

ANCIENT GREEK HISTORY AND CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL SCIENCE



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PATRONAGE IN ANCIENT SPARTA

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To seek a protector or to find satisfaction in being one – these things are common to all ages.

Marc Bloch¹

The ideology of the Spartan *homoioi*, the ‘equals’, or rather the ‘similars’, masked vast differences in wealth, prestige and power. In such circumstances, personal patronage thrives, as decades of anthropological investigations have shown us. Yet patronage is more commonly associated with Rome, despite the fact that several scholars have shown that patron–client relationships played a role even in democratic Athens, a society earlier thought exempt from this almost universal phenomenon.

In this chapter, I discuss the role of personal patronage in classical Sparta, and the differences between unequal reciprocity in the society of the ‘similars’ and in democratic Athens. I build on the findings of Stephen Hodkinson and Paul Cartledge (Sparta), Rachel Zelnick-Abramovitz (Athens) and my own research into patronage in the Roman Republic and the comparative structure of Athenian patronage, in order to demonstrate how patronage is a natural part of all ancient societies.² Different systems allow for the institution of patronage to assume different scopes and work through different venues, forcing the phenomenon to adapt to various circumstances. This changes the rates of exchange between patron and client, but does not abolish the institution, as claimed by Paul Millett.³

1 Bloch 1961: 147.

2 Cartledge 1987; Hodkinson 1986; 2000; 2002a; 2002b; Zelnick-Abramovitz 2000; Mæhle 2018.

3 Millett 1989.

1 A UNIVERSAL MODEL FOR A UNIVERSAL PHENOMENON: THE ECONOMY OF GRATITUDE

In the same way that archaeologists automatically look for a theatre in a Greek city, a public bath in a Roman city, and council houses, forums/agoras and temples in either, historians should look for patron–client relationships in the written sources, no matter which city is being scrutinised. And our answer to ‘What reason do you have to look for this?’ should be the same as an archaeologist would give if asked why he or she was so sure that somewhere on the site there would be the remains of a theatre, a council house, a temple or an agora: because it would be very strange indeed to find a city without these structures. Even without any success in finding some or all of these typical features, the archaeologist would repeat the old truth: *Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.*

By common definition, patronage is a (1) personal relationship which involves (2) exchanges of goods and/or services over time, between (3) two parties with differing power, bound together in (4) a moral contract of reciprocity and friendship.⁴ Even without any evidence of patronage in Sparta, I would still presuppose its existence in some form or other; the services and goods rendered to patron and client determined by the peculiar economic, social and cultural-politic setup. This general model for patronage in the ancient world can be summarised in six points:

1. The wealth of contemporary evidence for the perseverance of patronage in traditional and modern communities, discussed in the anthropological and sociological literature, leads one to conclude that personal patronage is found in all societies which have both socioeconomic inequality and competition for prestige and power.⁵
2. Whereas patrons provide subsistence crisis insurance, protection from private or public dangers and sometimes brokerage⁶ between the client and other powerful individuals or institutions,⁷ clients, apart from reciprocating with supplementary labour and goods when necessary, *protect their superior’s reputation, act as his or her eyes and ears, campaign for him or*

4 Saller 1982: 49.

5 Eisenstadt and Roniger 1984; Johnson and Dandeker 1989; Wallace-Hadrill 1989; Roniger and Günes-Ayata 1994; Goodbout 1998; Mauss 2011; Pappas and Assimokapoulou 2012; Satlow 2013.

6 Weingrod 1977: 47.

7 Scott 1977: 23.

Figure 8.1 Political roles in ancient city-states.

Roles	Friend	Patron	Big man	Statesman
Distribution	Symmetric	Asymmetric	Elitist	Universal
Output	Personal gifts and favours	Personal gifts and favours	Gifts to the community	Achievement values/'programme', eloquence
Input	Companionship	Protection	Largesse	
	Similar returns	Inferior returns	Respect and popularity	Respect and popularity
		Subservience		

*her if she or he should stand for office, and generally use their skills and resources to advance their patron over other patrons.*⁸

3. Although ancient patronage has traditionally been associated with Rome, patronage is also found in abundance in democratic Athens,⁹ the forms of interaction and 'rates of exchange' between patron and client adjusted to that particular system.¹⁰
4. What I have called 'the rates of exchange' in the give-and-take between client and patron depend on the relative power of the two parties and what they need from each other. Several factors determine this on the systemic level, such as available resources, the intensity of competition, rules for distribution, political and judicial rights etc.¹¹ On the personal level such factors as ethics,¹² emotional attachment¹³ and the gracefulness of the exchange¹⁴ come into play.
5. In the ancient city-republics of the Graeco-Roman world, patronage was one of four interconnected roles played in the competition for power and prestige (the *quadriga model*; see Figures 8.1 and 8.2):
 - (a) Friend – between equals
 - (b) Patron – between unequals
 - (c) Big man/Community patron
 - (d) Statesman/Politician

Through the use of all these roles, constituting a four-horse chariot race, the competitor could generate gratitude, but the sense of obligation and form of reciprocation he could expect depended on which roles members of the public met him in.

⁸ Scott 1977: 24.

⁹ Small 1998a; 1998b; Zelnick-Abramovitz 2000.

¹⁰ Mähle 2018.

¹¹ Scott 1977: 25; Bourne 1986: 8; Johnson and Dandeker 1989: 219–21; Gyax 2013: 45–6.

¹² Mauss 2011: 2.

¹³ Waterbury 1977: 331.

¹⁴ Hochschild 1989: 95–6.

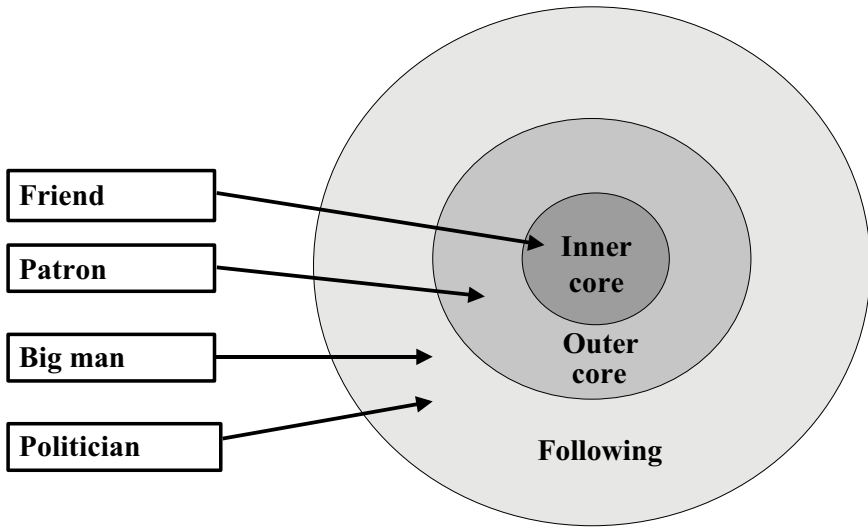


Figure 8.2 Core and following

6. The support generated through friendship and personal patronage gave the competitor a core of supporters who helped to influence the rest of the public to become his followers. The support generated through community patronage (not personal gifts, but gifts to the whole community) and statesmanship (reforms, state-sponsored handouts, leadership) was more volatile, because less personal and less exclusive than one-to-one patronage, and with more competition. Although a core group was necessary to be a competitor, it would, in the face of a large citizenry and many rivals for power and prestige, be insufficient to win the competition.

