the bloodshed and seemingly gratuitous deaths scandalize us, and the scandal is magnified by the 'amphitheatre' of Ortheia with its audience seduced by the bloody spectacle.

There are illuminating studies on cultivated tourism in late Hellenistic and imperial Sparta, and on the complexity of the cultural filters that qualified the experience of visiting the city.[118] When the *agṓn* is mentioned in passing, however, modern scholars present it as a brutal ritual, implying a dubious tourism with a bloodthirsty, if not sadistic, edge. Indeed, many scholars suggest that the spectators had a clichéd Roman interest in spectacles, especially the bloody ones, such as the *munera gladiatoria* or the *venationes*.[119] This suggestion seems to be completely misleading.

The very appearance of the building in which this spectacle took place, with its altar and the façade of the temple incorporated into the structure, accentuated any differences with a 'secular' structure designed or converted for the celebration of *venationes* and *munera*. There are also various features that should qualify our ideas about the *diamastígōsis*, distancing it from any gladiatorial spectacle. These included: the strong links of the Spartan *agṓn* to the culture of the city and the traditional values of Greek civilization; the theme of respect for the gods; the reference to the virtues of Sparta and overcoming the fear of death; the evocation of the Lycurgan origins of the *agṓn*; the nobility of the participants (and the absence of a monetary prize), and, last but not least, the reference to philosophical values such as *kartería* (a Stoic virtue and an essential component of

118 Cartledge and Spawforth 1989: 207-211 ([2] 2002: 192–195); see also Cusumano 2009–2010, with Nafissi in preparation.

119 The adjectives 'horrifying' and 'gruesome' describe the revulsion aroused by the idea of a goddess and boys being whipped on her altar (des Bouvrie 2009: 153); sometimes the comparison with gladiator spectacles is explicit (Burkert 1965: 172n20, cf. Lebessi 1991: 102 and n9). The emphasis is on the sadistic nature of tourism and on attraction to a degenerate ritual (Rose 1929: 405, Marrou 1948: 53–54, Den Boer 1954: 272–273, Cartledge 2001: 172, Engels 2004: 101, Burkert[2] 2011: 393, Christesen 2012: 201) or even just on such a dubious "entertainment" (McInerney 2015: 311, Braund 2018: 73). König 2005: 91–92 suggests a more complex relationship between the appreciation of traditional gymnasium culture and gladiatorial shows. Making a comparison between the Spartan *agṓn* and the ritual of Patrai for Artemis Laphria, in which the enormous number of animals, even wild ones, sacrificed on the acropolis suggested a kind of *venatio* (Pirenne-Delforge 2006: 106–107, Mylonopoulos 2008: 54–56, Spawforth 2012: 93–95), is a more sophisticated reading, though it still does not convince.

courage), not to mention Plato's *karterḗseis tôn algēdónōn*.[120] Perhaps most importantly, the public included the boys' fellow citizens. Membership of the same civic subdivisions with their specific social and personal relations must have determined emotional participation, disappointment and jubilation. First and foremost in this scale of relationships were obviously the young people's families, who are frequently mentioned in the sources. It would be wrong, I think, to dismiss the passages that mention the pressure exerted on children by their parents, urging them to resist at all costs, as empty reiterations of an old topos. Long-held beliefs about Spartan behavior would have affected all spectators, Spartans and non-Spartans alike. It is probable, for example, that the mothers present wanted to be seen as faithful representatives of traditional Spartan motherhood.[121] Indeed, the reactions of the parents must have been a spectacle within the spectacle.

