



# Twin-born with greatness

## The dual kingship of Sparta

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This article examines the comparative configurations of diarchy by means of an extended analysis of the Spartan dual kingship in ancient Greece. Twinned and inseparable, both human and divine, the Spartan kings were themselves descended from celestial twins, hence it is argued that the Spartan diarchy is an empirical instantiation of the king's two bodies—the dual kingship as an expression of sovereign twinship. The essay goes on to consider other royal twins of Greek mythology, one of whom was usually descended from a god, and argues that such myths of dynastic origin constitute a cosmology of sovereign right in which the Spartan myth of stranger-kings of divine descent was opposed to the Athenian ideology of autochthony.

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The one phenomenon which remains a complete puzzle [in Sparta] is the survival of kingship, worse still, of a dual kingship. I have no explanation to put forward, but I will suggest that “survival” may not be the precisely correct word.

Moses Finley (1981: 39)

Is it conceivable that before the *eunomia* was established, or, as Herodotus would say, before Lycurgus instituted the *gerousia* and ephorate, Sparta was ruled by two kings, each having sovereign power over the state? We have all heard about kingdoms divided between two princes, or about co-regencies of father and son, but one can hardly visualize a single state ruled by two sovereigns.

Robert Drews (1983: 81)

L'historien ne peut pas donner la raison de ce partage de la royauté. L'attribuer à un calcul de politique est une pure hypothèse.

Charles Daremberg (1904: 892)

It may be useful to begin by putting the dual kingship of classical Sparta into a comparative frame. If it has analogies elsewhere, or better if it appears as a variant of more familiar systems of sovereignty, then it begins to shed its enigmas.

Dual kingships are found in many different civilizations and in a variety of forms. In virtually all diarchies, one or the other king is superior by virtue of a

closer relation to divinity; but otherwise the kingship varies according to two distinct principles of sovereign dualism. The two kings are sometimes different and complementary in function; or else they are in-alike, sharing the same powers. Let us call the first a *complementary* or *asymmetrical* diarchy, referring in this way to the organic division of the sovereign powers, as between a war-king and a sacerdotal or peace-king. As they differ qualitatively, each is supreme in his own function. But in diarchies of *symmetrical* form, the one king is the functional image or twin of the other. If differing in rank, they are in all other respects the same in privilege, as they are in sovereign function. This is the Spartan kingship, admittedly more rare than complementary diarchies. Yet both types can be found, in diverse institutional expressions, among the ancient Indo-European peoples.

The Romans knew both, though they put only one into practice. In Roman kingship traditions everything happens as if the Spartan concept of twinned rulers were consciously rejected in favor of a complementary dualism. According to the well-known legend, a functional division of sovereignty was introduced in Rome precisely through the failure of the joint rule of twins, Romulus and Remus – failure of the kind of diarchy that in Sparta was the beginning of dynastic wisdom. Sired by Mars, Romulus and Remus had “an unsociable love of rule” (Dion. Hal. *Rom. Ant.* 1. 85). When sent off from Alba by their royal grandfather, together with his own rebellious subjects, the twins divided their party in two with the intention of stimulating a useful rivalry. But the effects were ultimately fratricidal: fatal to Remus and to the project of a twinned kingship. Instead, Rome was founded by a combination of peoples of different qualities, the militant Latin invaders and the (re)productive Sabine aboriginals, whose respective kings Romulus and Tatius initially shared power as joint rulers. Thereafter, Rome would be alternately governed by kings of the violent Latin type and the more judicious Sabine type—in Dumézil’s terms, *celeritas* kings and *gravitas* kings—who thus incarnated the cultural dispositions of the two founding peoples.

As the tradition goes, Romulus presumably killed his co-king Tatius (according to Livy 1.10), and then himself disappeared without issue. The kingship devolved upon the Sabine, Numa, whose reasoned and ritualized reign makes a strong contrast with the “sacred violence” of Romulus. Unlike Romulus, whose creative acts of sovereignty included rape, ritual sacrilege (falsification of the auguries), fratricide, regicide, and a thirst for conquests, Numa weaned Rome from war and instituted the cults of order and prosperity. Numa was succeeded by the warlike Tullus Hostilius, the latter by the peaceable Ancus, and so character of kingship alternated to the second Tarquin and the end of the monarchy. For Dumézil, the contrast between Romulus and Numa in particular was characteristic of the complementary dualism of Indo-European sovereignty (1949: 143–59).

