

**XENOPHON:  
GREECE, PERSIA,  
AND BEYOND**

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# AKANTHINA



## The Muses and Sacrifices before Battle

It has long been known that most information about Greek sacrifices during war and the examination of divinatory signs connected with sacrifices can be found in Xenophon's writings.<sup>1</sup> He differed significantly from Thucydides, who did not describe religious observances in the military sphere, probably considering them as customs too obvious to be worth relating.<sup>2</sup> However, in some cases the lack of favorable divinatory signs during a campaign could be of great military and, consequently, political significance.<sup>3</sup> And manipulating the result or sacrifice or information on divinatory consultation could contribute to achieving victory.<sup>4</sup>

The issue is exceptionally interesting from the point of view of both research on Greek religion and analysis of military action.<sup>5</sup> Just as in other avenues of research, researchers in this field are dependent on the uneven distribution of information and its relative randomness. It is true that most testimony comes from the Classical period – Parker dates the custom of blood sacrifice in the face of the enemy to 700-350 BC, and connects the phenomenon with the existence of the citizen army,<sup>6</sup> and in fact most of the evidence concerns the Spartan army. Thus, drawing far-reaching general conclusions is limited by the nature of the sources. We have a similar situation in questions of detail, e.g. we would like to know what sacrifices looked like in an army consisting of contingents from different *poleis* of varying religious traditions, and what might be the relationship of these customs to a local poliadic system of religious observances?

Despite these obvious shortcomings resulting from the state of sources, the phenomenon has been fairly well described in scientific literature, and it

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<sup>1</sup> See Parker 2000: 299-314, particularly 299.

<sup>2</sup> See Thuc. 4. 92; 6. 69.

<sup>3</sup> On stopping the Spartan expedition to Argos by unfavorable results following an examination of the entrails of sacrificial victims see Thuc. 5. 54-55; 116; 7. 50. The defeat on Sicily - Plut. *Nic.* 23. 7.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. Thuc. 4. 92; Polyaeus, *Strat.* 3. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Parker 2000: 299-300, distinguishes a few basic types of sacrifices connected with military campaigns and asking the gods for success: 1. sacrifices before departure from home; 2. sacrifices before leaving the borders of one's territory; 3. sacrifices before leaving camp each morning while marching through hostile country; 4. sacrifices before crossing a river; 5. sacrifices before engaging the enemy (in two forms): a. before leading an army to the battlefield; b. right before the battle, in the face of the enemy. Obviously, there exist other occasions, not necessarily connected with consultation, e.g. sacrifices after a (victorious) battle; confirming an agreement and affirming one's vows; honoring the gods whose *temenos* an army had to pass through.

<sup>6</sup> See Parker 2000: 303-304.

seems that only few of its aspects require additional defining.<sup>7</sup> An example of one of these issues which is still open is the issue of sacrifices for the Muses before battle. Four testimonies to the existence of such a custom in Sparta can be found in Plutarch's texts. First, in *Life of Lycurgus* we can find the following information interlaced into a presentation on the role of music in Spartan life (*Lyc.* 21. 4):

Μουσικωτάτους γὰρ ἅμα καὶ πολεμικωτάτους ἀποφαίνουσιν αὐτούς· ῥέπει γὰρ ἅντα τῷ σιδάρῳ τὸ καλῶς κιθαρίσδεν', ὡς ὁ Λακωνικὸς ποιητὴς εἴρηκε. καὶ γὰρ ἐν ταῖς μάχαις προεθύετο ταῖς Μούσαις ὁ βασιλεύς, ἀναμνησκῶν, ὡς ἔοικε, τῆς παιδείας καὶ τῶν κρίσεων, ἵνα ὧσι πρόχειροί παρὰ τὰ δεινὰ καὶ λόγου τινὸς ἀξίας παρέχωσι τὰς πράξεις τῶν μαχομένων; 'The Spartans are thus shown to be at the same time most musical and most warlike. "In equal poise to match the sword hangs the sweet art of the harpist", as their poet says. For just before their battles, the king sacrificed to the Muses, reminding his warriors, as it would seem, of their training, and of the firm decisions they had made, in order that they might be prompt to face the dread issue, and might perform such martial deeds as would be worthy of some record'; (tr. B. Perrin).

