

# Thucydides and Herodotus on the Pitane *Lochos*

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THUCYDIDES FLATLY DENIED that the Pitane *lochos* existed or had ever existed in Sparta, referring to the belief in this and also in the casting of two votes in the gerousia by each of the Spartan kings as examples of vulgar errors about present-day matters (1.20.3). His censure was evidently meant to fall upon Herodotus as well, since Herodotus appears to attribute two votes in the gerousia to each of the Spartan kings (6.57.5) and in his account of the battle of Plataea mentions the Pitane *lochos* (9.53.2–3, 57.1). No one, it seems, would believe that each Spartan king did have two votes in the gerousia, but Thucydides' denial that the Pitane *lochos* existed has not prevailed against the apparent evidence of its occurrence in Herodotus' narrative.<sup>1</sup> Even if Thucydides is admitted to have been right about the Pitane *lochos* in his own day, Herodotus' evidence has been held to be valid and to show that, at least before Herodotus' day, the Spartan army was organized on the basis of territorial divisions of some kind.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The following works will be cited by author's name alone: J. K. ANDERSON, *Military Theory and Practice in the Age of Xenophon* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1970); W. DEN BOER, *Laconian Studies* (Amsterdam 1954); A. R. BURN, *Persia and the Greeks* (London 1962); P. A. CARTLEDGE, *Sparta and Lakonia: a Regional History 1300–362 B.C.* (London 1979); C. HIGNETT, *Xerxes' Invasion of Greece* (Oxford 1963); W. W. HOW and J. WELLS, *Historical Commentary on Herodotus II* (Oxford 1928); G. L. HUXLEY, *Early Sparta* (London 1962); R. MACAN, *Herodotus: Books 5–6* (London 1895); H. MICHELL, *Sparta* (Cambridge 1952); A. J. TOYNBEE, *Some Problems in Greek History* (London 1969); H. T. WADE-GERY, *Essays in Greek History* (Oxford 1958).

<sup>2</sup> See den Boer 170–79; A. W. Gomme, *Historical Commentary on Thucydides I* (Oxford 1956) 138; L. Pareti, "Le tribù personali e le tribù locali a Sparta," *Studi Minori di Storia Antica I* (Rome 1958) 77–92; Wade-Gery 70–85; Huxley 47–49; Toynbee 174–78, 260–65; W. G. Forrest, *History of Sparta 950–192 B.C.* (London 1968) 42–47; N. G. L. Hammond, *Studies in Greek History* (Oxford 1973) 73–84, 92–93; Cartledge 255–56. For older views see G. Busolt, *Griechische Geschichte I* (Gotha 1893) 537–38. That ancient lexicography, as represented by Hesychius *s.v.* Πιτανάτης, agreed on the non-existence of the Pitane *lochos*, and that Arist. fr. 541 Rose (= schol. Thuc. 4.8.9, *cf.* schol. Ar. Lys. 454) gave the names of the five Spartan *lochoi* with that of Pitane not included has encouraged rather than dampened speculation. What Caracalla thought he was

Thucydides' allusive censure of Herodotus here has seemed to some to be small-minded and even to imply an unwarranted coolness towards Herodotus' achievement as a writer of history.<sup>3</sup> This is unpersuasive. With a writer who deals only in *minutiae* there may be some ground for complaint that wider issues are neglected, but Thucydides was not narrow in his outlook nor was he necessarily unappreciative of Herodotus' merits. Herodotus' appeal as a writer cannot condone either in his day or now indifference to getting right a detail of so obscure and so important a subject as the development of the Spartan state. Whether Herodotus or Thucydides was right about the Pitamate *lochos* matters not so much for estimating either's standing as a historian as for seeing what their conflicting evidence on the Pitamate *lochos* can or cannot contribute to understanding the military and political organization of Sparta.

It will be best therefore to ascertain exactly what Thucydides was denying. In *καὶ τὸν Πιτανάτην λόχον αὐτοῖς εἶναι* (1.20.3) editors and historians seem to agree that *αὐτοῖς* should be understood as *τοῖς Λακεδαιμονίοις*.<sup>4</sup> However, the subject of the infinitive *προστίθεσθαι* just before is *τοὺς Λακεδαιμονίων βασιλέας* and, as these phrases are linked with *τε . . . καί, αὐτοῖς* too should be taken as referring to the Spartan kings. In this case Thucydides was denying that the Spartan kings had ever had such a thing as a Pitamate *lochos* and, to make it clear to any who might think that the Pitamate *lochos* was to be found elsewhere in Sparta than at the side of the kings, he added that it had never existed.