In various writings (1948; 1949, etc.), Dumézil develops this contrast between the magical war-king and the judicial peace-king, between *celeritas* and *gravitas*, by means of a series of correlated oppositions. The two types are contrasted as sacred force is opposed to reasoned order, youthful warrior to venerable legislator, will to intelligence, act to decision, and other-worldliness to this-worldliness (or divine to human). For Rome, Romulus and Numa are the prototypes; but Dumézil finds the most general expression of this complementary dualism in another realm, the famous couple of Indic sovereign gods Mitra and Varuna, even as the same distinctions may be discovered in other systems of complementary rule, as between

the *kshatriya* and the *brahmin*. And there is still another kind of variation: the different ways such dualism is institutionalized as kingship.

The complementary powers *may* or *may* not be realized in diarchy, a double kingship. In the instance of Romulus and Tatius presumably they are; and one may add less equivocal Indo-European examples such as the Celtic chieftain and tanist. (Of course, there are numerous non-Indo-European analogues, as the sacred and active ruling chiefs of Polynesia, or emperor and *shogun* in Japan.) But in Rome from the time of Numa, there was but one king, and the two modes of sovereignty appeared in alternation, over time. Moreover, it would be easy to round out the set of permutations by instances of a unique king who synthesizes the creative violence and constitutional order of sovereignty in his own person. Descended of the Mayors of the Palace, whom Pirenne once styled the *shoguns* of the Merovingian king, Charlemagne as *rex francorum* was particularly endowed to so embody the royal duality.

The Roman and related traditions thus become instructive on several scores. First, even if it were only imagined in the native ideology, the change from a twinned kingship of the Spartan sort to a complementary dualism confirms that we are indeed dealing with a family of related structures. Asymmetrical and symmetrical diarchies belong to the same structural universe, as conceivable—and historically possible—transformations. Second, a distinction needs to be made between sovereign dualism as a *structural principle* and the manner in which it is institutionally expressed, the actual configuration of kingship. The same complementary opposition of royal powers may be variously manifest in a system of two kings who differ in function, in a dynastic succession of unique kings alternating in character, or at one and the same time in the duplex political being of an exclusive monarch. And finally, the Dumézilian parallels between ruling kings and sovereign gods—Numa : Romulus : Fides : Jupiter :: Mitra : Varuna, etc.—suggests a third conclusion, which will go a long way towards situating the symmetrical kingship of Sparta in the structural group at issue. There are two distinct principles of sovereign dualism: duality of the sovereign person, and duality of sovereign powers. Their intersection makes up the structural group.

The complementary distribution of powers between two rulers is one thing; another is the doubling of man and god entailed in concepts of divine kingship. The first is a political division of labor, a functional dualism, but the second is an ontological principle. The divine king is in some sense the double—the living form, the earthly successor, or the incarnation—of the sovereign god. Metaphysics differ: if we can again bring in comparative examples, Maori say that the sacred ruler (*ariki*) is the “resting place” of the god; Fijians, that the king is a “man god.” We can resume the variations by saying that the divine king is a twinned being; he is “twin-born with greatness.”

This *dédoublement* may easily escape notice as a dual kingship proper, insofar as the king’s two natures are combined in a single royal person. But if we can overcome our own dualistic prejudices about mind and matter, spirit and body, and privilege rather the structural principle over the institutional form, then the famous medieval doctrine of the king’s two bodies finds its place in the structural set. And the Spartan dual kingship then appears as a humanized version of the twinned sovereignty, an empirical expression of the king’s divinity by a mortal doubling of the royal person. Here it is simply that the king’s two bodies are tangibly present to experience.

In this perspective, the theological speculations of the Norman Anonymous (c. 1100 CE), cited by Kantorowicz, become paradigmatic:

We thus have to recognize [in the king] a *twin person*, one descending from nature, the other from grace....One through which, by the condition of nature, he conformed with other men; another through which, by the eminence of [his] deification and by the power of the sacrament [of consecration], he excelled all others. Concerning one personality, he was, by nature, an individual man; concerning his other personality, he was, by grace, a *Christus*, that is, a God-man (Kantorowicz 1957: 46; original emphasis).

The Norman Anonymous, moreover, goes on to explain that this *christomimetes* entails a dual ontology of *both* man and god, a metaphysical point also pertinent to the twinned kinship of Sparta (as we shall see). The god is (was) also a man, as the man is also a god—thus proving the interchangeability of the mortal and immortal sovereignties. Kantorowicz comments:

He [the king], the anointed by grace, parallels as a *gemina persona* the two-natured Christ. It is the medieval idea of Christ-centered kingship carried to an extreme rarely encountered in the West. The king is a twinned being, human and divine, just like the God-man. . . . (1957: 49).

