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# Biografia e storia

Sguardi sul mondo antico

*a cura di*  
*Francesca Cau e Flavia Usai*



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# Q

Questo volume raccoglie i contributi presentati al convegno *Biografia e storia: sguardi sul mondo antico*, tenutosi il 19 e 20 gennaio 2023 presso il Dipartimento di Lettere e Filosofia dell'Università di Trento. Al centro del dibattito è la complessa relazione tra biografia e storia – due generi di scrittura tanto vicini quanto distinti, il cui confine è stato oggetto di riflessione fin dall'antichità – e la conseguente controversa questione della validità e fungibilità storiografica delle opere biografiche. Gli interventi qui raccolti affrontano il tema da due prospettive complementari. Nei primi tre saggi, la questione del rapporto fra biografia e storia è esplorata dal punto di vista dello studioso che si trova ad utilizzare le Vite antiche come fonte per ricostruire il passato e si interroga, pertanto, sul valore e l'attendibilità da attribuire ai dati contenuti in queste opere; le considerazioni sviluppate in tutti e tre gli articoli prendono le mosse dalle biografie di Plutarco, l'autore antico che, più di ogni altro, ha fissato le forme del genere biografico, costituendo un modello insuperato almeno fino al XVIII secolo. Il punto di vista assunto negli ultimi tre contributi è invece quello dello storico che, al giorno d'oggi, si trova a scrivere un'opera di taglio biografico per ricostruire e raccontare la vita di un personaggio dell'antichità; l'attenzione si sposta dunque sui dilemmi della scrittura biografica contemporanea, tra la critica della storia sociale e le difficoltà di raccontare le individualità senza perdere di vista il contesto storico più ampio.

# Quaderni

17

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ELENA FRANCHI

SPARTA, ARGOS, AND THE ACHAIAAN LEAGUE  
IN PLUTARCH'S *PARALLEL LIVES*\*

1. *Kleomenes III and Argos in Plutarch's Parallel Lives: like no Spartan king ever*

Starting from 228 BC, the Spartan king Kleomenes achieved an important series of successes against the Achaian *koinon* and conquered many cities. On several occasions, the clash between Spartans and Achaians took place in Argolis or over Argive matters. According to Plutarch (*Kleom.* 15), on one of these instances the Achaians invited Kleomenes to a peace conference at

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\* This article provides an overview of some preliminary results of research conducted in the framework of the ERC project *FeBo: Federalism and Border Management in Greek Antiquity* (COG PR. 2021 Nr. 101043954) funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Council Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. I would also like to point out that the first three paragraphs summarise some points I already made in Franchi 2023. They also expand on some other points only hinted at in Franchi 2023 by adding further sources and enriching the interpretative framework in relation to the topic of the Greek *koina*'s approach to border issues. The last paragraph introduces the outcome of unpublished research that I am carrying out as part of my ERC project and which, for reasons of space, I aim to expand on in a forthcoming article. I am grateful to Claudio Biagetti, Roy Van Wijk and Sebastian Scharff, as well as to the anonymous referees for their valuable suggestions.

Lerna in Argolis, but the Spartan king fell ill and couldn't attend (c. 225). Kleomenes having recovered, a new peace conference was supposed to take place in Argos (which was already member of the Achaian League at this stage), but the Achaian leader Aratos manages to obstruct the negotiations. Or as Plutarch puts it (*Kleom.* 17.4-5, transl. by B. Perrin, Loeb):

[4] Presently the Achaeans, who were afraid that some treachery was afoot in Corinth and Sicyon, sent their horsemen and their mercenaries out of Argos to keep watch over those cities, while they themselves went down to Argos and began celebrating the Nemean games. So Cleomenes, expecting, as was the case, that while the throng was holding festival and the city was full of spectators, his unexpected approach would be more apt to cause confusion, led his army by night up to the walls, [5] occupied the region about the Aspis (τὸν περὶ τὴν Ἀσπίδα τόπον καταλαβόν) overlooking the theatre, a region which was rugged and hard to come at, and so terrified the inhabitants that not a man of them thought of defence, but they accepted a garrison and gave twenty citizens as hostages, agreeing to become allies (συμμάχους) of the Lacedaemonians, and to give Cleomenes the chief command (τὴν ἡγεμονίαν).

In the opening of Chapter 18, the conquest of Argos and the implicit weakening of the Achaian League is related to the centuries-old enmity between Argos and Sparta:

[1] This greatly increased the reputation and power of Cleomenes. For the ancient kings of Sparta, in spite of numerous efforts, were not able to secure the abiding allegiance of Argos (οὐ μικρὸν οὖν τοῦτο καὶ πρὸς δόξαν αὐτῶ καὶ δύναμιν ὑπῆρχεν. οὔτε γὰρ οἱ πάλαι βασιλεῖς Λακεδαιμονίων πολλὰ πραγματευσάμενοι προσαγαγέσθαι τὸ Ἄργος βεβαίως ἠδυνήθησαν)

Put differently, Plutarch, and most probably his source (Phylarchos for Chapter 18, see below) connect a phase of this third-century Spartan-Achaian clash and its connotations to the rise of the Achaian League, to an ancient border war. This older conflict concerned a disputed land near Thyrea, in Thyreatis, a micro-region of the wider region of Kynouria, wedged in between Lakonia and Argolis. A centuries-old border conflict whose outcomes had, in many cases according to the sources, only local implications.