Similar information can be found in the *Instituta Laconica* and in the collection of *Apophthegmata Laconica*.

(*Inst. Lac.* 238 b-c): Καὶ οἱ ἐμβατήριοι δὲ ῥυθμοὶ παρορμητικοὶ ἦσαν πρὸς ἀνδρείαν καὶ θαρραλεότητα καὶ ὑπερφρόνησιν θανάτου, οἷς ἐχρῶντο ἔν τε χοροῖς καὶ πρὸς αὐλὸν ἐπάγοντες τοῖς πολεμίοις. ὁ γὰρ Λυκούργος παρέζευξε τῇ κατὰ πόλεμον ἀσκήσει τὴν φιλομουσίαν, ὅπως τὸ ἄγαν πολεμικὸν τῷ ἔμμελεϊ κερασθὲν συμφωνίαν καὶ ἀρμονίαν ἔχη· διὸ καὶ ἐν ταῖς μάχαις προεθύετο ταῖς Μούσαις ὁ βασιλεύς, ἵνα λόγου ἀξίας παρέχωσι τὰς πράξεις οἱ μαχόμενοι καὶ μνήμης εὐκλεοδός; 'Moreover the rhythmic movement of their marching songs was such as to excite courage and boldness, and contempt for death; and these they used both in dancing, and also to the accompaniment of the flute when advancing upon the enemy. In fact, Lycurgus coupled fondness for music with military drill, so that the over-assertive warlike spirit, by being combined with melody, might have concord and harmony. It was for this reason that in time of battle the king offered sacrifice to the Muses before the conflict, so that those who fought should make their deeds worthy to be told and to be remembered with honour' (tr. F.C. Babbitt, Loeb).

*Apophth. Lac.* 221a: Ἐρωτηθεὶς δὲ τίνας ἕνεκα πρὸ τῶν κινδύνων ταῖς Μούσαις σφαγιάζουσιν, 'ὅπως' ἔφη 'αἱ πράξεις λόγων ἀγαθῶν τυγχάνωσιν;

<sup>7</sup> See Pritchett 1971; Lonis 1979; Jameson 1991. Researchers were most interested in blood sacrifices in front of the ranks of warriors and in the face of the enemy closing in, as well as in the issue of interpreting the observances.

‘Being asked for what purpose they offered sacrifice to the Muses before hazardous ventures, he said, “So that our deeds may find good words”’; tr. Babbitt). The latter can be found in the collection of King Eudamidas’ sayings. The last testimony comes from *De cohibenda ira* (p. 458e): ἀφαιροῦσι γοῦν αὐλοῖς τὸν θυμὸν οἱ Λακεδαιμόνιοι τῶν μαχομένων, καὶ Μούσαις πρὸ πολέμου θύουσιν ὅπως ὁ λόγος ἐμμένῃ (‘At any rate the Spartans use the playing of pipes to remove from their fighting men the spirit of anger, and they sacrifice to the Muses before battle in order that reason may remain constant within them’; tr. W.C. Helmbold).

Of course, any information contained in Plutarch’s texts constitutes a serious interpretative problem. This is also visible in the subject literature, as some researchers have either entirely disregarded these passages or preventively put them in footnotes. Sometimes the testimonies are treated as if both Spartan religiousness and Spartan military customs were something static, and in such case a diachronic approach becomes in this case a compromise way out of a stalemate.<sup>8</sup> From a historical point of view, the testimonies pose a problem for two basic reasons:

- a) they all come from one author and are relatively late;
- b) it is hard to find a reason for military sacrifices towards deities who are most often connected with sphere of poetic inspiration.