In the same way that the correlated dualism of *celeritas* and *gravitas* on the axis of complementary powers is realized in several configurations of monarchy, and not always in diarchy, so this principle of the king's two bodies varies in social expression. Nor are the representations of divine mimesis so far noticed—the two-in-one (medieval Europe) and the one-in-two (classical Sparta)—the only possible permutations of a twinned sovereignty. Where the king is the living image of the god, the whole field of iconography is potentially in play: all the parallel figurations of the god as an empirical image (e.g., as in stone or wood) associated with king and kingship. The subset is complex, ranging from the doubling of the king in an icon of the sovereign god—the former metonymically as well as metaphorically identified with the latter through the mediations of sacrifice—to the exclusive rule of a sovereign image standing in for the king. Such image-inations were unsuppressible even in a Christianized Europe: not only in the commonplace figurations of Christ as the celestial monarch, but *in extremis* the replacement of the defunct king by a wooden image to whom all royal honors were accorded. The deceased Francois I was so iconically “impersonated” for over ten days (Kantorowicz 1957: 425–26)—as it were, a perfectly logical inversion of the king's two bodies, the natural form of the divinity endowed by human grace with the spiritual guise of royalty. In Sparta likewise, if a king died in battle, the funerary honors were paid to a statue of him (Herod. 6. 58).

When situated thus in a comparative field, the dual kingship of Sparta begins to lose its strangeness. Indeed, if we are prepared to so enlarge the perspective, it becomes possible to claim that not even was the mortal doubling of the king unique to Sparta. The substitution of a human alter-image of the ruler is a common feature of world (and kingship) renewal rituals. In these rites of cosmic rebirth, including the Saturnalia and its carnivalesque reflexes, the king's double acts often as the sacrificer and characteristically as the divine victim. But we need not rehearse here the whole *The golden bough*. The point is that Spartan diarchy

is intelligible as a permanent human instantiation of the king's two bodies, with the same sense of a divine legitimation.

Since Aristotle's reference to the Spartan belief that two kings made for the stability of the state (*Pol.* 1271a26), scholars have sought the *raison d'être* of the diarchy in its supposed functional or real-political values. (The common invocation of "survival" can be included here, as this is merely the limiting case of the same paradigm, i.e., non-functionality.) It is speculated, for example, that inasmuch as the two kings were a single legal person Sparta originally had one king, and then invented the second as a curb to individual ambition (Hooker 1980: 121). But how did Sparta alone come to this inventive solution? The Spartan kingship seems indeed more a problem of intelligibility—"the one phenomenon which remains a complete puzzle" (Finley 1981: 39)—than of functionality, except insofar as the latter also entails legitimacy. Even then, we shall see, the meaning of the dual kingship has more to do with Sparta's historical pretensions to supremacy in Hellas than with her internal problems of statecraft.

On the other hand, neither can the Spartan diarchy be resolved into a normal Indo-European form of complementary sovereignty. Not Mitra and Varuna, but Castor and Polydeuces, who were alike and inseparable. Equal in privilege and identical in function, themselves descended from an original pair of royal twins—which in Greek mythology generally is the sign of a double fatherhood, divine and human—the two Spartan kings by their very resemblance proved they were indeed born of Zeus, hence uniquely entitled to hold the sceptre in the Peloponnese.

### Nature of the Spartan dual kingship

The Spartan king, says Thucydides (in the singular, but it was true of both), is "the seed of the demigod son of Zeus" (5.16.2). The allusion is to Heracles. With the "Dorian invasion" and the elimination of the Atreids—the house of Agamemnon and Menelaus, which had held the sceptre of Zeus—the Heraclids were the last Greek royalty that could claim power by devolution from the Olympian sovereign. Indeed they alone could have been the last to do so by direct patrilineal descent, since Heracles' mother Alcmena was the last mortal woman with whom Zeus lay. With the destruction or demise of the collateral branches of Heraclids in Messenia and Argos, the Spartan rulers by c. 600 BCE were the only surviving Zeus-born lineage in the Peloponnese. And Macedonian claims to one side, by the beginning of the classical period the Spartan kings were the sole blood heirs in all of Greece to the Zeusian sovereignty. Hence they were, "of all men the most blue-blooded" (Ste. Croix 1972: 139; cf., Isocr. *Ep.* 9.3).

We are not (of course) taking the mythological and genealogical ground of the foregoing statements as "true history." But there can be no doubt that this mythopoetic consciousness of Spartan kingship was alive and well in the political life of the Hellenes through the Peloponnesian war and beyond. This suggests that the theory and practice of kingship in Sparta have to be understood at least as much from her external relations to other states—most notably her long-standing projects of domination—as from the internal relations of the Laconian polity. By the same token, the myths and rituals of Spartan kingship become historical "truths," at least as relevant as the kings' "factual" powers.