The issue raises at least three questions. The first is to what extent does the ancient border conflict between Argos and Sparta play a role in Plutarch's representation of the clash between the Achaians and Kleomenes III? Is this role assigned to it only by Plutarch in the *Lives of Kleomenes and Aratos* or also by his sources? The second question turns on the issue of the extent to which the ancient border conflict between Argos and Sparta plays a role in the perception of the clash between the Achaians and Kleomenes III at the very time of this clash. Or to put it more schematically: were the actors and observers of the conflict between the pro-Achaian Spartans and Argives in the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century influenced by the memory of the ancient enmity between Argos and Sparta? Was it part of their horizons? This question then needs to be declined on at least three different levels (and this is the third question): indeed, it is to be expected that the Spartans, the Argives and the Achaian élites would revisit this link between intra-Peloponnesian relations in the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and the memory of the conflict between the Spartans and the Argives in distinct forms. It will thus be necessary to distinguish a Spartan perspective from one or more Argive and Achaian perspectives, and the latter will have to be related to the conquest and border management culture and policies of the Achaian League. Needless to say, we do not expect the evidence to allow us to reconstruct the three perspectives just mentioned. Yet it is possible to trace a few tell-tale signs of them. This article therefore sets out to investigate how the 'foreign' policy of Sparta, that of Argos, and that of the Achaian League were influenced by the memory of the border wars between Argos and Sparta. A second element is to examine the extent of the Achaians' management of internal and external borders and how this was influenced by the memory of these border wars. Important to note for this analysis are three factors. First, an explicit distinction will be made between how these memories were described in Plutarch's biographies; secondly, how this was done in his sources; and thirdly, how other sources portray these events to have played out in real life.

2. *Ancient border wars and more recent federal arrangements I: the view of Plutarch (and his sources)*

Let's start with the first question. Kleomenes ascended the throne in 235. After a few years of preparation, which tradition tries to represent in a form consistent with what happens after his coup d'état (Gabba 1957, 37; Christien - Rouzé 2007, 364-368), in 227 he proceeded with some impactful reforms. These reforms were also highly propagandistic: he redistributed land, reintroduced gymnasiums and *syssitia* (the former had been in disuse for 30 years at least, according to Kennell 1995, 13, *contra* Ducat 2006, XII-XIV), abolished the ephorate and in fact put an end to the traditional diarchy (Cartledge - Spawforth 1989, Ch. 4). In the field of foreign policy he opposed the Achaians. The latter had reconstituted their League around 280, perhaps out of fear of the growing prominence of the Aitolians (and of king Areus of Sparta), and had begun to gain considerable weight by the middle of the century, when an exile from Sikyon, Aratos, succeeded in freeing his city from tyranny and bringing it into the Achaian League, which thus grew stronger, and succeeded in removing Korinth from Makedonian control. Megara, Epidauros and Troizen then joined the League: strengthened by an ever-increasing regional weight, the Achaians managed to resist the Makedonians and Aitolians.

The Aitolians viewed this expansion with suspicion and regarded Sparta as a possible curb to the Achaians' expansion. When several Spartan neighbours, like Megalopolis (Roy 2023 with previous literature), join the League, this sends Sparta into a panic. It is no coincidence that one of Kleomenes' most significant moves is the occupation of a number of 'Achaian' cities with the tacit consent of the Aitolians (probably Tegea, Mantinea, Orchomenos and Kaphiae, which Aratos had forced into the League in 235 and which then between 234 and 229 had forged alliances – or had switched to ties of *isopoliteia*: Marasco 1981, II, 383 – with the Aitolians). The Spartan intervention has numerous im-

plications. Indeed, the cities of Arkadia constituted a dangerous corridor between Argos and Megalopolis (Marasco 1981, II, 389) and controlling them implied disrupting communications between the Achaians in Megalopolis and the Achaians in Argos. It is in this light that Kleomenes' interest in Argolis, the object of continuous Spartan campaigns, should be read: Argolis could be isolated and an easy target, a means to weaken the Achaians.

As a result of these and other Spartan successes, Aratos went so far as to seek the alliance of the Makedonians, which caused a stir, given the opposition between the Achaians and Makedonians in previous events. However, I would now like to shift our attention from the general picture, which I have sketched in brief, to a particular aspect, namely the relations between Argos and Sparta in these years.

In 229/228 BC the tyrant of Argos Aristomachos stepped aside and joined the Achaian League (Polyb. 2.44 with Tomlinson 1972, 158 and Shipley 2018, 66). In the same year, Kleomenes invaded the territory of Argolis (Plut. *Kleom.* 4: τὴν Ἀργολικὴν καταδραμόντος, depending on Phylarchos; *Arat.* 35.5; this was the first action of the Spartan king in Argolis), a fact that, as Walbank (1933, 78) already observed, must have greatly annoyed Aristomachos, who was dissuaded by Aratos from reacting (Plut. *Arat.* 35.5). According to Plutarch (*Kleom.* 4) it is Aristomachos who induces Aratos to direct his actions against Kleomenes. In later stages, Aratos' Achaians also adopt a wait-and-see policy and do not take aggressive measures against Kleomenes to the bitter end. As we have already mentioned, in 225 they invite Kleomenes to a peace conference at Lerna in Argolis; the Spartan king, however, cannot show up (*Kleom.* 15), which allows the Achaians to gain time and manage to weave an alliance with the Makedonians. After Kleomenes recovered from illness, a new peace conference was supposed to take place in Argos. It seems that some Achaian leaders informally proposed to Kleomenes to take over the hegemony in the League, or that Kleomenes himself demanded it. Nevertheless, Aratos manages to thwart the negotiations