Naturally, the late origin and uniqueness of information do not necessarily have to attest to the spuriousness of the record; however, a scrupulous and careful analysis is necessary here.<sup>9</sup> The fact that Plutarch gives information in a similar way in three different works must indicate that he treats it seriously.<sup>10</sup> However, the problem is where he drew the information from, and to what extent we can believe his source. In this case, the only thing we can say for certain is that the information did not come from *The Spartan Constitution* credited to Xenophon, because there is no mention of the Muses in the preserved text. This would not in itself be so important if it was not for the fact that in the very same work we can find the longest known passage concerning the sacrifices which had to be made by a Spartan king throughout the course of a campaign (*Resp. Lac.* 13. 2-8):

ἐπαναλήψομαι δὲ ὡς ἐξορμάται σὺν στρατιᾷ ὁ βασιλεύς. θύει μὲν γὰρ πρῶτον οἴκοι ὧν Διὶ Ἀγίτορι καὶ τοῖς σιοῖν [αὐτῶ] ἦν δὲ ἐνταῦθα καλλιερῆσι, λαβῶν

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<sup>8</sup> See e.g. Jameson 1991: 209 and n. 26; Richer 2007: 236-252; Lazenby 1985: 37; Da Rocha Júnior 2008: 655.

<sup>9</sup> I assume that in common with numerous other cases in research into the ancient world, we are allowed to trust single and isolated testimonies if they are consistent with the already familiar cultural context, and until other sources have undermined their authenticity – thus the discussion surrounding the authenticity of Duris’ testimony about the cult of Lysander on Samos can serve as an example: see Habicht 1970<sup>2</sup>: 9-10, 244-245.

<sup>10</sup> Because I am mostly interested in the possible function of the Muses in this context and the dating of the custom, I omit the issue of the discrepancy in the time when the sacrifice took place – before the war or before the battle – and Plutarch’s interpretation of religious behavior, as being of secondary importance for the considerations already mentioned.

ὁ πυρφόρος πῦρ ἀπὸ τοῦ βωμοῦ προηγείται ἐπὶ τὰ ὄρια τῆς χώρας· ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς ἐκεῖ αὐθύεται Διὶ καὶ Ἀθηνᾶ. ὅταν δὲ ἀμφοῖν τούτοις τοῖν θεοῖν καλλιερηθῆ, τότε διαβαίνει τὰ ὄρια τῆς χώρας· καὶ τὸ πῦρ μὲν ἀπὸ τούτων τῶν ἱερῶν προηγείται οὔποτε ἀποσβεννύμενον, σφάγια δὲ παντοῖα ἔπεται. αἰεὶ δὲ ὅταν θύηται, ἄρχεται μὲν τούτου τοῦ ἔργου ἔτι κνεφαῖος, προλαμβάνειν βουλόμενος τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ εὐνοίαν. πάρεσι δὲ περὶ τὴν θυσίαν πολέμαρχοι, λοχαγοί, πεντηκοντήρες, ξένων στρατάρχοι, στρατοῦ σκευοφορικοῦ ἄρχοντες, καὶ τῶν ἀπὸ τῶν πόλεων δὲ στρατηγῶν ὁ βουλόμενος· πάρεσι δὲ καὶ τῶν ἐφόρων δύο, οἱ πολυπραγμονοῦσι μὲν οὐδὲν, ἦν μὴ ὁ βασιλεὺς προσκαλῆ· ὀρώντες δὲ ὅ τι ποιεῖ ἕκαστος πάντας σωφρονίζουσιν, ὡς τὸ εἰκός. ὅταν δὲ τελεσθῆ τὰ ἱερά, ὁ βασιλεὺς προσκαλέσας πάντας παραγγέλλει τὰ ποιητέα. (...) μάλα δὲ καὶ τάδε ὠφέλιμα, ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ, ἐμηχανήσατο Λυκούργος εἰς τὸν ἐν ὀπλοῖς ἄγωνα. ὅταν γὰρ ὀρώντων ἤδη τῶν πολεμίων χίμαιρα σφαγιαζῆται, αὐλεῖν τε πάντας τοὺς παρόντας ἀύλητᾶς νόμος καὶ μηδὲνα Λακεδαιμονίων ἀστεφάνωτον εἶναι ('I shall repeat how the king sets out with the army. First, while he is still at home, he sacrifices to Zeus Agetor and those associated with him. If he sacrifices there with good omens, he crosses the borders of the country. And the fire from these sacrifices leads the way and is never extinguished, and sacrificial animals of all kinds follow. Whenever he sacrifices, he starts this duty while it is still dark, because he wants to attract the favour of the god in advance. Also present at the sacrifices are the generals (*polemarchoi*), colonels (*lochagoi*), majors (*pentekosteres*), the leaders of mercenaries, commanders of the baggage-train and any commanders (*strategoï*) from the cities who want to be there. In addition two ephors are present who do not interfere unless they are summoned by the king. By observing what everyone does, they restrain them all, as might be expected. When the sacrifice is over, the king summons everyone and orders what has to be done. (...) Lycurgus also introduced the following practices concerning warfare which seem very useful to me. Whenever a goat is sacrificed whilst the enemies are already looking on, it is the custom that all flute-players who are present play and no Spartan is without a garland'; tr. Lipka)