Three general characteristics of the Spartan diarchy stand out in the descriptions left by Herodotus, Xenophon, Plutarch, and the ancillary standard sources:

- (1) The divinity of the two kings: their exclusive association—and in certain respects, identification—with the sovereign god Zeus, and with the Dioscuri, Castor and Polydeuces;
- (2) The universal scope of sovereignty: sacrificial mediators between culture and cosmos, the kings' own lives were ritually and politically identified with the life of society; marked by wealth, their powers also included judicial and sacerdotal aspects, with a special emphasis on the external-military or protective functions of Zeus and the Dioscuri;
- (3) The symmetrical or twinned nature of sovereignty: the two kings were only minimally differentiated by descent while otherwise the same in privilege, and acted officially in concert.

These dimensions of Spartan dual kingship are interrelated; each is testimony to the others. In the discussion to follow, they are only nominally taken up in order, it being impossible to separate them absolutely.

Each of the Spartan kings is a double being. At all public feasts they received a double share of everything. Herodotus distinguished the religious occasions involving consumption of the sacrifice, where the kings are served first “and twice as much of every dish as everyone else,” from ordinary state dinners, where they are likewise “served with double quantities”—adding that they again enjoy the same privilege at private dinners (6.57). (Some of this may already be a reference to the Dioscuri, as: “The real guests at the entertaining of gods, *theoxenia*, are the Dioskouroi. They are celebrated above all in the Dorian area, in Sparta” [Burkert 1985: 107]). Xenophon commented that the lawgiver (Lycurgus) accorded the kings such privilege not that they might eat twice as much as others, but so that they could honor whomever they pleased (*Rep. Lac.* 15.4).

While taking note of the important point that the Spartans in this way and others gave their kings the means to appear as sources of largesse, such practical values do not explain the matter, since the kings also acted as two-fold persons in their legislative capacities. If absent from the *gerousia* a king is represented by his nearest kinsman among the elders, who is thus entitled to cast two votes *in addition to his own* (Herod. 6. 57; our emphasis). Nor would the intention to honor the king account specifically for the two-fold nature of the respects, as opposed to some other (and larger) numerical sign of the people's esteem, unless what was thus being recognized was the double nature of the royal person, part mortal and in part divine. Such issues are ignored by the familiar sociological observation—of which Xenophon's is an early example—that the double honors accorded the kings have the value simply of a status distinction, marking thereby the exalted position of royalty. We have to examine the precise content of such honors, to see just what is being signified.

Benveniste offers a relevant analysis of the pertinent term *geras*: the “honor” or the “honorific part” (as of booty) allotted to kings (*basileis*) in Homeric literature (Benveniste 1969: 43-50). He cites in this connection Herodotus' description of

the Spartan kings' double portions, as well as their places of honor at public games, care of the oracles, rights to the victims of animal sacrifice, and the like. "Each term [of Herodotus' description] seems to be made to illustrate a Homeric text" (1969: 47). Yet in certain of the Homeric texts adduced by Benveniste to support the point that *geras* refers distinctively to royal dues, the privileges in fact are being offered to the gods, in sacrifice. Benveniste fails to comment on this equivalence between royalty and divinity as *déstinaire* of the *geras*. Yet the equivalence concerns even the parts of the sacrificial animal. In the *Homeric hymn to Hermes* (122, 128-129), the divine messenger divides the slaughtered cattle into twelve portions as offerings to the gods, adding to each the honorable part or *geras*. The *geras* in question is the chine or back-portion, which is precisely the portion of the animal reserved: (1) to the Homeric king (*Od.* 4.65-66); and (2) to the two kings of classical Sparta (Herod. 6.56). "Why do they honor us like gods?" asks the Lycian king Sarpedon, referring to the prestations (*gera*) in cuts of meat, seats of honor, lands, and the like given to himself and his co-ruler Glaucus (*Il.* 12.310f). Once more the honors in question fit the Spartan kings—as do Sarpedon and Glaucus, on which more anon.

There is something more to the sacrifice. Xenophon tells that in the compact made by Lycurgus with the king(s), the lawgiver "ordained that the King shall offer all the public sacrifices on behalf of the state, *in virtue of his divine descent*" (*Rep. Lac.* 15.2; our emphasis). Apart from the usual (Maussian) association of sacrificer (and sacrificer) with the god through the mediation of a victim consecrated to the latter and identified with the former, the Spartan kings had an *a priori* suitability for the priestly office by virtue of their consubstantiality with Zeus: i.e., by descent. Thus they detained in particular the priesthoods of the celestial-encompassing and terrestrial-localized aspects of the god, Zeus Uranius and Zeus Lacedaemonius (Herod. 6.56; were these two priesthoods respectively held by the senior and junior branches of the Heraclid lineage?). Moreover, according to Herodotus, the kings were allotted the skins and chines of all animals offered in sacrifice (6.56-57; cf. Xen. *Rep. Lac.* 15.3). One cannot be certain but the statement appears to cover the offerings made by others, on occasions at which the kings were not present or officiating. At any event, the same significance attaches to the double portions due the kings at sacrificial feasts: the kings were not sacrificers merely, but in such rites played the role of the god, the one who consumes the offerings. There is nothing unusual or distinctively Spartan in the fact that men ritually consume the sacrifice, thus partaking of the divine benefits of the consecrated victim in a commensality with the god. But if the *gera* of the Spartan kings is testimony to their double being—i.e., being that includes a divine nature—then their double portion of the sacrificial offering makes the feast which follows more than a figurative communion with an unseen god. The sacrificial feast is an empirical communion partaken with existentially present gods, the kings. Hence the fact, already noticed, that the Dioscuri were the honored guests at the Dorian *theoxenia*, the "ubiquitous feasting of the gods." For the Dioscuri, we shall see, were the alter-images of the Spartan kings, even as the term means literally "sons of Zeus."