(Plut. *Kleom.* 17; *Arat.* 39). With regard to the Kleomenian actions in Argolis, this is the second one (Polyb. 2.52.1; *Kleom.* 17.1; 17.5; 19: ἐαλωκότος δὲ Ἄργους; a different perspective is provided in *Arat.* 39: the Argives came over to his side, εἴτ' εὐθὺς Ἀργεῖοι προσεχώρησαν αὐτῷ). In spring or summer of 224 BC the Achaians supported Aristoteles of Argos when he led an insurrection against the Kleomenian faction and, under the command of the strategos Timoxenos, conquered Argos by surprise (Polyb. 2.53; Plut. *Kleom.* 20, see Shipley 2018, 69); Kleomenes attacked Argos but the Achaians resisted fiercely (Polyb. 2.53; Plut. *Arat.* 44; *Kleom.* 21, depending on Phylarchos and emphasising the loss of the Argives to stress Kleomenes' courage): this is Kleomenes' third action in Argolis (again, it concerns the city of Argos).

At that point Antigonos succeeds in three important actions in 223, namely: entering Argos; retaking several places in Arkadia and entering Lakonia (Polyb. 2.54). In the autumn of the same year Kleomenes conquers Megalopolis and leads his soldiers towards Sellasia, as if he wanted to devastate the territory of Argos, but from there he descends into the territory of Megalopolis (so Plutarch, *Kleom.* 23, cfr. Polyb. 2.55). Shortly afterwards Aristomachos, accused of colluding with Kleomenes, is assassinated by the Makedonians and the League (Polyb. 2.59-60 with Gabba 1957, 10; Africa 1861, 30ff; Eckstein 2013, 322; Shipley 2018, 115). Between February and March 222, Kleomenes marches his army into the Argive region, which he does not hesitate to destroy: this is Kleomenes' fourth action in Argolis (in the Argeia: εἰς τὴν Ἀργείαν). The proportions of this devastation and the role of Aratos in the events must be assessed in relation to Plutarch's source, which here seems to be Aratos (through Polybios? Cfr. *Kleom.* 25.4 with Polyb. 2.64.2). If Gabriele Marasco (1981, II, 554-555) is right in considering that the facts described in Ch. 26 are not a duplication of what is narrated in Ch. 25 (vs. Klatt 1877, 85; Goltz 1888, 41-42), there follows a fifth action by Kleomenes in Argolis (again, in Argos), when the Spartan

king, having learned that Antigonos (ally of the Achaians) had advanced towards Tegea with the intention of invading Lakonia, returns to ravage the Argive plain (here Plutarch seems to depend on Phylarchos: cfr. *BNJ* 81 F 57).

Kleomenes' involvement in the eastern Peloponnese, and particularly in Argolis, clearly emerges from this brief review. The Spartan king leads several expeditions to Argos, and succeeds where his illustrious predecessors failed, according to Plutarch (Phylarchos): he occupied Argos.

What are the precedents to which Plutarch refers? In Plutarch's time, the ancients had a precise picture of the Argive-Spartan conflict as a centuries-long dispute. Its timeline is reconstructed by Pausanias (and his sources) through the connection of these military actions to Spartan kings: a clash in the time of the Spartan king Prytanis (3.7.2) was followed by a Spartan attack under Labotas involving Kynouria (3.2.3). Charillos would later come to devastate the territory of the Argives (3.7.3), while in no less than three passages the Periegete refers to the events connected with the invasion of Argolis led by Nikander, which would be followed by the punishment by Argos of the Asinaians, guilty of supporting the Spartans (2.36.4-5; 3.7.4; 4.24.4). In Alkamenes' time, the Spartans would go so far as to destroy Helos by defeating in battle the Argives who had brought aid to the Helots (3.2.7). A battle under Theopompos should be added to this summary review (the latter would not have participated because he was too old, 3.7.5; see Franchi 2018).

It is possible to suggest (but not prove) that Pausanias depended for this section of the High Archaic history of the Spartan-Argive conflict on an already structured account dating back to the Classical or Hellenistic age (Koiv 2003, 137ff.), or on various reports, extracted from different accounts, that the Periegete himself would later organise into the passages in question. However, it is evident that Pausanias, or more probably the traditions he takes up, tends to backdate and multiply a series of conflicts that in the late archaic and classical period are central to the dynamics

of the Peloponnese of their time (Musti - Torelli 1991, 171). Despite all the possibilities of retrojection, duplication, and invention of tradition that one may suspect, pieces of evidence prior to the 6<sup>th</sup> century jointly support some sort of Spartan-Argive enmity (further sources and literature in Franchi forthcoming (a)).