The influx of spectators from the Greco-Roman *oikouménē* into the sanctuary of Ortheia probably influenced the epigraphic habits of the dedicators. From the early imperial period, as we have seen, the goddess began to be named not only with the local epiclesis, but also, in a less parochial fashion, with the theonym Artemis. A more striking phenomenon should probably be read in the same way: the use of the local dialect, well noted by Nigel Kennell, which characterizes many of the dedications of the winners of the *paidik(h)ón* and other inscriptions relating to the *agōgḗ* in the second and third centuries AD. Again, this localist emphasis is at least partly an effect of the presence of non-Spartans, however much this might seem to run contrary to expectations.[122] From the late Hellenistic period, Spartan epigraphy was otherwise characterized by an initially prevalent, then exclusive, use of the *koinḗ*, generally in the Doric variant of Laconia. This *koinḗ*, with very rare traces of dialectal forms more specific than the preservation of /ā/, was also the language of public inscriptions in the imperial period. On the other hand, the inscriptions from the sanctuary of Orthia already show a greater tendency to preserve specific features of the Laconian dialect between the first century BC and the first century AD.[123]Among the stelae with sickles dedicated to Ortheia, from the time of Hadrian onwards, in addition to texts in *koinḗ* with a Doric coloring, we find a fairly large group in the distinctive Laconian dialect of the imperial age, the most striking feature of which is the rhotacism of the final sibilant.

120 Pl. *Leg*. 1.633b-c Kennell (1995: 111–113) in particular has done well in highlighting the noble philosophical pedigree of the *agṓn tâs karterías*. The Solon of Lucian's *Anacharsis* (38) interpreted the actions of Spartan youths of the imperial era as proof that they would become *karterikṓtatoi*, fully in the spirit of Plato's Megillos (Ducat 2009: 427–428).
121 See n. 74. Cf. Figueira 2010: esp. 271.
122 Kennell 1995: 87–93.
123 Brixhe 1996 (on Ortheia): 101–102.

It is not clear how widely this dialect was actually spoken in the city, but there is no doubt that it was used as a deliberate choice in the dedications for the boys and as a mark of identity. It underlined the specific character of local traditions and recalled the venerable antiquity of the Lycurgan customs.[124] The adoption of Laconian in the inscriptions probably reflects, in part, the use of the dialect in the rituals and especially in traditional songs. The epichoric and archaic flavor of dances and songs, noted for the Hyakinthia by Polykrates,[125] would also have been emphasized by the linguistic features, although the form of the imperial Laconian dialect differed from its presumed classical models. The unusual use of this dialect in the famous false Spartan decree against Timotheus, transmitted by Boethius (Mus. 1.1), seems to indicate a link between the Laconian dialect of the imperial period, ostentatious localism and traditional songs and music.[126] In order to fully appreciate the connotations of the use of the 'hyperlocal' dialect, it should be noted that the decree, while drawing on the Laconian of the imperial period, aims to restore the flavor of a classical Spartan text. The decree does not refer to the songs for Ortheia, but implicitly to the Karneia and explicitly to the *agṓnes* for Demeter and Kore at the Eleusinion of Kalyvia (tēs) Sōkhás. It is also worth noting, however, that the decree's declared purpose was to protect both traditional music and youth from corruption.

At the Limnaion, some of the songs may have been performed by the young people themselves during some of the *paidik(h)ón* competitions,[127] and the use of dialect was probably encouraged by the presence of an audience from all over the Greek world, before whom it was particularly important to present a language with local and ancient

124 Kennell 1995: 87–93, Alonso Deniz 2014, Kristoffersen 2019.

125 *FGrH* (= *BNJ*) 588 F 1: "Numerous choruses of young men come in and sing some of their local poems, and dancers mixed in with them move in the ancient style, accompanied by the pipe and the song." (transl. S. Douglas Olson: χοροί τε νεανίσκων παμπληθεῖς εἰσέρχονται καὶ τῶν *ἐπιχωρίων* τινὰ ποιημάτων ᾄδουσιν, ὀρχησταί τε [ἐν] τούτοις ἀναμεμιγμένοι τὴν κίνησιν ἀρχαικὴν ὑπὸ τὸν αὐλὸν καὶ τὴν ᾠδὴν ποιοῦνται). On Polykrates, see Lloyd 2019, 35–37, 239–242, who argues for an identification of the author with the early fourth-century Athenian rhetor. Referring to the archaic and local character of dancing and singing seems to be more suited to a Hellenistic writer.