Other passages in Xenophon strongly indicate that in the early IV<sup>th</sup> century BC the Spartans offered a goat to Artemis Agrotera immediately before battle.<sup>11</sup> The lack of information on sacrifices for the Muses in Xenophon's work seems to exclude the archaism of the custom in Sparta.<sup>12</sup> This belief is reinforced by the passage in Thucydides where the historian

<sup>11</sup> Xen. *Hell.* 4. 2. 20; see Jameson 1991: 209.

<sup>12</sup> Such a possibility – connecting the Muses with the sphere of fertility and nature – was indicated by Sam Wide: (1893: 213): 'Ich möchte lieber den spartanischen Staatskult der Musen als eine Überlieferung aus den ältesten Zeiten erklären, wo die Musen als Göttinnen des Erdsegens eine überschwengliche Verehrung in den damaligen primitiven geselligen Zuständen genossen'.

explains that the *aulos* was used by the Spartans to maintain battle formation, and it did not have any religious functions:<sup>13</sup>

Καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα ἡ ξύνοδος ἦν, Ἀργεῖοι μὲν καὶ οἱ ξύμμαχοι ἐντόνως καὶ ὀργῇ χωροῦντες, Λακεδαιμόνιοι δὲ βραδέως καὶ ὑπὸ ἀύλητων πολλῶν ὁμοῦ ἐγκαθεστῶτων, οὐ τοῦ θεοῦ χάριν, ἀλλ' ἵνα ὁμαλῶς μετὰ ῥυθμοῦ βαίνοντες προσέλθοιεν καὶ μὴ διασπασθεῖν αὐτοῖς ἡ τάξις, ὅπερ φιλεῖ τὰ μεγάλα στρατόπεδα ἐν ταῖς προσόδοις ποιεῖν ('After this they joined battle, the Argives and their allies advancing with haste and fury, the Lacedaemonians slowly and to the music of many flute-players—a standing institution in their army, that has nothing to do with religion, but is meant to make them advance evenly, stepping in time, without breaking their order, as large armies are apt to do in the moment of engaging'; tr. J. M. Dent).

This conclusion can be also supported by referring to our knowledge on cult of the Muses.<sup>14</sup> Scrupulous analyses of available testimonies indicate that cult of the goddesses is relatively late and confirmed in Athens in the late V<sup>th</sup> century BC, at the earliest.<sup>15</sup> Besides – it is also important for the analysis of Plutarch's testimonies – the majority of the earliest testimonies, particularly from IV<sup>th</sup>-III<sup>rd</sup> century BC, connect the Muses with upbringing, education, and intellectual development in the cult sphere.<sup>16</sup> It is certain that these sacrifices before battle cannot be about such a function of the Muses. If one tried to indicate a sphere of meanings connecting the goddesses with a military context (and through it with a political one), the only solution – I believe – would be to connect them with the idea of social order. The most complete description of such a function of the Muses can be found in the fictitious speech of Pythagoras speech to the feuding inhabitants of Croton, presented by Iamblichus in his compendium on the philosopher.<sup>17</sup> It is almost certain that the story is not to be connected with real events in southern Italy from the VI<sup>th</sup> and VI<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. We have many more grounds,

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<sup>13</sup> Thuc. 5. 70.

<sup>14</sup> See e. g. Mayer 1933; Mojsik 2011 (forthcoming).

<sup>15</sup> *IGT*<sup>3</sup> 369. 66, 86; Arias 1963: no. 3033, pl. 12.

<sup>16</sup> The culmination of the development of the cult of the Muses of that type, is undoubtedly the foundation of the Mouseion at Alexandria at the beginning of the III<sup>rd</sup> century BC.