More reliable in any case are the pieces of evidence referring to events happened from the 6<sup>th</sup> century onwards: the battle of the champions, fought between Spartans and Argives around the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century (Hdt. 1.81-83 is the main source); the battle of Sepeia, which can be placed between the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century (still Herodotus: Hdt. 6.75-81 [locus classicus]); a negotiation conducted shortly before the battle of Mantinea in 418 and reported by Thukydides (Thuk. 5.40-41); and finally the arbitration by Philip II, which is said to have returned Thyreatis to the Argives (Polyb. 9.28.7; Paus. 2.20.1; summary in Franchi 2023; Franchi forthcoming (b)).

The statement in *Kleom.* 18.1 shows Plutarch's interest not only in Sparta (Davies 2020 with previous bibliography) or in Kleomenes, but specifically in the military actions of Kleomenes, and in particular the military actions in Argolis, and the overall assessment of them (Marasco 1981, II, 493) is placed in relation to the glorious past of Sparta and thus the ancient enmity between Argos and Sparta. At this point, the investigation also directly concerns Plutarch's methods in his biographies, with particular reference to the relationship with Plutarch's other works and the sources consulted for the biographies themselves.

With regard to the first point, there are several occasions when Plutarch showed his interest in the enmity between the two poleis. In the chapter of *Mulierum virtutes* dedicated to the Argive women, he relates the events of the battle of Sepeia (Sokrates of Argos, BNJ 310 F 6 in Plutarch, *mul.virt.*, 245 C-F; cfr. also some *apophthegmata* handed down as Plutarch's: *apoph.lac.*, 223 A-C; 224 B). In the *Life of Lysander* (1.2) and in *De Herodoti malignitate* (858 C-D) he reports on the battle of champions; references to this old enmity are also found in the *Life of Agesilaus* (31.6;



cfr. also *apopht. lac.* 229 C; 231E; 233B-C). The connection between Kleomenes' Argive campaigns and the ancient enmity between Argos and Sparta may, however, already have been established by his source. In this case we are interested in the sources Plutarch used for the *Life of Kleomenes*. There seem to have been multiple sources he quoted from. Plutarch quotes Aratos 4 times (3 times in the *Life of Kleomenes*: *Ag.*10.4; *Kleom.*16.4ff; 17.4; 19.6; Gabba 1957, 3), 2 times Polybius (in the *Life of Kleomenes*: 25.5 and 27.11); he also employs Aristotle, particularly for details of Spartan lifestyle; it cannot be missed, however, that one of the privileged sources of the *Life of Kleomenes* is Phylarchos, a native of Athens or Naukratis (or Sikyon, these are all the hypotheses put forward by the *Suda* entry, Sikyon disputed by many scholars, vs. Pedeck 1989, 395-396 and Landucci 2017). Phylarchos (*BNJ* 81) is mentioned 4 times, with 3 mentions in the *Life of Kleomenes* (*Kleom.* 5.2-3 ὡς οἶεται Φύλαρχος = F 51; 28.2, indeed 27.4-29 = F 59; 30.3 = 60; see also *Ag.* 9.3 = F 32b; cfr. Gabba 1957, 3 and Davies 2020, 516, both with further bibliography). Other passages in the *Life of Kleomenes* seem to be inspired by Phylarchos too and what is interesting for us is that the topic of Spartan-Argive enmity recurs frequently there. Here I am not referring to Ch. 13, but rather to the chapters in which the various Kleomenian actions in Argolis are narrated. From Goltz (1888, 36ff) onwards the opinion on the Phylarchean derivation is unanimous. To give just one example: Chapter 18 reveals an admiration for Kleomenes that certainly cannot be derived from the *Memoirs* of Aratos and Polybius, and Chapter 20 on the attempts to seize Argos is again Phylarchean: one thinks not so much of the attention to details from the Spartan point of view as of the blatant admiration for Kleomenes' courage. If we then look at the reasons given by Plutarch to explain Kleomenes' retreat, carried out so as not to leave Lakonia defenceless, the Phylarchean derivation is even more evident, considering that according to Polybius the same retreat was necessary because otherwise Kleomenes would have found himself surrounded. But that is not all. Chapter 21

again emphasises the courage of Kleomenes, precisely on the occasion of an enterprise against Argos. With regard to the invasion of Argolis described in Ch. 26 there is mention of the use of the *ῥομφαία*, a double-edged sabre of uncommon use, therefore, the Phylarchean derivation here is more than certain, as a comparison with fragment 57 shows, preserved from a scholium attributed to Maximus the Confessor (on Pseudo-Dionysios the Areopagite ed. B. Corderio, Opera 2, 156 ed. Antv. 1634: ἡ γὰρ ῥομφαία βαρβαρικόν ἐστὶν ὄπλον, ὡς ἱστορεῖ Φύλαρχος).