The model can both accommodate cheating, by for instance introducing blatant corruption as a ‘fifth horse’, and the peculiarities of Sparta, where the role of community patron seems to have been something that only appeared on the stage in the Hellenistic and Roman age.¹⁵

2 APPLICABILITY OF THE MODEL TO ANCIENT SPARTA

Whereas the prevalence of patron–client relationships in democratic Athens has been explicitly denied by many modern scholars,¹⁶ its existence in Sparta was not even considered a possibility before Cartledge

¹⁵ Cartledge and Spawforth 2002.

¹⁶ Small 1998a; 1998b; Zelnick-Abramovitz 2000 for an opposite view.

and Hodkinson,¹⁷ since all Spartiates, scholars believed, by definition were given a piece of land, an undividable and unsalable *kleros*, at birth. The patron–client model was originally created to explain how elites control the masses in relatively open competitions for power and influence, but Sparta lacked a clear definition of ‘mass’ and ‘elite’. What need of patrons was there where everybody had enough to sustain themselves as rentiers and commit themselves to full-time soldiering? If the Spartiates were not outright economic and social equals, at least they must have been ‘similar’ enough to avoid personal patronage.

This view of landownership, or rather landholdership, since the state was supposed to be in ultimate control of a pool of *kleroi*, changed dramatically with the publication of Stephen Hodkinson’s article ‘Land tenure and inheritance in classical Sparta’ (1986). Hodkinson conclusively showed that the old system did not break down in the late fifth century due to some reform or other, but rather that it never existed in the first place. It was just another myth invented for propaganda purposes during the third-century revolution of king Agis IV and Kleomenes III. Not only was all land in the archaic and classical age privately owned and inheritable, but over time, Sparta too, as happened in all city-states, became increasingly stratified.

All three major historians, Herodotus, Thucydides and Xenophon, agreed that some were indeed ‘more equal than others’ among the so-called ‘equals’ or ‘similars’, and de Ste Croix’s list, even though not exhaustive, is certainly decisive in this matter:¹⁸

1. ‘The prosperous ones’ (Hdt. 6.61.3).
2. ‘Of good family, and in wealth among the first’ (Hdt. 7.134.2).
3. ‘Those who had great possessions’ (Thuc. 1.6.4).
4. ‘The first men’ (Thuc. 4.108.7; 5.15.1).
5. ‘The rich’ (Xen. *Lac. Pol.* 5.3; Arist. *Pol.* 4.9, 1294b22, 26).
6. ‘The very rich’ (Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.10–11).
7. Those ‘from whom the greatest offices are filled’ (Xen. *Lac. Pol.* 2.2).
8. ‘The gentlemen’/‘the wise and good’ (Arist. *Pol.* 2.9, 1270b24).

Many held on to their status as *homoioi* by the skin of their teeth, many more were declassed as *hypomeiones* (‘inferiors’), unable to keep up with the three economic demands for full citizenship; (1) participation in the *agogê* when children, (2) paying their mess dues

17 Cartledge 1987; Hodkinson 2000.

18 de Ste Croix 1981: 76.

when adults, and (3) remaining as full-time soldiers, forbidden to engage in any form of productive work. In this situation, the filling of the moral obligation to (4) start a family and produce children was for many potential Spartiates impossible. The inequalities permeating Sparta created the perfect environment for patron–client relationships. Paul Cartledge and Stephen Hodkinson have demonstrated how these vertical ties existed at both the bottom and the top of Spartan society.

In his biography of King Agesilaos, Paul Cartledge devotes a chapter to ‘the politics of patronage’, where he sets out

to explain the informal means at the disposal of an adroit Spartan king to determine in advance the outcome of meetings of the assembly and of major political trials and to ensure as far as possible or desirable that he or his men had the responsibility for executing those decisions of public policy that he had sponsored or approved.¹⁹

Whereas a king was exceptionally well placed to play the patron, the fact that he chose to do so is significant. In order to ‘work the system’ he found it useful to cultivate many ‘friends’, and did indeed use these connections many times in the course of his career. Other players, without royal blood, such as Lysander, did likewise.

As Cartledge observes, the patron–client relationship

is always asymmetrical or lop-sided in two senses: the patron has more to offer than the client and give in return; and the goods and services they mutually exchange are incommensurable, those a patron offers tending to be solidly material, whereas what he expects from a client has a more symbolic quality – loyalty, honour, prestige and general political support, in a word deference.²⁰

The display of *material wealth* within the borders of Sparta was not acceptable to the community, so the rich competed all the more vigorously in other arenas, such as the costly sport of chariot racing at the Panhellenic festivals, i.e. the Olympic, Isthmian and Nemean games. At home, although *community patronage* (the role of big man) was all but forbidden, it was nevertheless possible to display *social wealth*, in the form of one’s retinue, visible both on a daily basis and on public,

19 Cartledge 1987: 139.

20 Cartledge 1987: 140.

cultic occasions. Hodkinson points out how this retinue consisted of a variety of social categories:²¹

1. *Therapontes*: helot servants in the household.
2. *Mothônes*: helot children reared as attendants of Spartan boys.
3. *Trophimoi*: foreign 'foster-children'.
4. *Xenoi*: foreign, probably high-status friends visiting.
5. *Nothoi*: 'bastards' of the Spartans.
6. *Mothakes*: sponsored citizen children.
7. *Philoï*: citizen friends without their own retinue, fathers of the *mothakes*, beneficiaries of gifts and services.