<sup>17</sup> Iamblichus, *VP* 9. 45. It is interesting that one of the sources of information on the cult of the Muses in Croton / Metapontum and their role in the history of the Pythagorean school is for Iamblichus one of Dicearchus's works, who, in turn, is attributed as being the author of a work on the Spartan system (*Politeia Spartiaton*) by the Suda (s. v.). The text supposedly became so popular in Sparta that public readings were ordered in the presence of the ephors and young Spartans. Nigel M. Kennell 1995: 19, believes that this information may well be authentic, and he dates the custom to later than 146 BC (the restoration of the system by the Romans). For the most recent edition of the fragments, testimonies with discussion of Dicearchus, see Fortenbaugh and Schütrumpf 2001 (eds.).

however, for believing that such a way of understanding of the function of music and the Muses by the Greeks belongs to the Classical period.<sup>18</sup>

The clearest example of a cult where the Muses were connected not only with social order but, undoubtedly, also with the military sphere, is the otherwise enigmatic cult of *Hercules Musarum*, founded in (or transplanted to) Rome by Marcus Fulvius Nobilior after his capture of Ambracia.<sup>19</sup> We also have a few testimonies connecting such a way of perceiving the action of music and musicians/poets, and consequently probably also of the Muses, with Sparta.<sup>20</sup> The oldest reliable testimonies come from the second half of the IV<sup>th</sup> century BC and the turn of IV<sup>th</sup> / III<sup>rd</sup> century BC, and mention the alleged participation of one of the poets, Terpander of Lesbos or Thaletas of Gortyn, in putting an end to the civil strife (*stasis*) and / or the plague. Thus, the stories would concern events from the VII<sup>th</sup> century BC – a period in the history of Sparta that we know little about – and, perhaps, one should place them in the same category as the tales about Epimenides or Pythagoras.

Now it is worth remembering that one of Plutarch's testimonies concerns the supposed statement of King Eudamidas who reigned in the late IV<sup>th</sup> century BC. However, the quoted statement is quite general (πρὸ τῶν κινδύνων ταῖς Μούσαις σφραγίσουσιν) and can also refer to a temple of the Muses described by Pausanias, to the left from the sanctuary of Artemis Chalkioikos.<sup>21</sup> Besides, this collection of Spartan *apophthegmata* comes from the second half of the II<sup>nd</sup> century BC, at the earliest, and individual statements are hardly authentic.<sup>22</sup>

Accordingly, I am inclined to believe that from the testimonies mentioned above, it can only be inferred that in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century BC there existed strong connotations of the Muses/*mousike* with the sphere of social order

<sup>18</sup> See e.g. Euripides, *Med.* 830-831 (Harmony, mother of the Muses); Servius, *ad Aen.* 1. 8; Rhianos, fr. 19, Powell; Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 8 (716f-717a; with Burkert 1983: 168-179); Pausanias, 4. 31. 10 – it is possible that in the precinct of Asclepius in Messene the Muses were venerated along with Heracles Alexikakos (see Zunino 1997: 178, n. 128; 185 – 186 and 275-279); see Wilson 2004.

<sup>19</sup> See Cancik 1969; Hardie, 2002; Sciarrino 2004. The relations of Hercules with the Muses are more profound and also appear e.g. in sphere of the *gymnasion* – e. g. *Sylf* 578; *I. Ch.* 77. 6 and Graf 1985: 139.

<sup>20</sup> See Pausanias, 3. 18. 8; *Schol. Hom. Od.* 3. 267, p. 143, 15b, Lindorf; see Demetrius Phalereus, frg. 144 (SOD and Wilson 2004: 270); cf. n. 1 about the attribution to Demetrius: τοσοῦτον δὲ καὶ πρὸς τὰ πολιτικὰ διέτεινεν ἢ τῶν καθαροδῶν μουσικὴ ὡς τῶν Σπαρτιατῶν τὴν πόλιν ὠφελῆσθαι λέγουσιν ὑπὸ τούτων τῶν ἀνδρῶν τὰ μέγιστα καὶ πρὸς ὁμόνοιαν καὶ πρὸς τὴν τῶν νόμων φύλακίην – ‘And the music of the *kitharodoi*’ was so closely connected to matters political that they say that the Spartan city-state was given assistance in the most important affairs by these men both to assist its civic unity and to safeguard its laws’ (tr. Wilson 2004: 270); Terpander, frgs. 7 and 9 Campbell; Thaletas, fr. 4 and 6 (Campbell). It is quite probable that testimony from scholia in Homer’s *Odyssey* refers exactly to tales about Terpander and Thaletas.