Generally speaking, Phylarchos was inclined to compare between Sparta's glorious past and to trace Kleomenes III's successes back to the reintroduction of Lykurgic customs, as shown by the references in Ch. 11 (which depends on Phylarchos, because it concerns internal politics) to the reintroduction of the agoghe by Spheros (Marasco 1981, II, 448), and in Ch. 31 to Kleomenes' descent from Herakles. Returning to Ch. 26, it seems to me that we can see further evidence, hitherto overlooked, that Phylarchos tended to portray the clashes between Argos and Sparta in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century in relation to the ancient enmity. Plutarch tells us that Kleomenes marched on Argos and ravaged its fields, whose crops were destroyed by his soldiers (here it is up to Phylarchos). Having arrived at the gymnasium just outside the city he stops, so Plutarch, «realising that there too, as in Megalopolis, he was about to follow the counsels of wrath rather than those of honour». It is certainly true that the remark about Megalopolis cannot be of Phylarchean derivation (Phylarchos was defending Kleomenes' actions in Megalopolis), but there is reason to believe that the part that follows again depends on Phylarchos, since there is a need to justify the Spartan invasion by emphasising Kleomenes' intention to respect Hera, to whom he intends to sacrifice:

[2] [...] As for Antigonus, in the first place he went back at once to Argos, and then occupied the hills and all the passes with outposts. But Cleomenes pretended to despise and ignore all this, and sent heralds to the king demanding the keys to the Heraeum, that he might offer sacrifice to the goddess before he went away. [3] Then, after this jest

and mockery, and after sacrificing to the goddess under the walls of the temple, which was closed, he led his army off to Phlius. (26.2-3)

So the temple is closed and Kleomenes respects that situation without forcing his way in. His predecessor, Kleomenes I, had behaved quite differently in a similar situation, as we read in Herodotus (6.76-83, esp. 81):

[81] Then Kleomenes sent most of his army back to Sparta, while he himself took a thousand of the best warriors and went to the temple of Hera to sacrifice. When he wished to sacrifice at the altar the priest forbade him, saying that it was not holy for a stranger to sacrifice there. **Cleomenes ordered the helots to carry the priest away from the altar and whip him, and he performed the sacrifice.** After doing this, he returned to Sparta.

Whereas Kleomenes I defeats Argos, does not occupy it but goes so far as to profane the Heraion, Kleomenes III, who has already occupied Argos several times and will do so again, does not profane the temple. It is tempting to think that Phylarchos had Herodotus in mind here; after all, the bad behaviour of the homonymous predecessor allowed him to defend and indeed put the actions of his hero, Kleomenes III, in an entirely positive light. In this light, it is time to ask whether all this is really just propaganda and literary construction.

### 3. *Ancient border wars and more recent federal arrangements II: a 3<sup>rd</sup> century Spartan perspective*

We have in my opinion more than one reason to believe that the ancient enmity between Argos and Sparta also played a role *in re*. Some clues can be found in Plutarch's Lives, in an episode that is narrated in both the Lives of Kleomenes (17) and Aratos (39). In these *vitae* he mentions that after the failure of the assembly convened at Lerna, Aratos summons an assembly in Argos. Kleomenes is supposed to turn up alone (so in the *Life of*

*Kleomenes*, in a passage that probably depends on Phylarchos), or with a few men (so in the *Life of Aratos*) and abstains from appearing at the meeting. A somewhat plausible explanation for this renunciation, described as such by both the pro-Kleomenian and the Anti-Kleomenian sources, seems to be Kleomenes' lack of confidence in the strength of the pro-Kleomenian Argive faction, a mistrust in turn fuelled, as Marasco (1981, II, 491) rightly surmises, by the old enmity between Argos and Sparta. Moreover, the latter was still very familiar in the Hellenistic age, probably in Sparta itself.

In this regard, some epigrams from the Hellenistic period collected in the Palatine Anthology should be considered. The 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC saw the development of new poetic tendencies that replaced the old Ionian and Peloponnesian schools and represented a return to Dorism. Sparta and her successes are the main themes of the epigrams of Dioskorides, Nikander, Damagetos, Chairemon and the author of an epigram traditionally attributed to Simonides. Their epigrams all have anti-Makedonian and Philo-Spartan overtones and most of them refer to the so-called Battle of the 300 Champions. Thyrea is described as «the prize of the spear» (Chairemon *A.P.*7.721.2), soaked with the blood of champions (Dioskorides *A.P.*7.430.3), and belonging «to the Lakedaimonians» (Pseudo-Simonides *A.P.*7.431.6), the Spartans as fighting with Dorian shields (Dioskorides *A.P.*7.430.2) and dying «having wrought a deed worthy of Sparta» (Damagetos *A.P.*7.432.4; see also 16.1). The memory of border wars between Argos and Sparta is constantly fed into these epigrams. We can even go further: in some cases (Damagetos) it was convincingly argued (Scharff 2024, 162-165 with literature) that this memory was clearly influenced by dynamics connected to the Social War. What's more, this very enmity is also often recalled in the anonymous *apophtegmata lakonika*, the so-called sayings of the Spartans recorded by Plutarch who brings them together in some collections and quotes them in other writings (and this brings us back to the point of the relationship between the biographies

and the rest of Plutarch's oeuvre). It is generally believed that these sayings date from the Hellenistic period, most probably the 3<sup>rd</sup> century; indeed, they show many similarities with other lakonian-themed writings of the same period. Several sayings refer to the enmity between Sparta and Argos; we'll focus here on some of them:

**Plut. *Apophth.Lac.* 229 C Nachstädt-Sieveking-Titchener**

(Lysander)

In answer to the Argives, who were disputing with the Spartans in regard to the boundaries of their land and said that they had the better of the case, [p. 375] he drew his sword and said, 'He who is master of this talks best about boundaries of land (περὶ γῆς ὄρων).'