The first two categories, both helots lifted from normal agricultural work, may have felt privileged or not, depending on the temperament of their masters and their own inclinations. But surely, rich Spartans had more helots than less affluent Spartans. *Xenia* (guest-friendship) was an established elite custom, and having a foreign 'foster-child' in one's retinue was a symbol of such elite status. We know that Spartan representatives, commanders and harmosts in other states often had previous *xenia* ties there, which gave them the edge over competitors without inside knowledge and important contacts. The last three categories, however, were tied to a particular household by traditional bonds of gratitude, which is to say *personal patronage*, and also lent lustre to the retinue. Not only did they signal great wealth and social prestige, but they were simultaneously a service to the state, pumping up the number of citizen-soldiers. When these *trophimoi* were *perioikoi*, they added to the elite soldiery of the Spartan state. In a word, the greater and more distinguished the retinue was, the more importance was associated with the head of household.

In the following comparison between Spartan and Athenian sources on reciprocity, the friend of Agesilaos and all things Spartan, Xenophon, will be treated as a reliable spokesman for Spartan affairs. The lack of Spartan voices in the source material is, of course, lamentable. But if by a strange quirk of fortune we suddenly found something similar to the information we can extrapolate from the Attic orators, I doubt that Xenophon's testimony on the political use of reciprocity would be significantly contradicted.

21 Hodkinson 2000: 336ff.

3 THE IDEOLOGY OF RECIPROCITY IN SPARTA AND ATHENS

The Athenians saw themselves as political equals, but recognised that there were great economic and social differences between citizens. The Spartans never claimed to live in political equality, but pretended, despite rising evidence to the contrary, that the economic and social differences were not there. The appellation of the citizen body as the *homoioi*, the *equals*, or rather, following Paul Cartledge's preference, the *similars*, was not, however, totally wrong.

First, the equal division of the conquered Messenian land in the late seventh/early sixth century, and the availability of a large subject labour force, the helots, to work those lands for the Spartiates, created for a time the possibility of realising an egalitarian and collectivist ideology. All citizens became landlords, freed from the necessity of working their own fields, and could devote themselves to becoming full-time soldiers. No citizens faced subsistence crises for several generations and, for perhaps a century, independence was the norm.²² Gradually, the familiar processes of inheritance by more than one son, dowries to daughters and subsequent indebtedness, reduced many estates, and opened the field for the beneficence of patrons.

Second, living costs were reduced through the imposition by law of a uniform lifestyle.²³ The public upbringing (*agogê*); the messes (*syssitia*); the sumptuary laws restricting the display of wealth at funerals and marriages, in sacrifices and houses, as well as the use of precious metals or artefacts; all made it easier for the less fortunate *homoioi* to keep up with the rich. At the same time, however, the same restrictions, which forbade manual labour, craftsmanship and trade²⁴ made it impossible for struggling Spartans to work themselves out of economic difficulties.

Third, those who could not keep up their status as full-time hoplites, and at the same time pay their mess dues, feed their families and support their sons through the *agogê*, were excluded from the citizen body. This meant dwindling citizen numbers but without the political pressure from below to remedy the situation. The *homoioi* continued to be *equal/similar*, but only by reducing great numbers to the status of inferiors, *hypomeiones*. When solutions to the *oliganthropia* were introduced in the third century, they came from the top, and in a society permeated with patron–client relationships.

22 Hodkinson 2000: 353.

23 Hdt. 7.234; Thuc. 1.6; Xen. *Lac. Pol.* 7.3–4; 10.7; Arist. *Pol.* 1294b21–7.

24 Plut. *Lyc.* 9–10; 13.3–5; 16.6–7; 17.4; 19.3; 27.2.

Despite these peculiarities, the ideology behind reciprocity seems to have been more or less the same in Sparta and Athens, if we allow Xenophon to speak for the Spartans. Discussing the virtues of his hero and benefactor, King Agesilaos, Xenophon extols his circumspection in money matters:

Agesilaos not only judged it wrong to fail to pay a debt of gratitude, but also for someone with greater resources not to pay considerable interest on the debt.²⁵

It is when favours are freely given that people are glad to do something for their benefactor, not just repay the favour, but also in gratitude for being judged trustworthy enough to safeguard the advance loan of a favour.²⁶

Demosthenes concurred with the *noblesse oblige* expressed in these statements, and added that, although beneficence creates gratitude, and nothing is more loathsome than ingratitude, some finesse is required of the benefactor in handling the situation:

I believe that the recipient of a favour should remember it for all time if he is to act honourably, and the one who conferred the favour should forget it immediately if he is to avoid mean-spiritedness. Recalling benefactions conferred in private and talking about them is nearly the same as insulting people. So I will do nothing of the kind, nor shall I be provoked into doing it, but whatever reputation I have in this regard is good enough for me.²⁷

That finesse was required is also very clear from Pericles' funeral oration, where the superiority of the Athenian way of doing things is extolled above that of all others, especially the Spartans. Possibly reciprocity in foreign relations is alluded to here, but the sentiment remains the same:

We are at variance with most others too in our concept of doing good: we make our friends by conferring benefit rather than receiving it. The benefactor is the firmer friend, in that by further kindness he will maintain gratitude in the recipient as a current debt: the debtor is less keen, as he knows that any return of

25 Xen. *Ages.* 4.2 (trans. R. Waterfield).

26 Xen. *Ages.* 4.4 (trans. R. Waterfield).

27 Dem. 18.269 (trans. H. Yunis).

generosity will be something owed, not appreciated as an independent favour. And we are unique in the way we help others – no calculation of self-interest, but an act of frank confidence in our freedom.²⁸

This is consistent with Ober's notion of dignity as the third core democratic value, alongside liberty and equality.²⁹ In order for a client to be an effective support for his patron, he should never humiliate himself in the way the abhorred archetype flatterer would do:

You might call flattery (*kolakeian*) talk that is shameful, but also profitable to the flatterer. The flatterer (*kolaka*) is the sort to say, as he walks along. 'Do you notice how people are looking at you? This does not happen to anyone in the city except you.' 'They praised you yesterday in the stoa', and he explains that when more than thirty people were sitting there and a discussion arose about who was the best, at his own suggestion they settled on his man's name. He tells everyone to keep quiet while his man is saying something, and praises him when he is listening, and if he should pause, adds an approving 'You're right.'³⁰

So while the client should take care never to forget the benefits received, the patron should pretend to have forgotten about them. The benefactions were not actually forgotten by the patrons, of course, and we shall see that Athenian clients were summoned to witness in court about the help they had received from their patrons.

Although the ideology and logic were similar, the actual give-and-take naturally had to adapt to the peculiarities of two systems so different from each other as those of Athens and Sparta were.

4 MATERIAL BENEFITS

Taking part in the common meals in the *syssitia* was part of the definition of a citizen in ancient Sparta, whereas taking part in a symposium in ancient Athens was a mark of elite status. The notorious luxury of the symposia and the austerity of the *syssitia* are well known *topoi*; the most important difference for this study, however, is the fact that the Athenian dinner (whether as a full symposium or a more modest affair) was usually paid for by the host, and that the host also decided

28 Thuc. 2.40 (trans. Hammond).

29 Ober 2012: 827.

30 Theoph. *Char.* 2.1–7 (trans. J. Rusten).

who was invited, while the Spartan *syssitia* were paid for equally by all the members.