The texts on royal privileges in Sparta allude to several corollary intimations of Zeus. For example, in battle the kings were accompanied by a bodyguard of one hundred men, chosen from Sparta's finest—thus the "hundred-handed ones," offspring of Uranus, whom the latter had cast into the nether regions of Tartarus,

whence they were rescued by Zeus and became his fighting allies in the war with the Titans (Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.1-2).

And terrible strength was in their mighty forms. (Hes. *Theog.* 153)

The Spartan bodyguard would sooner suffer their own disgrace than allow the king to meet death (Isocr. *Ep.* 2.6). Likewise for any soldier it was a greater dishonor to fail to sacrifice oneself for the king than to throw away one's arms (Isocr. *de Pace* 143). Even the enemy, "fearful of spilling the blood of a Spartan king," would generally tend to avoid direct combat with him (Plut. *Agis* 21). So within Sparta the king's person was inviolable. Until the murder of Agis IV (241 BCE), and as documented even in Plutarch's description of the deed, it was hardly conceivable for anyone to lay violent hands on the king (Plut. *Agis* 19.9). A human modality, all this, of divine immortality—indicative also of the cosmic significance of the king's life for the existence of society.

Also corollary: the king's body was (in principle) without blemish, and his conduct without blame. One judges from the arguments over the accession of the lame Agesilaus (early fourth century BCE) that a physical defect in a potential heir was a disqualification, albeit in this instance not definitive. Especially inauspicious would be the defect of lameness, as it is the mythical sign of the earth-bound and earth born (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1977: 215-16)—hardly the pride of the immigrant *cum* celestial dynasty of Dorian Sparta, however much it might be honored in "autochthonous Athens." The faultlessness of the king was bound up with his role as sacrificer for the kingdom, thus with his metonymic connection to the god established through a victim that was likewise without blemish. But then, the blamelessness of a king would extend to his political conduct, on pain of incurring divine wrath.

The effect is a Frazerian relation between the king's goodness and the welfare of the state, to the extent that the king becomes politically accountable and subject to removal by other powers-that-be. Every ninth year, reports Plutarch, the Spartan ephors consulted the celestial signs regarding the king's conduct, and "if they chance to see a shooting star, they presently pronounce their king guilty of some offence against the gods, and thereupon he is immediately suspended from all exercise of regal power, till he is relieved by an oracle from Delphi or Olympia" (*Agis* 11.3). In a celebrated incident, Lysander as ephor claimed to have seen the inauspicious sign, temporarily bringing about the deposition of the King Leonidas, whose faults were that he had violated the ancient laws forbidding any of the royal blood of Heracles to settle in a foreign country or to sire children by a foreign woman (*Agis* 11.4). Speaking of Frazer, the practice can be considered a Greek version of famous ideologies of regicide, the doing-in of the failing ruler, based on the same correspondence between the king's perfection and the society's *eunomia*, but here modified by the inviolability of the royal person.

All this has bearing on current scholarly debates about the political powers of historical kings in relation to the other organs of rule in the Spartan polity: the ephors, the *gerousia* and the assembly (e.g., Drews 1983: 78-85; Ste. Croix 1972: 138-48). The issue is whether kingship was mainly (or merely) "symbolic," or else a real force in the decisions and affairs of state. Dispute is joined over the known or presumed influence of kings such as Agesilaus, and what this might imply about more obscure rulers and the kingship in general. We would not here enter the lists, except to say that, clearly, some did and some didn't. Some (as Cleomenes I), did



exercise considerable authority and had significant historical effect; others (as Leonidas II) could not even prevent their own deposition, banishment, recall from military command or liability to legal censure and penalty. Yet this variability, as it cannot be accounted for from constitutional principles, itself requires explanation. And what has been said here about the king's sacred status may offer some contribution.