[Transl. by Cole Babbit, 1931]

**Plut. *Apophth.Lac.* 231 E Nachstädt-Sieveking-Titchener**

(Polydoros)

The Argives, after the battle of the three hundred, were again overcome, with all their forces, in a set battle, and the allies urged Polydoros not to let slip the opportunity, but to make a descent upon the enemy's wall and capture their city (τὴν πόλιν ἐλεῖν); for this, they said, would be very easy, since the men had been destroyed and the women only were left. He said in answer to them, 'To my mind it is honourable, when fighting on even terms, to conquer our opponents, but, after having fought to settle the boundaries of the country, to desire to capture the city I do not regard as just; for I came to recapture territory and not to capture a city (τὸ δ' ὑπὲρ τῶν ὄρων τῆς χώρας μεμαχημένοντῆν πόλιν ἐπιθυμεῖν λαβεῖν οὐ δίκαιον τίθεμαι εἶναι: ἤλθον γὰρ χώραν ἀπολαβεῖν οὐ καταλαβέσθαι πόλιν).'

[Transl. by Cole Babbit, 1931]

We can imagine that for a Hellenistic audience the ancient enmity between Argos and Sparta was a familiar theme. A special attention to borders, moreover, emerges from many of the mentioned apophthegms: think of *περὶ γῆς ὄρων* in 229C and *ὑπὲρ τῶν ὄρων τῆς χώρας* in 231E. In particular, in the apophthegma attributed to Polydoros, a difference is established, well known to the Spartan king, between a battle for borders and a battle conducted for the occupation of enemy territory: τὸ μὲν ἐκ τοῦ ἴσου μαχόμενον νικᾷν τοὺς ἐναντιομένους ἐστὶ μοι καλόν, τὸ

δ' ὑπὲρ τῶν ὄρων τῆς χώρας μεμαχημένοντὴν πόλιν ἐπιθυμεῖν λαβεῖν οὐ δίκαιον τίθεμαι εἶναι: ἤλθον γὰρ χώραν ἀπολαβεῖν οὐ καταλαβέσθαι πόλιν. Both Polybius and Plutarch repeatedly emphasise that the Spartan king entered the city and occupied it or threatened to do so. This emerges from the second Kleomenian action in Argos (Polyb. 2.52.1: προσλαβὼν δὲ τῷ τρόπῳ τούτῳ Καφύας, [2] Πελλήνην, Φενεόν, Ἄργος, Φλιοῦντα, Κλεωνάς, Ἐπίδαυρον, Ἑρμιόνα, Τροίζηνα, τελευταῖον Κόρινθον; *Kleom.* 17: τὸν περὶ τὴν Ἀσπίδα τόπον καταλαβὼν ὑπὲρ τοῦ θεάτρου; *Kleom.* 19: ἐάλωκότος δὲ Ἄργους); as well as the third (Polyb. 2.53.2: κατέλαβον τὴν τῶν Ἀργείων πόλιν; *Kleom.* 21.3: καὶ τῶν ἐντὸς ἔνια κλίμακας προσθεὶς κατέλαβε; see also *Arat.* 44); and the fourth, in which Plutarch points out that Kleomenes went as far as the walls (*Kleom.* 25.4: ὁ δὲ Κλεομένης ἄχρι τῶν τειχῶν στρατῷ προσελθὼν).

Given that Chairemon is from Athens, Dioskorides lived in Egypt and the Spartan origin of Damagetos, *pace* Legrand (1901, 187-189), is difficult to prove, the point of view expressed by the epigrams could be, it must be admitted, more *etic* than *emic*. However, as I have already pointed out (2023), we also have evidence of the *emic* relevance of this enmity: a passage of Sosibios, a native Lakonian scholar who most likely lived in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. According to Sosibios, the leaders of the choirs staged during a festival also involving the Gymnopaidiai wore crowns in memory of the victory at Thyrea and these crowns are called *thyreatikoi* (Sosibios *BNJ* 595 F 5 *ap.* Athen. 15.678b). In other words, in Hellenistic Sparta, at least once a year, the Spartans commemorated on a public occasion those who fell fighting against the Argives. It is hard to imagine that these memories, constantly revisited and performed, were not in use at the time of the Kleomenian war. In the *Life of Kleomenes*, echoes of this experiential horizon are preserved through Phylarchos. After all, what the οἱ πάλαι βασιλεῖς Λακεδαιμονίων, the illustrious Spartan kings, were unable to do, was achieved by King Kleomenes III: οὐ μικρὸν οὖν τοῦτο καὶ πρὸς δόξαν αὐτῷ καὶ δύναμιν ὑπῆρχεν.

#### 4. *Ancient border wars and more recent federal arrangements III: Argive and Achaian perspectives*

So far we have investigated the Spartan perspective (both etic and emic) on the relations between Spartans and Argives in connection with the Achaian League. The possibility of tracing one or more Argive perspectives as well as an Achaian perspective still remains to be investigated. The following remarks are intended as preliminary to a study that would further explore these aspects.

As we have seen, the position of the Argives towards the Achaians is far from unambiguous, not only because within the civic body of Argos there are opposing factions but also because the loyalty of Argos as a whole vacillates in these years.