<sup>21</sup> Pausanias, 3. 17. 5 – as in many other cases, this passage is only a confirmation of the existence of a temple which existed in Pausanias’s times.

<sup>22</sup> See Kennell 1995: 20-23.



and idea of *homonoia*.<sup>23</sup> Such a way of understanding the function of the Muses – also in the cult sphere – undoubtedly brings us closer to explaining the role of sacrifices for these goddesses in the military sphere. Thus, if we assume that what we have here is a late innovation, and we must bear in mind here that such sacrifices are not mentioned in Xenophon's works, rather than an archaic custom, then we should search for a context in which introducing such an extraordinary innovation would make sense. Some kind of social-military reforms in Sparta connected with social tensions would be an appropriate context.

In this case, regarding Sparta, one immediately thinks about dynamic changes of the second half of the III<sup>rd</sup> century BC, connected with attempted reforms of, first, Agis IV, and later of Cleomenes III, as well as the innovations of Nabis.<sup>24</sup> It is important to remember that not only are strong social tensions, system changes, and political murders, connected with this period, but also the large-scale introduction of non-citizens, including aliens (*ksenoi*) into the army and the Spartan community as well. One can even say that in that period under consideration we are dealing with a situation where the Spartan citizen army (not the mercenaries) mostly consisted of new members of the community. Thus, we can imagine how strong was the need to create a set of symbols and gestures, particularly in religious sphere, which would facilitate bonding together social elements of different origins. Precisely the Muses, and perhaps also because they were conceived of as a choir of goddesses of identical or even unanimous characteristics,<sup>25</sup> could be perceived as particularly fitting this context, particularly in the Hellenistic period.

There exists another testimony which is usually treated even more sceptically than the information about the sacrifices for the Muses before battle. However, taking into consideration the above context of social and political transformations of the III<sup>rd</sup> / II<sup>nd</sup> century, the information can start to make sense and in fact confirm the interpretation of function of sacrifices for the Muses. Namely, in Athenaeus' passage on Eros and his cult in the Greek world, we can find information that the Spartans (and probably, the Cretans too) made sacrifice to this god before battle:<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> I believe that if the cult of the Muses was connected with stories about putting an end to the civil strife in archaic Sparta, then one of our sources, and there are plenty of them, would have referred to that fact. However, none of the authors makes any connection. On the other hand, Plutarch himself does not indicate that there is any connection between the sacrifices for the Muses with the activities of the poets in archaic Sparta. Finally, it is worth remembering that all these testimonies come from authors outside of Sparta – the first known Spartan author was probably Sosibios, the grammarian from the II<sup>nd</sup> century BC.

<sup>24</sup> See e.g. Cartledge and Spawforth 2002<sup>2</sup>; *passim*; Shimron 1972.

<sup>25</sup> See e.g. Servius, *ad Aen.* 1. 8: *Has Musas siculas Epicharmus non multas sed "homonoousas" dicit*; Rhianos, fr. 19, Powell; on the functions of choirs, particularly in the Spartan context, see Calame 1997.

<sup>26</sup> Athenaeus, 13. 561e-f (= Sosicrates (*FGrH* 461, F 7). There is no other information on the custom in Sparta or in Crete.

Λακεδαιμόνιοι δὲ πρὸ τῶν παρατάξεων Ἔρωτι προθύονται, ὡς ἐν τῇ τῶν παραταττομένων φιλία κειμένης τῆς σωτηρίας τε καὶ νίκης, καὶ Κρήτες δ' ἐν ταῖς παρατάξεσι τοὺς καλλίστους τῶν πολιτῶν κοσμήσαντες διὰ τούτων θύουσι τῷ Ἔρωτι, ὡς Σωσικράτης ἱστορεῖ. ('Thus the Lacedaemonians offer preliminary sacrifices to Eros before the troops are drawn up in battle-line, because they think that their safe return and victory depend upon the friendship of the men drawn up. So, too, the Cretans post their handsomest citizens in the battle-lines and through them offer sacrifice to Eros, as Sosicrates records'; tr. Gulick, Loeb).