The Athenian case is beautifully summed up in a fictional dialogue by Xenophon, where Socrates claims that his rich interlocutor, Kritoboulos, with all his obligations, really is worse off than the relatively poor Socrates:

Socrates explained, ‘. . . in the first place, I see that you are obliged to offer many large sacrifices to the gods; otherwise, I think both gods and men would object. Next, it is incumbent on you often to entertain visitors from abroad, and to do so generously. What is more, you have to invite your fellow citizens to dinners and do them favours; otherwise you’d lose your supporters. Furthermore, I notice that the State is already requiring great expenditure from you on things like horse-rearing, financing choruses and athletic competitions, and on administration; and if there should be a war, I’m sure they will require you to finance triremes and will make you pay an almost unbearable amount of tax.’³¹

That these dinners, and other gifts of food, could be seen as patronage is clear from other stories. The use of food for political purposes was common in Athens. Kimon left his gardens unfenced, so that passers-by could help themselves more easily, but he also ‘threw his house open to all, so that he regularly supplied an inexpensive meal to many men, and the poor Athenians approached him and dined’.³² The Spartan mess system made private dinners or privately initiated banquets obsolete.³³ Still, even within the narrow confines of the Lycurgan diet, there was room for competition and display.

The simplicity of the Spartan table is spelled out clearly by Xenophon, but he also mentions the extras available:

The amount of food [Lycurgus] allowed was just enough to prevent them from getting either too much or too little to eat. But many extras are supplied from the spoils of the chase; and for these rich men sometimes substitute wheaten bread. Consequently the board is never bare until the company breaks up, and never extravagantly furnished.³⁴

31 Xen. *Oec.* 2.5–6 (trans. R. Waterfield).

32 Theopompos *FGrH* 115 F89, cf. F135 (trans. P. Millett).

33 Hodkinson 2000: 211–13.

34 Xen. *Lac. Pol.* 5.3. (trans. E. C. Marchant).

Later sources claim that the rich did not just provide wheaten bread (the less toothsome and nutritious barley bread was the norm), but also, much like Kimon, shared their harvest with their clients, offering them anything from their fields which was in season:

Sometimes the common people bring whatever is caught in the chase; but the rich contribute wheat bread and anything from the fields which the seasons permits.³⁵

They contribute [the *epakleion*, additional meal] . . . to give evidence of their own prowess in the hunt. Many of them, too, who keep flocks, give a liberal share of the offspring. So the dish may consist of ring-doves, geese, turtle-doves, thrushes, blackbirds, hares, lambs and kids. The cooks announce to the company the names of those who bring in anything for the occasion, in order that all may realize the labour spent upon the chase and the zeal manifested for themselves.³⁶

The mess table was perhaps not the most fertile ground for creating patron–client relationships, since (1) the extras provided by the rich were given to the whole dining group instead of to one needy person; (2) a kid or lamb testified to wealth and generosity, but hares and doves showed personal accomplishment and dedication of time and effort; (3) poorer members might thus be able to reciprocate and compete for honour through hunting – the rich were more likely to own hunting dogs, which, however, according to Xenophon they were expected to lend to anyone that asked;³⁷ and (4) the respect given to wealth and gratitude for its gifts were heavily mixed up with the prestige of rank, accomplishments, seniority and physical prowess.

In order to get admission to the mess, however, one first had to complete the *agogê* and, when co-opted to a mess, pay the mess dues, which were five or six times higher than subsistence level, according to calculations made by Thomas J. Figueira.³⁸ As testified by Aristotle, this was the root cause of Sparta's greatest problem, the steady dwindling of citizen numbers:

Also the regulations for the the public mess-tables called Phiditia have been badly laid down by their originator. The revenue for

35 Athenagoras 141c–d (Sphairos) (trans. Hodkinson 2000: 357).

36 Athenagoras 141d–e (Molpis) (trans. Hodkinson 2000: 357).

37 *Lac. Pol.* 6.3–4.

38 Figueira 1984: 84.

these ought to come rather from public funds, as in Crete, but among the Spartans everybody has to contribute, although some of them are very poor and unable to find money for this charge, so that the result is the opposite of what the lawgiver purposed. For he intends the organization of the common tables to be democratic, but when regulated by the law in this manner it works out as by no means democratic; for it is not easy for the very poor to participate, yet their ancestral regulation of the citizenship is that it is not to belong to one who is unable to pay this tax.³⁹

The solution for Spartan fathers who either had fallen out of the system and into the category of *hypomeiones*, or had difficulties paying the tax to the messes and at the same time providing for their family, was the institution of the *mothax*.

The *mothakes* are foster-brothers (*syntrophoi*) of the Lakedaimonians. Each of the boys of citizen-status, according as their private means suffice, make some boys their foster-brothers – some one, others two, and some more.⁴⁰

Kallikratides, Gylippos and Lysander in Lakedaimon were called *mothakes*. This was the name of the <foster-brothers (*syntrophis*)> of the affluent, whom their fathers sent with them to compete with them in the gymnasia. The man who made this arrangement, Lykourgos, granted Lakonian citizenship to those who kept to the boys' *agogê*.⁴¹

Patronage in Sparta was thus institutionalised with a view to creating citizens and strengthening the state. In Athens it was not the poor man's citizenship that was in jeopardy, but his well-being and status, and any arrangement with richer friends would have been a private affair. Moreover, the threshold for when help towards subsistence was needed in Athens and Sparta was quite different. It would make sense that the *mothakes* also continued to be on the receiving end of the rich men's bounty after admission to a mess and hence full citizenship.

Being unable to pay the mess dues was, however, not the same as being destitute or needy in an Athenian setting for a number of reasons. First, as we have seen, the tax was five or six times higher than the amount needed for subsistence. This may, in addition to providing

39 Arist. *Pol.* 2.1271a27–38 (trans. H. Rackham).

40 Phylarchos, *FGrH* 81F43, ap. Athen. 271e–f (trans. Hodkinson 2000: 355).

41 Aelian, *VH* 12.43 (trans. Hodkinson 2000: 355).

food for helots in mess/state service, as Figueira suggests,⁴² also have financed other institutions of Spartan society.⁴³

Second, the surplus from what remained of the struggling Spartan's farm had to be extracted at a rate of 50:50, the helots doing all the work for half the produce.⁴⁴ It was not possible to reduce the helot stock in order for Spartans to work on the land and increase their part of the surplus. That meant automatic exclusion from the citizen body as surely as defaulting on the mess dues. Neither could our prospective client add to his income by crafts or commerce, both of which were also forbidden.