For in the correspondence between the existence of the king and the well-being of society, there is room both for the ruler's exercise of charismatic leadership and his political neutralization. Both would come from this very correspondence, with its implications concerning divine favor and divine wrath, which a gifted king might mobilize to take command but rival forces could invoke to hold the king responsible. Embodying the polity, the king could take it in charge, but he was also then accountable. Otherwise neither the constitutional division of powers nor the presence (or absence) of outstanding personalities will be sufficient to explain the known variability of royal authority. Only within the encompassing doctrine of the king's divine powers are such factors given license to determine the *de facto* distribution of political powers. It follows that this distribution, as between the kings and others, will always be contingent and contextual, i.e. historical.

Operative thus in history and event, the structures of sovereignty are periodically subject to contingencies that, by the correspondence doctrine, become crises of major proportions: the death of the kings. In principle, society dies with the king, to be reborn with the installation of a successor, which is what Herodotus describes in the royal mortuary rituals of Sparta (6.58). Herodotus likened the unusual rites to barbaric practices, specifically to Asian (Persian) models (6.59). Perhaps significant historically, the observation is surely acceptable anthropologically, since the ceremonies are of the kind known to divine kingships worldwide.

The particulars of the funerary rites given by Herodotus are few, even peculiar; but in this wider context they become intelligible. At any rate, our interpretations can be confirmed by the parallels between the signs of royal power displayed at death and the documented functions of Spartan kings in life. The main interpretations of Herodotus' description of the funerary ceremonies are as follows:

(1) The catastrophe of the king's death is cosmic or universal, which is to say in political terms, imperial. Herodotus is careful to note that it not only concerns Spartans, but helots and country people (*perioikoi*, "dwellers around") from all over Laconia. A number of these conquered and outlander peoples are obligatorily required to attend the ceremonies, mourning intensively alongside Spartans proper in a "huge crowd" of many thousands. This is one of the similarities to the death ceremonies of "Asian" kings. It speaks to a comparable character of Spartan sovereignty: its universalist pretensions, like the Persian "king of kings." Remarkable from an Hellenic point of view, this quality of Spartan kingship is not unrelated to its other "anomalies," such as the attempt to make good by myth and war its unique claim to the succession of Zeus.

(2) The catastrophe involves the fertility or reproduction of the social order. Hence the curious stipulation that two people from each household, a man and a woman—i.e., a reproductive couple—put on mourning, on pain of heavy fine. Herodotus also observes that "men and women together" strike their foreheads

and otherwise display their grief at the ceremonies proper. The implication is that the king is the condition of the people's fecundity and prosperity.

(3) Another implication is that society dies with the demise of the king. Smiting their foreheads, while wailing and singing the praises of the dead king, the people inflict punishment upon themselves, in this way symbolically sharing the fate of the sovereign. But the suspension of the society has also a direct representation: for ten days after the funeral, only mourning prevails; all public meetings and elections—the normal affairs of society—are prohibited. Without the king, no social order, only the disordered excesses of grief.

(4) The new king, upon installation, re-establishes social life as a new beginning. "When a new king comes to the throne on the death of his predecessor, he follows a custom which obtains in Persia on similar occasions: he remits, that is, all debts owed by Spartan citizens either to the king or to the treasury. This corresponds with the Persian custom whereby a king, on his accession, remits arrears of tribute from all his subject states" (Herod. 6.59).

The installation of the new king is in this way the logical complement of his predecessor's death rites: if society dies in the latter, it is reborn in the former.

What we say of Herodotus' text is generally supported by Xenophon. He remarked that the funerals of Spartan rulers are more like those of heroes (demi-gods) than of men (*Rep. Lac.* 15.9). And of the death ceremonies of Agis II (c. 401 BCE), they were "more solemn than belongs to a man" (*Hell.* 3.3.1). Our interpretations might even so seem far-fetched, were they not also supported by the privileges and powers attested for living kings.

The mortuary ceremonies are the negative imprint only of the sovereignty; on the other side of the coin are the positive attributes of Spartan kings. Just as the funerals depict the kings as the condition of fertility and social reproduction, so the ruler in his style of life as well as judicial offices is specifically associated with fecundity, both sexual and proprietary. Plato says that the kings were the richest men in Sparta (*Alc.* 122c-3a). True or not, this is the impression the Spartans would manage by the economic prerogatives accorded their rulers: as many cattle as they wish, choice lands in *perioikoi* districts, their own lake near their house, not to neglect the double portions. Again the commentators (Herodotus, Xenophon, etc.) understand these arrangements as practical means of ensuring that the kings will be able to discharge their duties as sacrificers, as well as do honors to others. But they also mean that the kings will appear the embodiment of wealth by their property and the fount of largesse by their generosity. These material expressions amount to the same thing as the kings' sacrificial function, the finality of which is likewise the general prosperity.