Athenaeus refers to Sosicrates of Rhodes, writing in the second half of the II<sup>nd</sup> century BC, an author of a highly praised work on Crete (*Kretika*). We do not know how to date the custom – surely before the first half of the II<sup>nd</sup> century BC – and how to understand properly the information about 'sacrifices' on Crete, but it seems that it is not a remnant of the practices of a pre-archaic Doric community. Obviously, this passage adds to the already existing interpretative problems, but at the same time can be used to confirm our previous interpretations connected with the cult of the Muses. Understanding the function of Eros in this context as a deity cementing previously divided elements is perhaps understandable, and requires no further explanation. Thus, it seems that if we were to place such a custom somewhere in Sparta, then it seems to fit well into the picture of the social and political transformations of the late 3<sup>rd</sup> and the first half of the II<sup>nd</sup> century BC, and particularly to the circumstances of introducing new individuals into the citizen circle, and to the army as well.

The connection between Sparta and Crete in this context, established probably already in the time of Sosicrates, cannot be fully discussed here.<sup>27</sup> However, I would like to point to two important aspects of the problem. Firstly, I would like to point to the regularity with which Cretans were used as mercenaries by the Spartans in the IV<sup>th</sup>, and particularly in the III<sup>rd</sup> century BC, which is quite profusely documented, among others, by Plutarch's lives of Agis and Cleomenes. Taking into consideration the scarcity of good land on Crete, and a large population growth which is known for the Hellenistic period, and the exceptional similarity, actually identity, of the institutions of citizen education and military training, we may assume that Cretan mercenaries were above all others suitable to make new Spartan citizens/warriors in the period of social and political reforms.

Secondly, I believe that in the discussion on Cleomenes's reforms (conducted to some degree with the participation of Sphairos<sup>28</sup>), and particularly on the proposed return to / recreation of the "traditional" system of *syssitia* and training of the youth, it is worth considering the possibility that these "archaic" patterns were borrowed back from Crete,

<sup>27</sup> On Crete in general see Chaniotis 2004; Perlman 2005.

<sup>28</sup> See Plut. *Cleom.* 11. 3-4; Kennell 1995: *passim*; Fowler 2002.

where, it was perhaps believed, they had not been changed to such an extent as at Sparta.<sup>29</sup>

If we acknowledge at least the partial participation of Cretans in the transformations which took place in Sparta in the III<sup>rd</sup> / IV<sup>th</sup> century BC, then the existence of common religious customs, or similar religious interpretations of gestures in the military sphere (confirmed for the period before the first half of the II<sup>nd</sup> century BC) seems to make sense.

Plutarch attributes the introduction of sacrifices for the Muses to Lycurgus. This is not to be taken literally, taking into consideration the quite common custom in the ancient world of referring quite new system changes to archaic legislators. In Sparta moreover, as has been clearly indicated among others by Michael Flower,<sup>30</sup> such rhetoric accompanied first and foremost Cleomenes's reforms and were designed to make more acceptable the introduction of what were, in fact, quite revolutionary changes for contemporary Spartans. It can be argued that the introduction of sacrifices for the Muses, and to Eros, if we link him into this picture, can be regarded as a radical and essential change, particularly when we remind ourselves that all the earlier sources confirm that in the military context the only sacrifices which were made were for deities which played important roles in the Spartan pantheon, Artemis Agrotera, Zeus Agetor, and Athena.<sup>31</sup> This is what led Michael Jameson to conclude that 'the only sure historical example of a specific addressee is Artemis Agrotera' and to relegate the sacrifices to the Muses and to Eros to footnotes, as probably unreliable in this context.<sup>32</sup>