The kind of troops that could be thought of as belonging to the Spartan kings can only have been the elite corps of 300 *hippeis* that served as the royal bodyguard in the field. Each year the ephors chose three Spartiates of mature age to serve as *hippagretai* in command of the *hippeis*; it was the prerogative of each of these three to choose a hundred young men to serve as *hippeis*.<sup>5</sup> It was

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doing when he established a 'Laconian and Pitamate *lochos*' (Herodian 4.8.3, with C. R. Whittaker's note, LCL) is beyond conjecture.

<sup>3</sup> F. M. Cornford, *Thucydides Mythistoricus* (London 1907) 75; Huxley 48; Hignett 328 n.4; Burn 532 n.52; A. H. M. Jones, *Sparta* (Oxford 1967) 32; Toynbee 372; Cartledge 256.

<sup>4</sup> E.g., B. Jowett, *Thucydides translated into English I* (Oxford 1881) 14; A. Croiset, *Thucydide i-ii* (Paris 1886); C. F. Smith, *Thucydides I* (LCL 1919); J. de Romilly, *Thucydide I* (Paris 1953); R. Warner, rev. M. I. Finley (Harmondsworth 1972). To the works cited *supra* nn.1 and 2 add C. Schneider *Information und Absicht bei Thukydides* (Göttingen 1974) 137.

<sup>5</sup> Xen. *Lac.* 4.1-4; cf. G. Busolt and H. Swoboda, *Griechische Staatskunde II* (Munich 1926) 706.

clear to Thucydides, who knew something of Sparta and its ways,<sup>6</sup> that the *hippeis* were not the Pitanate *lochos* nor could a force recruited in this way be thought of as the Pitanate *lochos*.

How Greeks in general came to think of the *hippeis* as the Pitanate *lochos*, as Thucydides complains they did (1.20.3), could be variously answered, depending on whether Herodotus is thought to share in the common misconception or to be himself responsible for it in Thucydides' eyes. What Herodotus says about the Pitanate *lochos* (9.53.2–3, 57.1) is to be connected with what he says about the burial of its commander Amompharetus and some other Spartiates (9.85.1–2). In this passage Herodotus says that there were three graves for the Spartans killed at Plataea: one for the helots and one for the Spartiates other than those buried in the third who, according to the manuscript readings, were 'priests' (*ιρέας, ιρέες*).<sup>7</sup> Here editors usually print Valckenaer's emendations: *ιρένας, ιρένες*. Difficulties remain, which have been discussed by W. den Boer.<sup>8</sup> He shows that there is no support for Valckenaer's emendation in either the glossary known as the *Lexeis Herodoti* or in the fuller version of the gloss in question in the Paris manuscript of Strabo. Den Boer's own solution is to keep the manuscript readings at Herodotus 9.85.2 and to find support for it by emending Plutarch, *Lycurgus* 27.3, to read: *πλὴν ἀνδρὸς ἐν πολέμῳ καὶ γυναικὸς τῶν ἱερῶν ἀποθανόντων*. He takes this to mean "except in the case of a man fallen in battle or of a woman if they belonged to the *ιεροί*." The context in Plutarch is Lycurgus' prohibition of inscribed gravestones except for the persons mentioned, but Plutarch could not have chosen such a clumsy way to say that only priests who died in battle and all priestesses received inscribed tombstones. That the four Spartiates mentioned in Herodotus 9.85.1 happened to hold unattested and, as den Boer admits (297), unimportant priesthoods is incredible. Den Boer is also wrong in saying that only four Spartiates mentioned by Herodotus were buried in the one grave, for Herodotus was clearly being selective with the names he gives (9.85.1, *τῶν καὶ Ποσειδώνιος κτλ.*).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Note, e.g., Thuc. 5.16.3 on the ceremonies thought to have been used at the foundation of the monarchy (a neglected passage). See further P. Cloché, "Thucydide et Lacédémone," *EtCl* 12 (1943) 81–113; F. M. Wassermann, "The Voice of Sparta in Thucydides," *CJ* 59 (1964) 289–97.

<sup>7</sup> Herodotus appears to ignore the *perioikoi* (see Macan and How and Wells *ad loc.*), unless he loosely included them in the term 'Spartiates' (*cf.* perhaps 5.42.2). Pausanias' account of the graves (9.2.5) is of no help here.

<sup>8</sup> Den Boer 288–300.