The sovereigns' peacetime judicial rights are again similar. Surely they are restricted by comparison to the legal prerogatives of other organs of state. But if reduced to a minimum the kings' own magisterial roles are a significant—i.e., a signifying—minimum. The two kings were juridically concerned with familial reproduction and the transmission of estates, that is, in default of the normal domestic mechanisms of continuity. They selected spouses for unbetrothed women who had inherited estates, and attested to adoptions. Besides, the kings ruled legally on all matters concerning public roads, another reference of their

relation to the social totality. We have mentioned their charge of the public cult and their command in war, again real-political expressions of the cosmic sovereignty represented in the royal rituals of death. Without denying that all this may leave the kings with only limited constitutional powers, warfare perhaps excepted, it should be noted that their powers are *in kind* universal.

In Dumézilian terms the kings are both *celeritas* and *gravitas*: they exercise both functions of Indo-European sovereignty, judicial-sacerdotal and external-military. Or else, their dominion spans all three functions: priest, warrior and producer (source of wealth). And as both kings detain the same functions in all domains, the Spartan diarchy is not complementary. It is a universal and symmetrical sovereignty, encompassing all aspects of social life, with a special emphasis in the protective-military dimension—hence specially universal or encompassing in relation to outer nature, other people, and rival kings.

On military campaigns, the king(s) take(s) command. The sovereign leads on the march, issues the orders of the day, decides the places of encampment and (in principle) battle. The strategist in war, the king's judicial powers are also total in this context: he holds court on all matters of dispute, booty, etc. arising on campaigns. Likewise for his sacrificial offices. Before the army departs, the king makes offerings for success to Zeus “and the gods associated with him” (identified by Marchant [1925: 178–79, note 1] as Castor and Polydeuces). At the borders of Spartan territory he sacrifices again in order that the army may cross over into foreign land—if the sacrifice is unsuccessful, they all go home—and he makes the offerings too before battle. Regarding these sacerdotal activities, we underscore several features. First, the king rules transgressions of the border: he is the condition of the possibility of a Spartan imperial presence in Greece and beyond. This is once more akin to the funerary rites: the kingship, and only the kingship, and only the *Spartan* kingship has *transcendent powers*. Like Zeus. But also like the celestial twins, the Dioscuri: in battle, the kings particularly take part of Castor and Polydeuces, and vice versa. This relationship merits some comment.

The divine twins Castor and Polydeuces were kinsmen of the Spartan kings, at once through Zeus and in the human line of Heraclidae. The guiding stars of Spartan arms, who disappeared before the defeat of Leuctra (Paus. 4.26–27.3) and appeared upon Lysander's victory at Aegospotami (Plut. *Lys.* 12.1), the Dioscuri were also physically present in the Spartan host, in direct association with the Spartan kings. Their image accompanied the kings in battle: the *dokana*, a double cross-piece of two vertical and two horizontal staves (cf. Waites 1919; also Plut. *De frat. amore* 478a). Apparently a double-barred figure-H (#), the *dokana*, by its celestial and terrestrial orientations, seems a perfect icon of the dualities involved. After the falling out of Cleomenes I and Demaratus in campaign against the Athenians (c. 506 BCE), it was made illegal for the kings to take the field together. The image of the Dioscuri was then divided between the one who stayed in Sparta and the other who led the army. The Dioscuri, however, were not merely protectors or tutelaries of the kings; in war the kings played the role of their divine counterparts, most particularly of Castor, who was the son of a human father and the strategist.

When their army was drawn up in battle array, and the enemy near, the king sacrificed a goat, commanded the soldiers to set garlands upon their heads, and the piper to play the tune of the hymn to Castor, and himself

began the paean of advance (Plut. *Lyc.* 22.2-3; n.b., the composition of the war paean was attributed to Castor).

Protected by twins, identified metaphorically with twins, the Heraclid dynasty of Sparta was born of twins (fig. 1). These were Procles and Eurysthenes, the sons of Aristodemus, a direct descendant of Heracles (in the fifth generation). Aristodemus had been heir by lot to Sparta in the so-called Heraclid return. According to the usual account, however, he died before the conquest; the twins, ruling jointly, were the beginning of the dynasty. Herodotus retails another version which, he says, the Spartans tell themselves, differing by the assertion that Aristodemus did reign over Laconia, only to die shortly after the birth of his sons and successors. The apparently minor difference in fact encodes another claim to legitimacy, apart from conquest, and we shall return to it presently. Here we would complete the general discussion of Spartan kingship by remarks on its character as a symmetrical diarchy.