Third, the really destitute fell out of the system long before they started to starve (the rest of the family, if they had any, were probably not so lucky). Failure to pay mess dues at the rate of five or six times the subsistence minimum would entail loss of citizenship status long before subsistence crises afflicted the Spartan himself.⁴⁵ To keep his household going without too much sacrifice, the man on the way down probably acquired both debts, enforceable by law, and 'friendly loans' such as we know from Athens. If he had not already attached himself to a patron early in the game, it was probably harder to get one once he was declassed. As *hypomeiôn*, he might bolster a rich man's retinue, and probably still be used as a soldier, but he could not participate in any meaningful way in the arenas where he could repay the benefactions that kept him alive. However, we know nothing of him and his like, apart from their revolutionary temper in the so-called Kinadon affair.

Fourth, social tensions in Sparta were either solved through personal patronage or removed from the body politic. This gave patron-client relationships a systemic function which is entirely alien to the Athenian context. Personal patronage, however, remained the privilege of a few. Even though the possible scope of patronage was enormous in Sparta, the constraints were significant, and the motivation of prospective patrons moderate at best. In order to keep a client within the body politic, it was not enough to keep him alive by adding to the surplus he could produce himself, as in Athens. He had to be kept not only on a comfortable survival level, but free from the necessity of working for a living. This naturally narrowed the extent to which personal patronage could save the system from itself. Apart from the cost of clients, what was their use, other than bolstering the

42 Figueira 1984: 97.

43 Neither of these suppositions, however, has any base in the primary sources, which are almost completely silent about state finance.

44 Figueira 1984: 104–5.

45 Figueira 1984: 94.

patron's prestige? Most positions of power were filled by appointment, not election (or sortition) as in Athens, either by the ephors, higher officers or the kings.⁴⁶ In order to succeed, a rich man needed patrons in high office even more than he needed clients. However, to reach high office, one did not have to be rich, as the case of the admiral Lysander demonstrates.

Although Lysander was from one of the semi-noble families, the ancestors of Heracles, the sources agree that he was relatively poor, and it is even claimed that he was one of the above-mentioned *mothakes*.⁴⁷ Consequently he was from childhood enmeshed in the web of patron–client relationships, first as client and later as patron.⁴⁸ As a young man he even became the ‘lover’ of the later king Agesilaos, a formalised relationship that boys in the *agoge* entered into at age twelve.⁴⁹ We know nothing of Lysander's rise before his election to be admiral in 407, possibly a brand-new office to cope with Athenian supremacy at sea.⁵⁰ There is no reason to doubt that he was considered an extraordinary talent, or that the long war with Athens would make the power brokers of Sparta even more willing to recognise ability in its more socially humble families. But there seems to be more to the story, as Plutarch relates:

he seems to have been naturally subservient to men of power and influence, beyond what was usual in a Spartan, and content to endure an arrogant authority for the sake of gaining his ends, a trait which some hold to be no small part of political ability.⁵¹

As an admiral stationed in Ephesos, he got the most influential men among the exiles and allies to contribute generously towards the equipment of the fleet, in exchange for promises to leave the cities in their charge after the victory.⁵² When his one year as admiral was up, these foreign clients of Lysander lobbied the Spartans to reinstate him.⁵³ Sent back as nominal vice-admiral, but in reality in full command, he vanquished the Athenian fleet and installed his foreign clients as

46 For those positions that were filled by election, we shall see later how useful clients could be in the loud and vociferous assemblies. The same goes for measures for which the elected or appointed office holder needed popular approval.

47 Plut. *Lys.* 2.1; Aelian, *VH* 12.43; Phylarchos, *FGrH* 81F43, *ap.* Athen. 271e–f.

48 Hodkinson 2000: 356: When Lysander rose in prestige and power he must have cast off his earlier bonds of dependence.

49 Plut. *Ages.* 2.1, *Lys.* 22.6.

50 Xen. *Hell.* 1.5.1; Kennell 2010: 125.

51 Plut. *Lys.* 2.3 (trans. B. Perrin).

52 Diod. 13.70.4.

53 Xen. *Hell.* 1.6.4, 2.16.

juntas in their home cities and his compatriots as governors of Spartan garrisons all over the Greek world.

Even after his private empire was dismantled by the kings and ephors in 403/2, Lysander had considerable personal influence.⁵⁴ We find him as king-maker in 400, in a dispute over the succession, but unfortunately we know little more than that Lysander successfully spoke on behalf of Agesilaos, in the debate regarding the interpretations of the oracles.⁵⁵ As he had for so long occupied a position of vast authority abroad, it would not be far-fetched to assume that many at home owed their personal advancement to him, and that this would have helped Agesilaos to the throne. Agesilaos reciprocated by taking Lysander with him to Ephesos to protect the newly acquired Spartan Empire from the Persians, only to find that his kingly status counted for little in comparison with the prestige of Lysander.

Since Lysander was so generally known, he was being constantly approached by people asking him to help them to get what they wanted from Agesilaos, and as a result there was always a great crowd of courtiers around Lysander wherever he went, so that it looked as though Agesilaos was an ordinary individual and Lysander was the king of Sparta.⁵⁶

Agesilaos decided to demonstrate the difference between a power holder and a power broker, sending away empty-handed all those who were recommended to him by Lysander. Henceforth, '[Lysander] no longer allowed a crowd to follow him about and he plainly told those who wanted to make use of his influence that they would be better without it.'⁵⁷

Leaving the illustrative case of Lysander, and returning to our main argument, we know next to nothing of what other material services a Spartan patron could bestow on his Spartan clients, besides the support through the *agogê* and for mess contributions Lysander himself may have received in his youth. Xenophon's *Agesilaos* vaguely alludes to various opportunities connected to imperial administration and the sale of booty, which enriched his friends (without defrauding the state), and mentions that the king abstained from taking possession of his inheritance, thereby favouring his kinsmen on the maternal

⁵⁴ Kennell 2010: 128, 131.

⁵⁵ Xen. *Hell.* 3.3.1–4.

⁵⁶ Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.7 (trans. R. Warner).