As Ioanna Kralli (2016, 231) acutely observes, «Argos represents the most interesting case of change of allegiance and the hardest to explain». At the beginning of the Kleomenian War, the tyrant of Argos, Aristomachos, was hostile towards both Achaians and Spartans. As mentioned above, in 229/228 BC Aristomachos joins the Achaian League (Polyb. 2.44) and in the same year, Kleomenes invades the territory of Argolis, a fact that must have greatly annoyed Aristomachos, who was dissuaded from reacting but certainly did not give in. On another occasion as strategos of the Achaians he pushed for an invasion of Lakonia, perhaps also as a reaction to Kleomenes' earlier Argolic invasions (*Kleom.* 4.4). In 225, however, the Argives come over to Kleomenes' side: in July of that year the Spartan king takes advantage of the sacred truce on account of the Nemean Games and takes the Aspis by night (*Kleom.* 17.4-5); the Argives do not react, grant 20 hostages, accept a Spartan garrison and become allies of the Spartans, accepting Kleomenes' control (*Kleom.* 17). It is not easy to determine whether this is more of a surrender (thus the Phylarchean-derived report in *Kleom.* 19.1) or a voluntary accession (a view that seems to derive from the *Memoirs* of Aratos and is found in *Arat.* 39.4). It seems undeniable, however, that Kleomenes had supporters in

Argos, at least among elite members (and perhaps also among the masses, if Plutarch is right in crediting them with the hope of exporting the reforms implemented in Sparta: *Kleom.* 20.3; cfr. also 17.3). Polybios (2.60.6) also records Aristomachos' switch to the side of the Spartans. The Argive-Spartan axis is, however, short-lived: in the summer of 224, while Kleomenes is engaged at the Isthmus against the Makedonian king Doson, the Argive Aristoteles, a friend of Aratos, carries out an action against τοῖς Κλεομενισταῖς (Polyb. 2.53.3: most likely, the Argive followers of Kleomenes) and a rapprochement of the Argives with the Achaians (Polyb. 2.53, Plut. *Arat.* 44.3 and *Kleom.* 20.3) follows. The contribution of Aristoteles and his Argive supporters must have been decisive and perhaps in the early stages even unsupported by the Achaians, who, so Polybius says, would have arrived late (2.53.3). At that point Kleomenes, having learned what has happened, goes to Argos to retake the city (Polyb. 2.64.1-5; *Kleom.* 25.4-5). Doson does not come to the aid of the Argives and the latter are said to have been outraged (*Kleom.* 25.5); there follows a return of Argos to the side of Sparta, which at this stage was preferable to Doson (and the Achaians), «simply because he appeared more successful» (Kralli 2016, 234).

Richard Tomlinson (1972, 160) is certainly right to point out that the fragility and instability of the Argive alliances can be traced back to the advantages that this or that Argive elite member might have gained as well as to the fears that elites had of the forces in the field (Achaians; Makedonians; Spartans: Kralli 2016, 232). The brevity of the Spartan-Argive alliance, which resurfaced several times but was never consolidated, is also due to the fear that the Argives must have had of finding themselves lined up not only against the Achaians but also against the Makedonians. The latter had supported the Argives in the times of Gonatas and also Doson, not least because of the mythical kinship between the Argives and the Argeads. More generally, it can be observed that the Argives enact a kind of bandwagoning, a widespread tendency that sometimes prevails over other attitudes:



threatened by a power of greater strength, rather than to balance (that is, to ally in opposition to the principal source of danger) they decide to ally with the state that poses the major threat (that is, to bandwagon: Waltz 1979; Walt 1985 with literature; Wolfers 1962, 122-124; Eckstein 2023 applies this concept to the history of the Hellenistic Peloponnese, but with reference to the relationship between the Achaians and the Romans, not, as here, with reference to the relationship between the members of the League and the Achaians).

Indeed, the Argives, cornered in a situation in which it becomes difficult to assert their power in areas where they had been dominant in the past, juggle by choosing from time to time the alliance that least undermines their integrity: faced with the military skills of Kleomenes, capable of entering Argos and retaking it at the expense of the Achaians, as happened in 225 and 224, the Argives accepted (more or less actively) his hegemony over them. Yet they did not hesitate to return to the Achaian alliance, which at that stage implied Makedonian support, as soon as the latter again proved more attractive and more promising in terms of protection, simply because in international relations «states are attracted to strength» (Walt 1985, 7) and «after all, if an aggressor's intentions are impossible to change, then balancing with others is the best way to avoid becoming a victim» (*ibidem*). Actually, a contest in which bandwagoning prevails over balancing explains the climax leading to the battle of Sellasia, since a bandwagoning world is much more competitive: great powers that appear to be both powerful and potentially dangerous will be rewarded if states have a tendency to align with them.

In this case, unlike in the case of the Spartan perspective, it is difficult to assess whether the memory of the wars between Argos and Sparta played a role in the perception of the actors at the time of Kleomenes III's campaigns. However, we can make conjectures. It seems likely that this role is relevant in the phases when the anti-Kleomenian (and often pro-Achaian; see Polyb. 2.53; *Kleom.* 4; 20; 21; *Arat.* 44) faction prevailed in Argos. This

resonates with the fact that the *apophthegmata* and epigrams of the Anthologia Palatina examined that convey this memory do not only document a Spartan emic point of view, but also (and indeed more so) an ethical point of view, more widespread in Greece.