126 ἐπειδὴ Τιμόθεορ ὁ Μιλήσιορ παραγινόμενορ ἐττὰν ἁμετέραν πόλιν τὰν παλαιὰν μῶαν ἀτιμάσδε κτλ. "Since Timotheus of Miletus, having come to our city, dishonours the ancient muse and by turning away from the seven-stringed cithara and introducing a variety of tones he corrupts the ears of the youth; and since by means of the multiplicity of the strings and the novelty of his song in place of her simple and well-ordered garments he clothes the muse in ignoble and intricate ones by composing the frame of his melody according to the chromatic genre instead of the enharmonic one to the antistrophic responsion; and since being further invited to the musical contest at the festival honouring the Eleusinian Demeter he arranged the story improperly, for he did not instruct becomingly the youth about the Birthpangs of Semele; be it resolved *** that the kings and ephors shall censure Timotheus for these two reasons and, after having cut the superfluous among the eleven strings and leaving the seven, shall also enforce that anyone who sees the grave dignity of the city will be deterred from introducing into Sparta any unpleasant (musical) ethos and the glorious fame of the contests may not be affected." (transl. L. Prauscello). Cf. Prauscello 2009: 172–188. The first part of the decree must refer to the Karneia, that in other sources are the setting of the anecdote: Plut. *inst. lac.* 17 (*Mor.* 238c) and Paus. 3.12.10 (D'Alessio 2013: 129–130).

127 Nafissi in preparation.

connotations.[128] It seems especially significant that the inscription on the statue of a young man who – as suggested above – died in the *diamastígōsis* competition (*IG* V 1, 653a = *AO* 356, no. 142) also has these specific dialectal features. The other honorary inscriptions, on the other hand, are generally written in local *koinḗ*, as are those for the *bōmoníkai*. The statue in question was erected in the sanctuary of Ortheia and was financed by the boy's *bouagoí*, i.e., by young men of the same age group, members of that city elite that had financed his education.[129] The anomalous choice of language seems to have been dictated by the location chosen for the statue, by the desire to emphasize participation in a shared educational experience and, of course, by the local origin of this extraordinary act of courage and resistance. The Laconian dialect of the imperial age was an enduring hallmark of Spartan excellence.

Conclusion

When the *agṓnes* of Ortheia began is uncertain, but they probably took place – at least as far as the theft of the cheese described by Xenophon is concerned – between the full Archaic and the early Classical ages.[130] These are the centuries when the Sparta we know best was maturing. During their education, boys competed in unusual contests, such as the stealing *agṓn*, but also in more common contests involving gymnastics and athletics. All these competitions gauged the physical and moral abilities of young people and contributed to hierarchies being established within the community. Success was a prerequisite for further selection or co-option into more prestigious roles.[131] By staging an event in which theft was forbidden, the contest made it possible to measure and reward cunning in theft and resistance to pain, two skills that were considered central to the education of young Spartans, an education vaguely inspired by the harshness of a warrior's life in the countryside.[132] It is probable that this unusual contest was one of the sickle contests, and that it was held in the same festive setting as the latter.[133]

128 Although this cultural choice also had a local importance; see Prauscello 2009: 186-188.
129 At least from the late first century AD, young people of all ages formed groups of "cattle herds" (*bouaî*), led by a "herdsman" of their own age, a *bo(u)agós*. Among other things, the *bo(u)agós* probably had to bear part of the expenses necessary for the correct performance of their activities, including the religious ones provided for in the common training course and, as in this case, those for the honorary statue. The prestige inherent in the title of *bo(u)agós* is borne out by its frequent occurrence in lists of magistrates, dedications, and *cursus honorum*.
130 Xen. *Lac*. 2.9. Powell 1998: 129-133, proposed to recognize a flogging scene in the cup Stibbe 1972, no. 64, from the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia: the hypothesis is rather unlikely, cf. Delahaye 2019: 452–453n2784 and Nafissi in preparation.
131 Ducat 2006: 214–219.
132 Nafissi in preparation.
133 Nafissi in preparation.