⁵⁷ Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.8. (trans. R. Warner).

side, who needed it more.⁵⁸ In Spartan society, fines were probably used quite often, but we have only one obscure reference to this practice being a source of patronage: In Plutarch's *Spartan Sayings*, a Spartan sentenced to death is quoted as exclaiming: 'I rejoice to think that I must pay this penalty myself, without begging or borrowing from anybody.'⁵⁹ From Athens we know that friends were supposed to help pay fines (and indeed any great and unexpected outlays), but also that this could be refused.⁶⁰

We are, thanks to the many court speeches which have survived, better informed about how patrons aided their clients in Athens. To take just two examples, Demosthenes and Lysias write:

If any of you are unaware that in my private life I am generous, compassionate, and helpful to the needy, I'll say nothing. I would rather not utter a word or provide any testimony about those matters, for instance, about any prisoners of war whom I ransomed from the enemy, or about the daughters of any citizens whose dowry I provided, or about any similar matters.⁶¹

In addition to this, he privately helped some of the poorer citizens by contributing to their daughters' and sisters' dowries, ransomed others from the enemy, and provided money for others for their burial. He did this in the belief that an honourable man should help his friends, even if nobody would know about it. But now it is fitting that you should hear about it from me. Please call that man, and the other one, for me.⁶²

Spartans rarely paid ransoms and funeral expenses were negligible by law. But helping out with dowries, which Aristotle thought were exorbitant in Sparta, was probably part of the repertoire of the better-off. In the middle of misogynistic ranting, Aristotle even tries to quantify the problem of land concentration, created by the division of an inheritance between sons, the custom of giving large dowries to daughters, and permitting heiresses to marry outside the family instead of bolstering the family fortunes of uncles or cousins:

It has come about that some of the Spartans own too much property and some extremely little; owing to which the land has fallen

58 Xen. *Ages*. 1.17–19, 4.1, 4.5.

59 Plut. *Moralia* (*Spartan Sayings*) 221f (trans. F. C. Babbitt).

60 Lys. 20.12.

61 Dem. 18.268 (trans. H. Yunis).

62 Lys. 19.59 (trans. S. C. Todd).

into few hands . . . And also nearly two-fifths of the whole area of the country is owned by women who inherit estates and the practice of giving large dowries . . . As a result of this, although the country is capable of supporting fifteen hundred cavalry and thirty thousand hoplites, they numbered not even a thousand [in the battle at Leuktra, 371 BCE].⁶³

Even if we are reluctant to accept Aristotle's estimation of female landholding and its evils, it fits nicely with Plutarch's story of how King Agis went about promoting land reform and cancellation of debts in the third century. One of his first steps was to win over his mother, who, 'owing to the the multitude of retainers (*πελατῶν*), friends, and debtors, had great influence in the state and took a large part in public affairs'.⁶⁴ The word translated as 'retainer' here, *pelatês*, is defined by Liddell and Scott as 'one who approaches to seek protection, a dependant'; also found in the Aristotelian *Ath. Pol.* 2, it is the closest equivalent to 'client' in the Greek language. The women turned economic power into social and political power through patronage.⁶⁵ The women, continues Plutarch:

joined in urging and hastening on the projects of Agis, sent for their friends among the men and invited them to help, and held conferences with the women besides, since they were well aware that the men of Sparta were always obedient to their wives, and allowed them to meddle in public affairs more than they themselves were allowed to meddle in domestic concerns.⁶⁶

Much of the crushing debt problem in the fourth and third centuries may have had an innocent beginning, in the form of interest-free loans. Over time, gratitude may well have given way to resentment, and the kind of renegotiation discussed extensively by Aristotle with regard to exchanges between 'unequal friends' and 'friendships based on utility'.

It is debatable whether in estimating a service and making repayment for it one should have regard to the benefit of the recipient or the generosity of the donor. The recipients assert that what they received cost their benefactors little and could have been had from other sources – thus trying to minimize their indebted-

63 Arist. *Pol.* 2.1270a10–35 (trans. H. Rackham).

64 Plut. *Agis* 6.4 (trans. B. Perrin).

65 Mæhle 2008: 65.

66 Plut. *Agis* 8.2–4 (trans. B. Perrin).

ness; the donors on the contrary insist that their services were the greatest that lay in their power, and could not have been had from elsewhere, and were rendered in the face of danger or some such emergency. Probably where the friendship is based on utility, the right standard is the benefit of the recipient; for the request is his, and the other supplies it in the expectation of getting back an equal return. So it is the amount of help obtained by the recipient that constitutes the value of the service; and therefore he ought to repay as much benefit as enjoyed, or even more, because that will be a finer gesture.⁶⁷

In the end this conflict could not easily be resolved for persons locked in a downward social and economic spiral, and the egalitarianism between the two parties would be abandoned, in favour of what Aristotle calls a 'friendship based on superiority', 'unequal friends' or, in our vocabulary, a patron–client relationship:

the superior friend should get more honour, and the needy friend more gain; because honour is the reward for virtue and beneficence, whereas the remedy for need is gain . . . This then is the way unequal friends should associate: the one who is benefitted financially or morally should give honour in return, making such payment as is in his power.⁶⁸

5 JUDICIAL HELP: ADVOCATES, WITNESSES, JURYMEN AND JUDGES

Except for a few celebrity cases, involving kings or commanders, brought before the *gerousia* and the ephors, we know little of how justice was carried out in Sparta. One of these cases, the trial against Sphodrias for storming an Athenian citadel under a truce, is described in detail by Xenophon, revealing that justice could be determined by the number of your friends:

Now the friends (*philoî*) of [King] Kleombrotos were political associates (*hetairoi*) of Sphodrias, and were inclined to acquit him; but they feared [King] Agesilaos and his friends (*philoî*), and likewise those who stood between the two parties.⁶⁹

67 Arist. *Nic. Eth.* 8.1163a10–21 (trans. J. A. K. Thomson).

68 Arist. *Nic. Eth.* 8.1163b 1–5; 12–14.

69 Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.25 (trans. C. L. Brownson).

Therefore Sphodrias said to [his son] Kleonymos: 'It is within your power, my son, to save your father by begging [your friend] Archidamos [son of king Agesilaos] to make Agesilaos favourable to me at my trial.' Upon hearing this Kleonymos gathered courage to go to Archidamos and begged him for his sake to become the saviour of his father.⁷⁰

Now when Archidamos saw Kleonymos weeping, he wept with him as he stood by his side; and when he heard his request, he replied: 'Kleonymos, be assured that I cannot even look my father in the face, but if I wish to accomplish some object in the state, I petition everyone else rather than my father; yet nevertheless, since you so bid me, believe that I will use every effort to accomplish this for you.'⁷¹

The story tells us that Sphodrias' acquittal was secured through the mobilisation of friends in high places. Kleonymos' remark about petitioning everyone else rather than his father only makes sense if indeed King Agesilaos was not alone in manipulating the system through such contacts. It would not be unreasonable to infer that the common Spartan's chances before the court rested not only on the quality of his defence, but also on the social network he could mobilise – to bear witness for him, certainly, but also to soften up the *gerontes* and ephors.