Last, but not least, there exists a final important passage which indirectly indicates that the Stoic philosopher Sphaيروس, the disciple of Zeno and Cleanthes, could have been responsible for innovations in the religious sphere. From fragments of Zeno's *Politeia* which have been preserved it can be inferred that *homonoia* was clearly a central concept in the organization of his imaginary community, and, which in this context is particularly significant, that *homonoia* was described as a form of love or Eros.<sup>33</sup> The most important fragment can be found in Athenaeus, in the same long passage dealing with Eros, where one can also find information on the connections of this god with military activity on Crete and in Sparta:

Ποντιανὸς δὲ Ζήνωννα ἔφη τὸν Κιτιεῖα ὑπολαμβάνειν τὸν Ἔρωτα θεὸν εἶναι φιλίας καὶ ἐλευθερίας, ἔτι δὲ καὶ ὁμονοίας παρασκευαστικόν, ἄλλου δὲ οὐδενός. διὸ καὶ ἐν τῇ Πολιτείᾳ ἔφη τὸν Ἔρωτα θεὸν εἶναι συνεργὸν ὑπάρχοντα πρὸς τὴν τῆς πόλεως σωτηρίαν; 'Pontianus said that Zeno of Citium claimed that Eros was the god of friendship and freedom, and further that he was the promoter of *homonoia*, but of nothing else. That is why he

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<sup>29</sup> See e. g. Arist. *Polit.* 1272a; Perlman 2005.

<sup>30</sup> Flower 2002.

<sup>31</sup> Xen. *Resp. Lac.* 13. 2; *Hell.* 4. 2. 20.

<sup>32</sup> Jameson 1991: 209.

<sup>33</sup> See Murray 2005: 210-211.

said in his *Politeia* that Eros was a god, a fellow-worker providing for the safety of the city'.<sup>34</sup>

If this testimony is reliable, then it constitutes exceptionally strong support for the above interpretation of the possible functions of sacrifices for the Muses and Eros during the period of domestic disorder in Sparta.

To sum up, it should be indicated that in the above context Plutarch's information seems exceptionally reliable. Dating it back to the archaic epoch is highly improbable because we know that the cult of the Muses had not yet developed into anything significant, and because of the lack of any reference to this custom in Xenophon's *The Constitution of the Lacedaemonians*. It would also be difficult to connect this custom with any supposed changes which took place in the Spartan Army at the end of the Peloponnesian War.<sup>35</sup> Next, even if the supposed late IVth century BC context given to one of the passages by its attribution to King Eudamidas, or the stories of the role played by Terpander and / or Thaletas in putting an end to the civil strife in archaic Sparta by means of music, both come in a sensible context from a semantic point of view, they are not convincing.<sup>36</sup> For this period we do not have any substantial social or political transformations, resulting from a crisis,<sup>37</sup> which would need either a referral to the authority of Lycurgus, or the introduction of new religious practices to consolidate the changes which had just been introduced. Particularly, such changes would need to be connected with the introduction of new social and ethnic groups into Spartan army and body politic, and the granting to such groups of equal rights within the citizen community. We have to deal with a phenomenon on an appropriate scale only in the times of Agis, Cleomenes or Nabis. And perhaps only in this case that the custom of making sacrifices to the Muses before battle confirmed by Plutarch, as well as the information given by Athenaeus (Sosicrates) indicating that in Sparta sacrifices were made for Eros just before battle, seem to fit into a context which can be regarded as probable.

If we assume that these customs appear somewhere between the second half of the IIIrd century and the first half of the 2nd century BC, then we can also assume that the source of information for Plutarch was either Phylarchos, or Sphairos himself, among whose works Diogenes Laertius lists an *On the Laconian Constitution*, and an *On Lycurgus and Socrates*.<sup>38</sup>

Tomasz Mojsik,  
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<sup>34</sup> Athenaeus, 13. 561c; tr. in Murray 2005: 211.

<sup>35</sup> About these reforms see Lazenby 1985; Sekunda 1998.

<sup>36</sup> See, n. 23 above.

<sup>37</sup> As Fowler 2002: 202 formulates it after the famous work of Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983 (eds.): 'The invention of tradition often takes place at times of crisis and is a means of dealing with a crisis when older traditions are in themselves insufficient or outmoded'.

<sup>38</sup> Diogenes Laertius, 7. 177-178; see Fowler 2002: 199-200.

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