The *diamastígōsis* is a clear example of invented tradition, probably created in the climate of exaggerated patriotism at the time of Sparta's 'liberation' from Achaian domination. The introduction of the *diamastígō*sis made Spartan practices more in keeping with the city's traditional image as well as more pleasing to the gods. The unfolding of the *agṓn*, although briefly touched on in a large number of sources, starting with Cicero,[134] is not easy to reconstruct. Nonetheless, a new reconstruction of the contest has been proposed here: the contest seems to have involved the boys going round the altar and, when they reached the platform on which the altar itself stood, the blood from their whipping bathed it in blood. The new *agṓn* took on an unusual religious edge, and any reference to theft, which had characterized the previous competition, was eliminated. However, the *agṓn tâs karterías* was not simply a moralization of earlier Spartan competitive and educational practices: in fact, even during the imperial period, Spartan boys engaged in theft during their education, if only for brief periods. In this particular form, however, the competition reflects the desire to eliminate the worrying sacrilegious traits that might be found in the cheese-stealing contest.

The young man who withstood the relentless succession of lashes the longest was declared the winner of the contest,[135] and could boast the title of *bōmoníkās*, as attested in the imperial era. The contradictory evidence of Nicolaus of Damascus *FGrH* (= *BNJ*) 90 F 103z11, who states that a few participants were given the victory prize, remains difficult to explain. At least from the mature imperial era, the city voted for the winner to be honored with a statue, which was then usually dedicated by private individuals at their own expense. Rumors of deaths were known as early as Cicero[136] and there is no reason to doubt that such tragic events, also reported by other ancient authors, really did occur. Lucian states that, like the victors, these young men were awarded statues by public decree and that they were the object of special honors.[137] An inscribed base honoring one of these ill-fated young men has been recognized here for the first time.[138]

The contest thus took on the ultimate connotations of a challenge ending in victory or death. All the protagonists, the young competitors and the spectators, were affected by the commonplaces and implications of a Spartan tradition, of which every Spartan had to be worthy: from the historical and anecdotal memories of the warriors of Plataiai and Thermopylai to the clichés of mothers demanding that their sons conform to the heroic standards of the city. The presence of a foreign public accentuated these tendencies:

134 Cic. *Tusc*. 2.34, 2.46, 5.77.
135 Plut. *inst. lac*. 40 (*Mor*. 239c).
136 Cic. *Tusc*. 2.34.
137 Lucian. *Anach*. 38.
138 *IG* V 1.653a = *AO* 356, no. 142.

expressions of the culture and dynamism of local society and of a civic pride impervious to changing times. Whatever our moral judgment of the *diamastígōsis*, hasty references to sadism or a taste for gladiatorial spectacles only bring into play issues of individual/mass psychology and cultural parameters that are completely inappropriate for understanding this phenomenon and its drama.

Foreigners were perhaps not particularly large in number, but were distinguished by their social background, culture, authority and political role. They came to Sparta from all over the Greek world, indeed from the entire imperial world. Although the cult of Artemis Ortheia must have appeared venerable, especially after a narrative about its Taurian origins was propagated, perhaps in the second century AD, the festival and sacrifice of Ortheia were not recognized in the religious calendar of other poleis and thus did not attract any official delegations.[139] Foreigners visited Sparta for much more individual reasons. They were attracted by the Panhellenic stature of the past and the image of Sparta, and by the fame and enduring heroism of its young men.

Undoubtedly, the myth and prestige of Sparta exerted a great fascination on the outside world. However, the homage paid to tradition was not only the result of decisions made by an elite seeking a place for themselves and their community in the Greco-Roman world, nor was it the result of adherence to the classical models of Rome.[140] The city's elite had a deeply felt need to live up to its own traditions and past greatness. Sparta's homage to its own myth was primarily an endogenous product, even if the myth was further fueled by interaction with the political and cultural elite of the Greco-Roman world.

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139 On city delegations to the Panhellenic Games of the imperial period, see Rutherford 2013: 47–50 and *passim*.

140 This is the dominant line in Spawforth 2012.

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