A full-scale trial, with five ephors and the entire *gerousia*, seems to be a bit of an overkill for more mundane court cases. Probably the ephors were able to punish lesser infractions with fines, a right which might also have extended to the polemarchs for purely military matters, like their counterparts in Athens, the *stratêgoi*. We know nothing of appeals, boards of popular judges or how judicial proceedings were carried out, below the 'supreme court', which was probably reserved for treason and matters of state more generally. We do know, however, that the Athenians, despite their reputation for being eager litigants, had several ways of dealing with both criminal and civil cases before they reached the courtroom.

Crimes such as seduction could be dealt with summarily, provided that one had willing witnesses to the crime and an agreement upon the justice of the punishment. A man caught *in flagrante delicto* as a seducer could, in Athens, be killed legally by the *kyrios* of the woman, but the killer had to be prepared to answer for his private execution

⁷⁰ Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.26.

⁷¹ Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.27.

of justice before a court of law if accused by the relatives. One such angry husband, Euphiletos, seems to have commanded enough respect among his friends to carry this out:

He [Eratosthenes] did not dispute it, gentlemen. He admitted his guilt, he begged and pleaded not to be killed, and he was ready to pay money in compensation. But I did not accept his proposal. I reckoned that the laws of the city should have greater authority; and I exacted from him the penalty that you yourselves, believing it to be just, have established for people who behave like that. Will my witnesses to these facts please come forward.⁷²

If there were doubts as to the veracity of a crime, however, the victim had recourse to legal proceedings. Private disputes were first subject to arbitration, with an official arbitrator picked from among the elder citizens. We can readily imagine similar tasks in Sparta taking up at least some of the time of the *gerontes*, but this was probably a more widely shared task. Prior to this, the Athenians preferred people to reach a private accommodation with the help of their friends:

I wonder, if he had true and just demands to make, why it was that, when our friends wished to settle our differences, and many conferences were held, he could not abide by their decision. And yet who could better have exposed the baselessness of claims advanced by him or by me than those who were present at all these transactions, who knew the facts as well as we did ourselves, and were impartial friends of us both? But this was plainly not to the interest of my opponent – that he should be openly convicted by our friends and find a settlement this way. For do not imagine, men of the jury, that men who know all these facts, and who now at their own risk are giving testimony in my favour, would then, when they had been put under oath, have formed a different conclusion about them.⁷³

Whether standing before the ephor or as party in an arbitration, in a society where the spoken word and a man's reputation counted for everything, and gossip was positively encouraged, the quality and size of one's circle of friends must have mattered a great deal.

Somewhat surprisingly perhaps, Demosthenes of Athens claimed that even in Athens the law was not equal for all citizens. The hubristic

⁷² Lys. 1.29 (trans. S. C. Todd).

⁷³ Dem. 41.14–15 (trans. C. and J. Vince).

Meidias not only punched his rival Demosthenes, but made life miserable for all who opposed him:

Some of his victims, men of the court, were afraid of him, his reckless behaviour, his cronies, their wealth, and all the other advantages this man possesses, and kept silent. Others tried to obtain justice but were unable to, while still others reached settlements with him, perhaps thinking this would be better.⁷⁴

Demosthenes further claims that Meidias was not alone in this behaviour, but was rather an example of a general problem. This might of course to some extent be special pleading, intended to convince the jurors to take the case seriously, but it seems unlikely that they would have been persuaded if his claim did not ring true in their ears:

Perhaps I need to say something about this too right now: in comparison to the wealthy, the rest of us do not share equal rights and access to the laws, men of Athens; we do not share them, no. These men are given the dates to stand trial that they want, and their crimes come before you stale and cold, but if anything happens to the rest of us, each has his case served up fresh. These men have witnesses ready to testify and well-trained men all available to speak with them and against us. Yet, as you can see in my case, a few men are not willing even to give truthful testimony.⁷⁵

According to Demosthenes, even when a commoner avoided the threats from the hubristic rich, they risked having both their own witnesses scared into silence, and corrupt witnesses arraigned against them:

But there are some, men of Athens, who are adept at being corrupted by the rich, following them around and testifying for them. Each of the rest of you, I think, who lives as he can on his own resources, finds all this terrifying. For this reason, stand united! Each of you is rather weak in some way, whether in respect to friends, property, or something else, but standing united, you are stronger than each of them and will put a stop to their insolence.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Dem. 21.20 (trans. E. M. Harris).

⁷⁵ Dem. 21.112 (trans. E. M. Harris).

⁷⁶ Dem. 21.139–140 (trans. E. M. Harris).

The validity of Demosthenes' description is supported by many sources,⁷⁷ but here it suffices to quote Aeschines, his contemporary rival:

As supporting speakers I call on Euboulos to represent the politicians and men of character, Phokion to represent the generals, a man who has also surpassed everyone in justice, and to represent my friends and contemporaries Nausikles and all the others I have mixed with and whose pursuits I have shared.⁷⁸

During the trial itself, friends were used as co-speakers (*synēgoroi*), and popular judges who knew the disputing parties were asked to verify statements by talking to those sitting next to them, clearly with no regard for the modern conception of inability.⁷⁹ Athens, with all its procedures to curbe undue influence over the law, was still a city where social capital was used to manoeuvre in the judicial system. Similar sources from Sparta, if they existed, would no doubt reveal even more of this.

6 POLITICS: APPOINTMENTS, ELECTIONS, DEBATE, MANOEUVRING

The normal preconditions for high office and ambassadorial positions in the ancient world were family connections, wealth, reputation and ability, and, as Lynette G. Mitchell has demonstrated, Sparta was no exception in this.⁸⁰ It was expected that a city would be represented by citizens of a certain standing, with names familiar to the hosts and with knowledge and abilities only the wealthy were able to acquire. Only the elite members of Spartan society were able to enter into formal guest-friendships, *xenia*, with elite members of other city-states, entertain on the scale and style proper for representatives of cities, and exchange costly gifts with them.