Conversely, in the brief phases in which a convergence between Argos (led by a pro-Kleomenian faction) and Sparta (sometimes in an anti-Achaian vein) occurred (Polyb. 2.59-60; *Kleom.* 17.3; 20.3; *Arat.* 39.4), this memory had to be weakened.

As for the Achaian perspective – that is, the perspective by the Achaian and Peloponnesian pro-Achaian élites – it is clear that on the one side the Achaians need to emphasize the unity of the members of their *koinon* – as testified to by a famous passage in Polybius (2.37.10) – and on the other side they can also usefully build on the ancient border enmity between Argos and Sparta in order to regulate relations between the two Peloponnesian cities. The centuries-old border wars between Argos and Sparta become an excellent opportunity for the Achaians to manage the balance of power in the eastern Peloponnese between cities that are or will become members of its League while at the same time advocating unity and propagandising it. This could be one of the elements that explain the wait-and-see politics towards Sparta that is adopted by Aratus at a certain point; in fact, the Achaians sometimes move in a Pro-Spartan direction (*Arat.* 35.5) and sometimes in an anti-Spartan direction (Polyb. 2.53; *Kleom.* 20; 21; *Arat.* 44). In this management of the balance of power by the *koinon*, the border thus becomes significant on two levels: on the one hand, the ancient border disputes become an opportunity to temper and control the balance of powers; on the other hand, when these border disputes concern cities that are or will soon become members of the League, as in the case of Argos or Sparta, it is the very context of the search for such a balance of power that is a border context, if observed from the League's point of view, and this on a side where control is not only on the strictly territorial side.

In all this, Kynouria, which had always been disputed between Argos and Sparta, most probably played a not insignificant role.

In the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century this region was controlled by the Argives (cfr. Polyb. 4.36; 5.20; *FD* III 8.68 / *Syll.*<sup>3</sup> 407; Paus. 3.24.1) as a result of an action by Gonatas (as suggested by Bölte 1929, c. 1304) or Doson (as argued by Piérart 1997, 324, 337-338; 2001, 31 and n. 75 at 40; 2007, 39 who considers both hypotheses plausible; see also Christien 1987, 118, 123). In short, having Argos on one's side implied having a substantial part of the eastern Peloponnese on one's side, or, to put it more bluntly, controlling Argos implied controlling Kynouria as well. Yet the Achaians could take nothing for granted and indeed, their policy had to be, in this respect, particularly angled and shrewd, and for at least two reasons. The first lies in the status of Kynouria, which in the past was controlled by the Spartans for a long time and on several occasions (as mentioned above, following the battle of the champions and after the battle of Sepeia, e.g), and which the Spartans frequented assiduously perhaps even at times when it was controlled more by the Argives. This seems to be attested by the fact that the Spartans frequented two places of worship in honour of Apollo Pythaeus located precisely in Kynouria (at Kosmas and Tyros, where inscriptions and artefacts from the Archaic period have been found that show very frequent styles in Lakonia as well) and by the fact that they also celebrated festivals in Kynouria, such as the Parparonia (and this is consistent with the custom of carrying out cultic and agonistic activities outside Lakonia, cfr. Nafissi 2013).

The second reason lies in the particular attitude that the Argives develop, precisely in this period, regarding the areas that from an Argive point of view are frontier areas. If Clemence Weber-Pallez (2022, esp. 144-150) is right to emphasise a progressive focus of the Argives on the urban centre with a consequent looser attention to the frontier areas (Weber-Pallez specifically refers to the Heraion of Prosymna and the sanctuary of Zeus at Nemea) and this also applies to Kynouria (a fact that does not seem to me to be at odds with the teichological trends noted by Balandier - Guintrand 2019), it is clear that an Achaian-Argive

axis and the Achaian control of Argos do not *immediately* imply control of the areas controlled by the Argives. This, in turn, explains the frequency of Kleomenes' scurrying into Argolis and the ease with which he entered Argos, a feat never achieved by his predecessors. His success was certainly a result of his charisma and military prowess, but also somewhat facilitated by the rather marked permeability of this area of the eastern Peloponnese. The Achaians' attention to these frontier areas and their constantly changing status must have been sharp to be truly functional to their expansion.

Yet the memory of the Spartan-Argive enmity did not prevent the Achaians from representing the relations between the Spartans and Argives in a different fashion than that of a border dispute between equipotent poleis. We cannot argue but neither exclude that the Plutarchean and perhaps Phylarchean vocabulary that presents the Spartan-Argive axis in terms of a Spartan hegemony do not go back to Achaian leadership, that could thus present a possible Spartan-Argive axis in the form of a Spartan hegemony (cfr. *Kleom.* 17.5: συμμάχους; 18.1: προσαναγέσθαι) by relying more on the memory of what had been the Spartan *symmachia* in a Peloponnesian key than on the memory of a dispute that was instead a border dispute and thus countering it with a more attractive proposal, the federalist one. For even if it is true that the Spartan hegemonial *symmachia* had federalist traits and the Achaian league had traits not too far removed from the military *symmachia* (see e.g. Polyb. 2.37.10: συμμαχικὴν καὶ φίλικὴν κοινωνίαν), the second proposal might have been, in the eyes of the Argives, more attractive, and less likely to configure a situation of subjugation (cfr. Hdt. 1.68.6: ἡ πολλὴ τῆς Πελοποννήσου ἦν κατεστραμμένη).

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