<sup>9</sup> IG V.1 contains fifteen epitaphs in Lakonia for men who died *ἐν πολέμοι* (701–10 from

The serious difficulty raised against Valckenaer's emendation is that it would make Amompharetus an *eiren* although he was the commander of what Herodotus called the Pitamate *lochos*.<sup>10</sup> *Hippeis* were probably aged between twenty and twenty-nine years<sup>11</sup> and this seems too young an age for Amompharetus to have commanded a *lochos* or to have acted with the effrontery with which Herodotus' narrative credits him. He was not, as has

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Sparta; 918, 921, 1124–25, 1591 from the *perioecis*), all from the fourth century B.C. or later, as not much can be expected earlier. From Sparta itself before *ca* 300 B.C. there are three epitaphs that give bare names (699, 700, 712) and might possibly have belonged to priests, if not to men killed in war, not explicitly commemorated as such. 823–26 are so dubious that they must be disregarded here. In contrast, there are four epitaphs from Sparta for foreigners which give more than a name (715–19), although foreigners can never have been numerous in Sparta in comparison even with priests. Of the four verse epitaphs that fall before *ca* 300 B.C., one refers to a woman (720), one to a Cretan (?) (721); the third (722) remains uninformative, even after its reworking by A. J. Beattie, "An Early Laconian *Lex Sacra*," *CQ* N.S. 1 (1951) 46–58; the fourth (729) is thought to refer to a freed slave (?). An epitaph from Sparta (711) that gives the deceased the title *hιαπεύς* is a second century A.D. copy of a text of unknown date, but there is one (1338) for a priest from Gerenia (fifth century B.C.). There is nothing here to support den Boer's view, which fails for the lack of an epitaph explicitly honouring a priest who died in battle, while 714, 1128, 1277 honouring women who died in childbirth strongly support K. Latte's conjecture *λέχους* for *τῶν ἱερῶν* at Plut. *Lyc.* 27.3. Plut. *Mor.* 238D is no help for den Boer, who ignores it. The Spartiates' grave in the Kerameikos (La Rue van Hook, "On the Lacedaemonians buried in the Kerameikos," *AJA* 36 [1932] 290–92) is also against his view.

<sup>10</sup> How and Wells 325; den Boer 292; Michell 171–72.

<sup>11</sup> Den Boer 248–61 (a detailed discussion) concludes that the *eirenes* were twenty and twenty-one years old; cf. C. M. Tazelaar, "*Παῖδες καὶ ἔφηβοι*. Some notes on the Spartan stages of youth," *Mnemosyne* SER. IV 20 (1967) 127–53; G. S. Schwartz, "The Damonon stele—a new restoration for line 39," *ZPE* 22 (1976) 177–78. Xenophon speaks only of four broad age-groups: *παῖδες* (*Lac.* 2.1–3.1), *οἱ ἡβῶντες* or *τὸ μαιρακιοῦθαι* (3.1–4.6), those of mature age (4.7), and the old (10.1). The *ἡβῶντες* can be regarded as those aged from twenty to twenty-nine who are the youngest of the age-groups counted by years in the Spartan army: cf. G. Busolt, "Spartas Heer und Leuktra," *Hermes* 40 (1905) 403–05; A. Billheimer, "*Τὰ δέκα ἀφ' Ἡβης*," *TAPA* 57 (1946) 214–20; Anderson 243–46. For thirty as the age of maturity at Sparta cf. Plut. *Lyc.* 25.1. It is not clear from Xenophon if he included the *eirenes* amongst the twenty- to twenty-nine-year olds, *i.e.*, amongst *οἱ ἡβῶντες*: at *Lac.* 2.2 the *paidonomos* has 'whip-bearers' from *τῶν ἡβῶντων*, while at 2.11 each *ile* of boys (*παῖδες*) is put under "the sharpest of the *eirenes*." Elsewhere Xenophon (*Lac.* 4.7, 11.3, 13.9) speaks generally of the youngest soldiers. Possibly the name *eiren* was applied, even if only loosely, to those aged from twenty to twenty-nine, but Herodotus hardly provides plausible evidence that this was so (see *infra*). A population with more than 300 in the age groups twenty to thirty (600 in all?) presupposes a total for adult males of roughly 2000 (which is credible enough for Sparta before the 360s B.C.), if the same kind of death-rate applies for Spartiates as for other communities in antiquity (see S. Isager and M. H. Hansen, *Aspects of Athenian Society in the Fourth Century B.C.* [Odense 1975] 12–15).