Mitchell finds that 34 per cent of all known Spartan ambassadors between 435 and 323 BCE had guest-friends in the cities to which they were sent as representatives.⁸¹ This is certainly indicative of a system dominated by personal relationships. As Mitchell points out, the procedure for appointing ambassadors is unknown,⁸² but a list of

77 Iseaus 1.7, 3.19; Lycurg. 1.20; Lys. 19.59; among others.

78 Aeschin. 3.184 (trans. C. Carey).

79 Plato, *Apology* 9d; Andoc. 1.33; Din. 41–2; Hyp. 4.11; Isoc. 21.1; etc.

80 Mitchell 1997: 73.

81 Mitchell 1997: 77.

82 Mitchell 1997: 78.

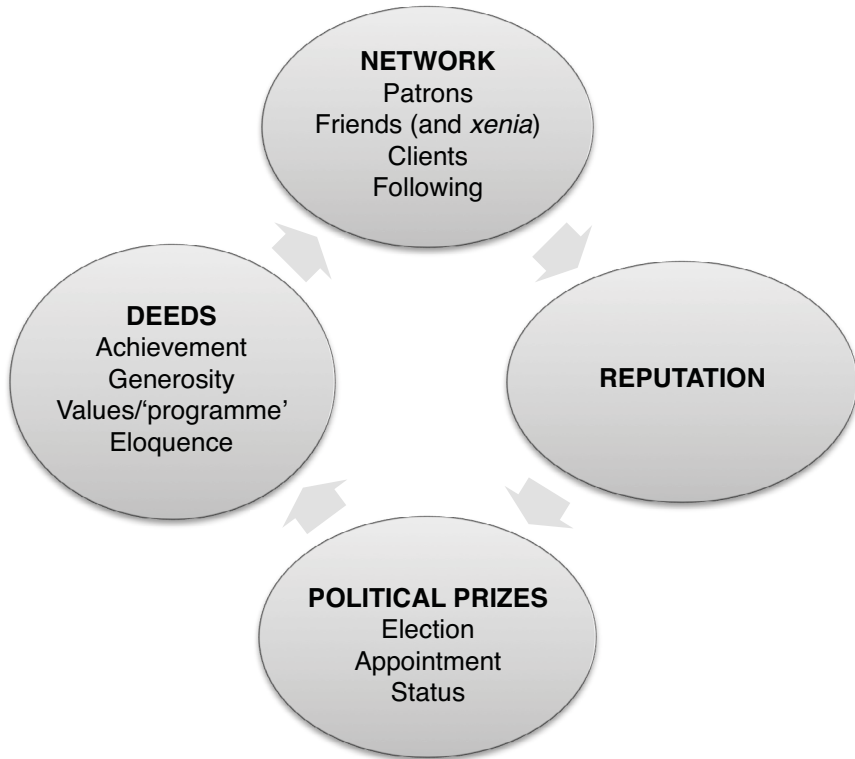


Figure 8.3 Political prizes

the possibilities clearly shows that the influence of internal patrons, friends and clients could have played a role just as important as the external *xenia* relationships:

1. Election by the Assembly from a list prepared by the ephors.
2. Appointment by the ephors.
3. Appointment by the gerousia.
4. Appointment on the battlefield by the kings.
5. Etc.

At this point, before we proceed to non-royal commands and ephors, I will introduce the final figure in the *quadrige* model (Figure 8.3), to explain how a prospective politician translated deeds into a network of associates and followers who bolstered his reputation, which was the basis of the political prizes such as election, appointment and status. In the second cycle, the political prizes, properly utilised, would add achievements to the politicians' record; provide opportunities for generosity in word, deed and material benefits to his

network; and demonstrate his values or even 'programme'. Examples of laconic eloquence are similarly connected to people in important posts.

This is not just a description of Spartan political competition, but could equally well be applied to Athenian or even Roman politics. The differences are to be found in the way the various political systems sought to prevent the cycle from running amok, concentrating more and more power into fewer and fewer hands. We have already noted that whereas Athens depoliticised the role of community patron through the liturgy system, the Spartans did away with this form of generosity altogether. Whereas Athens rather successfully divorced military power and civilian power, Sparta put military conquest at least partially out of the cycle by (1) reserving high command for the kings; (2) avoiding the establishment of a permanent council of generals, which would have been an institutionalisation of the general staff;⁸³ (3) allowing no re-election for the admiral, whose military power rivalled that of the kings; and (4) probably basing the selection of polemarchs on appointment by the kings.

Mitchell finds two probable ways of appointing subordinate commanders in Sparta; either by the supreme commander in the field, whether king or admiral (elected by the Assembly without possibility of re-election), or by a formal procedure at home, probably in the hands of the ephors (also elected by the Assembly without possibility of re-election). In contrast, all these positions were elected with the possibility of re-election in Athens. In Sparta, appointment was the chief way to military positions, and elections played an almost marginal role. Mitchell concludes: 'As Hodgkinson has shown, whatever the procedure, appointees were drawn from the Spartan elite, and private influence and patronage could play a part in securing appointments.'⁸⁴

Elections in Sparta, were, according to Aristotle, a childish affair, and thanks to Plutarch we are familiar with the procedure for the election of *gerontes*.⁸⁵ Assuming the procedure was similar for the ephors, we can say that election in Sparta was by acclamation (the loudness of the shouting was independently judged by a committee), and not by votes. This is partisan enthusiasm institutionalised. Even the well-ordered Athenian Assembly was influenced by shouts, heckling and various forms of acclamation and group pressure.⁸⁶ It would be no wonder if

83 Similar to the situation in Athens after the *stratêgoi* replaced the *polemarchoi*.

84 Hodgkinson 1993: 157–9, 161; Mitchell 1997: 81.

85 Plut. *Lyc.* 26.

86 Thuc. 6.13; Dem. 2.29, 5.15, 13.20, 18.143; Isoc. 8.3–5.

friends and clients of the candidates led the shouts of approval, much like the later theatre claque in imperial Rome.

7 CONCLUSIONS

General conclusions:

1. Patronage is a very adaptable beast.
2. We can safely assume the existence of it wherever there is inequality and competition, even without data.
3. Through comparison we can highlight the differences as well as the similarities with regard to how patronage functions.
4. The variations we see are the results of a city-state's social and political setup, and not the cause of this setup.
5. The rates of exchange favour the client in a more democratic regime, because his services are more valuable and he has more protection from the law.

Specific but tentative conclusions concerning Sparta:

1. Sparta was not a typical 'mass and elite' society, but consisted of layers upon layers of officials, most of them appointed because of their reputations for personal achievement. This reputation was propagated by one's friends and family connections.
2. To reach the top one needed to be appointed by one's superiors and recommended by one's friends. Some of these may objectively be called patrons, other clients.
3. In a society so geared towards a common ideal behaviour and obsessed with individual achievement, rumour control was of paramount importance. Without a core group of supporters to sing one's praises, defend one's honour and testify to one's worth, one's achievements would be either not noticed or soon forgotten.
4. In addition to the advantages of acquiring clients already listed, the rich probably felt social pressure to act as patrons, both towards the young and poor and towards their adult brothers in arms. Too many of such clients would, however, probably arouse suspicion, if the apocryphal story of Agesilaos being fined for making citizens 'his private property' is at all indicative of Spartan sentiment. Clients were, even more than in Athens, the 'lucky few'.

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