been claimed,<sup>12</sup> a member of Pausanias' council of war, but displays of wilful independence on the battlefield that can be compared with Amompharetus' truculence are to be found only in Spartiates of some seniority.<sup>13</sup> It would be a desperate expedient to dismiss the incident of Amompharetus' defiance as a 'camp tale'<sup>14</sup> and so give up pursuing its implications. The tale of Amompharetus has very likely been improved in the telling but its kernel of truth may have included the fact that Amompharetus had the standing to be expected of a Spartiate who took his time over obeying a commander's order. Xenophon implies that to be chosen a *hippagretes* was an even greater honour than to be chosen amongst the 300 *hippeis*: in the competitive Spartiate system with its winners and losers at every stage,<sup>15</sup> the *hippagretai* had the task, as vexatious as it was satisfying, of publicly giving their reasons for selecting some and rejecting others. This was not a post to be held by three undistinguished Spartiates.

Xenophon (*Lac.* 4.1–4) also makes it clear that the *hippagretai* were chosen from τῶν ἀκμαζόντων, *i.e.*, from those who were thirty years of age and over, whereas the *hippeis* were chosen from τῶν ἡβώντων, the young men aged from twenty to twenty-nine. Thus, while the *hippeis* were a young soldiers' corps, their three senior officers were men of some maturity and proven ability, who can be compared with the candidates for the office of *sophonistai* of the ephebes chosen under oath at Athens by their respective tribes from men over forty years of age "who they consider are the best and most suitable to supervise the ephebes."<sup>16</sup> It may also be assumed that the same chain of command applied in the *hippeis* as in the rest of the Spartan army,<sup>17</sup> so that Amompharetus was the

<sup>12</sup> How and Wells 311 and 325, although Herodotus says (9.53.2) that Amompharetus did not attend this council and does not imply that he had any right to. K. J. Beloch, "Griechische Aufgebote II," *Klio* 6 (1906) 65, went so far as to make Amompharetus a polemarch.

<sup>13</sup> Thuc. 5.71.3–72.1 (two polemarchs); Xen. *Hell.* 7.4.25 ("one of older men"); nothing can be concluded either way about the "certain man" of Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.22.

<sup>14</sup> How and Wells 311; Burn 532. Hignett 329–32 hardly defends the authenticity of the story by dwelling on the difficulty of substituting any other reason for the delay.

<sup>15</sup> M. I. Finley, "Sparta," in J.-P. Vernant (ed.), *Problèmes de la guerre en Grèce ancienne* (Paris 1968) 147.

<sup>16</sup> Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 42.2; compare Xen. *Lac.* 2.2, 4.6, and Plut. *Lyc.* 17.2, on the Spartan paidonomos.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Thuc. 5.66.2–4, 3.109.1, 4.38.1. One of the six polemarchs was senior to the rest (Xen. *Lac.* 11.4, 12.6; *Hell.* 4.2.22) and so too was one member of a king's personal suite (*Lac.* 13.7).

senior of the three *hippagretai* and held the position of responsibility that enabled him to make his mark at Plataea. Strictly speaking, he was not an *eiren* and Herodotus should not have spoken of him as one at 9.85.2, but he would have felt nothing repugnant to common sense in speaking of an older commanding officer along with the dead from the elite young soldiers' corps with whom he lay buried. Herodotus would not have been alert for the distinction in age and status between the officer and the rank-and-file.

The *hippeis*' normal duty on campaign was to serve as the royal bodyguard, and the Spartan commander at Plataea was not a king but the regent Pausanias. However, the *hippeis* were a standing force and did perform other duties, such as escorting a guest of honour (Hdt. 8.124.3) or police-action against internal subversion (Xen. *Hell.* 3.3.9). It would not have been stretching a point to have had the *hippeis* serve as a bodyguard for the regent in command at Plataea, especially at a time when Sparta sent out a full levy of troops for service outside the borders (Hdt. 9.28.2, 29.1).<sup>18</sup> The difference of opinion between Pausanias and Amompharetus, whatever form it actually took, may have had something to do with the latter's feeling that attendance by the corps upon a regent was not quite in keeping with its dignity, especially when the regent's orders began to disregard strict military honour (Hdt. 9.53.2).

Valckenaer also proposed reading *ἰππέας* at Herodotus 9.85.1.<sup>19</sup> Although, on the argument given above, his intuition was right, his other correction *ἰπένας* (-εϛ) is to be preferred since it is far likelier that the manuscript readings *ἰπέας* (-εϛ) arose from this than from *ἰππέας* (-εϛ). Moreover, Herodotus knew what the *hippeis* were,<sup>20</sup> but he did not connect Amompharetus and the *eirenes*' tomb with them. His interest here lay not in any precise detail of Spartan military organization but in the striking incident of

<sup>18</sup> Archidamus, heir apparent to Agesilaus, was not attended by the *hippeis* when holding a command against the Arcadians but had some thirty distinguished Spartiates as a bodyguard (Xen. *Hell.* 7.4.23, and compare 6.4.13 for the phrase *οἱ μαχόμενοι πρὸ αὐτοῦ* also applied to the *hippeis*). Cf. *infra* n.20.

<sup>19</sup> Known to me only through den Boer 290.

<sup>20</sup> Hdt. 1.67.5; 8.124.3. Yet at 6.56.2 Herodotus speaks of 100 *λογάδες* attending the kings (not, as is often said, 'each king'), this being only one of the problems presented by his excursus on the Spartan kings (6.56–8). Michell 249 believes both in the *hippeis* as a "brigade of guards" and in a separate "corps of 100 picked men" without explaining the difference; the Olympic victors whom he assigns to the latter belong rather to a king's personal suite (cf. Xen. *Lac.* 13.1 and 7, 15.4–5; *Hell.* 4.5.8, 7.4; 6.4.14). See in general Anderson 247–49.

Amompharetus' truculence (9.53.2–57). He recorded the names of Amompharetus and three others from amongst those on the tomb (9.85.1) because these four had all been mentioned in his narrative, Amompharetus alone in a memorable story and then all four in Herodotus' report of the Spartans' award of posthumous battle honours (9.71.2–72).

Herodotus' notion that what Amompharetus commanded was the Pitanate *lochos* may be traced back to his meeting with Archias at Pitane in Sparta (3.55.2) and a guess made as to how he misled Herodotus: local pride led Archias to speak of the elite corps that had included those awarded the prize of valour at Plataea as if it was, for all practical purposes, made up of the young men of Pitane who, at least in Archias' opinion, always dominated the competitive selection of *hippeis*. So Herodotus came away with the impression that the *hippeis* were called the Pitanate *lochos* and that they were all *eirenes*, and what he saw of the Spartan graves at Plataea did not run counter to this impression. It is probable that, in Herodotus' day, personal and therefore local associations played some part in forming the troops of boys, *eirenes*, and adults who took part in the various competitions of the Spartan discipline,<sup>21</sup> even if only to the extent that those who selected the teams were more inclined to see merit in the relatives and friends who lived near them than elsewhere. So the appearance of the Pitanate *lochos* in Herodotus is evidence of the pervasive spirit of emulation at Sparta and also perhaps of some Spartan jocularly of which Herodotus was the victim, but not, as has been claimed repeatedly in modern times, of any territorial political and military organization at Sparta, not even at the time of the battle of Plataea.

Herodotus' good faith is not in question over what he said about the Pitanate *lochos*: where he went wrong was in a lack of concern over detail. In contrast, Thucydides alone of the Greek writers pointed out how difficult it was to get correct information about Sparta even in his own day (1.20.3, 5.68.2), but his warning was ignored and later writers discoursed freely on Sparta without showing much concern over the problem of evidence involved in almost anything to do with Sparta. How Thucydides dealt with

<sup>21</sup> Xen. *Lac.* 9.5 refers to selecting adults for teams of *sphaireis*. On the later evidence for the local and personal factors in the formation of Spartan groups for training and sport, see K. M. T. Chrimes, *Ancient Sparta* (Manchester 1949) 84–136, 442–70, though at 318 she was wrong to see in Hdt. 9.53.2–57.2, 71.2–72, and 85.1 evidence for four locally recruited *lochoi* of *hippeis*.

this problem can be seen when for once in his work he showed something of his method of enquiry into what might have seemed a public and obvious enough fact, the numbers of the Spartan army at Mantinea (5.68.2–3). It follows that Thucydides' deliberate statements on Spartan institutions are not to be set aside unless there is superior evidence to the contrary and that such a denial by him of the existence of the Pitamate *lochos* should serve as a corrective for modern theories about any territorial organization of the Spartan state.<sup>22</sup>

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY  
October, 1980

<sup>22</sup> As against, for example, Wade-Gery (when developing such a theory) 76–77: “Thucydides has slipped up badly. . . . he extrapolated rashly (we are hardened to his manners).” On the proliferation of such theories see further M. A. Levi, *Quattro studi spartani e altri scritti di storia greca* (Milan 1967) 28–41; F. Kiechle, *Lakonien und Sparta* (Munich 1963) 116–41. I am grateful to Mr G. T. Griffith who commented on an earlier version of this article.