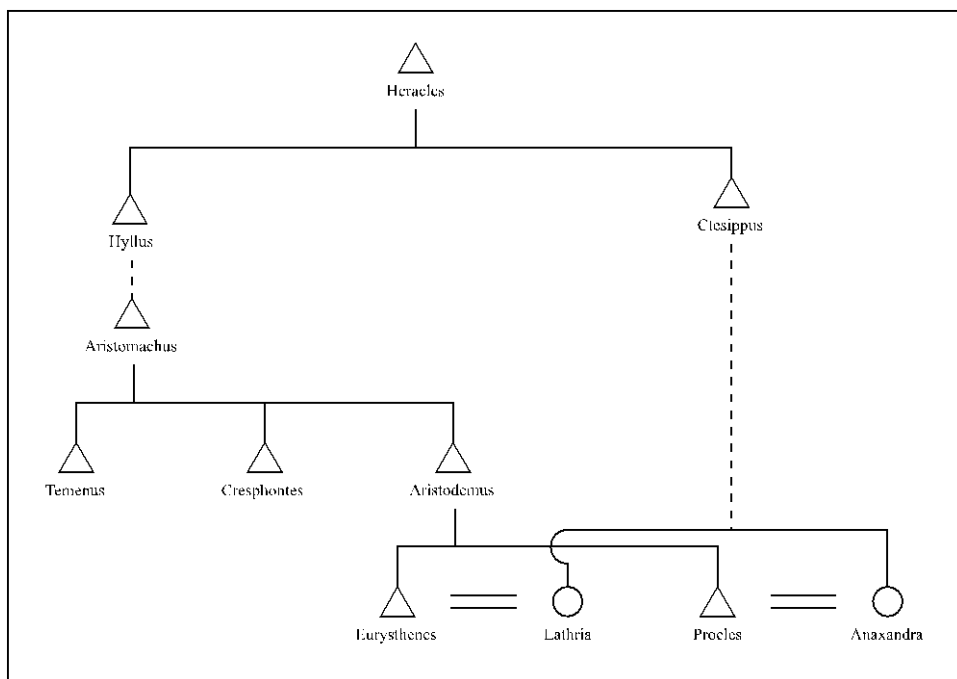


Figure 1. Genealogy of the royal Spartan twins.

Rather than a complementary dualism of sovereign functions, the Spartan is a mirror kingship. The kings are mirror images of each other in action as they were in origin. The original twins, Procles and Eurysthenes, Herodotus recounts (6.52), could not even be told apart: “they were both the same size and each exactly like the other.” Nor could (or rather, would) their mother tell the difference, thus frustrating the Spartans’ desire to make the elder one the king. The Delphic oracle advised that both be kings, allowing the elder only the greater “honour.” Still stymied by this, the Spartans on the suggestion of a Messenian man watched the mother—who in fact knew the difference well enough—to see which one she fed and washed first. So they were able to determine that Eurysthenes was the elder

and had him brought up at the public expense. His descendants thenceforth ruled as the senior line, the Agiadae, but jointly with the cadet branch from Procles, the Eurypontidae.

The kingship was minimally differentiated. It even began in twin mothers as well as twin fathers: Procles and Eurysthenes married twin sisters, Lathria and Anaxandra, who also descended (in the paternal line) from Heracles (Paus. 3.16.6). Thereafter, the single important difference between their respective descendants was seniority in the Heraclid line. However, this is one of those differences that make a difference, a distinctive feature (structurally speaking) signifying “greater honor,” which is to say in Greek closer to god. On the other hand, since the two kings are otherwise identical, the *sequitur* must be that the god = the man. In this mirror sovereignty, each king not only sees himself in the other, but a reflection of divinity.

This helps account for the Spartans’ insistence, throughout the history of the dynasty, that there must be two kings, and that they must respectively derive (in the paternal line) from the two Heraclid branches, the Agiads and the Eurypontids. If a king died leaving a minor heir, a regent was appointed from among his close kin. If a king were dethroned, he was succeeded by another from the same house. The one exception is relatively late and of the kind that “proves the rule.” Cleomenes III (236–222 BCE) attempted to make his own brother Euclidas partner in the throne (Plut. *Cleom.* 11.3). But precisely this was part of Cleomenes’ vain project to revive the *ancien régime*: he would begin the kingship anew.

Twinned by origin, the two kings were indistinguishable in authority and in action. Except that one was the priest of Zeus Uranius and the other of Zeus Lacedaemonius, no distinction appears in the texts in their sovereign powers, whether juridical, sacerdotal or military. Nor is there any indication that one was superior to the other in social privilege or political authority. Until the rule that only one could take the field at a time, they appear to have done everything official together; they even lived and messed together in the same tent (as *suskenoi*; Xen. *Hell.* 5.3.20; *Rep. Lac.* 15.5; Plut. *Ages.* 20.5). Herodotus surely exaggerated when he said that the descendants of Procles and Eurysthenes quarrelled ever after, as those two did all their lives (6.52; cf. Ste. Croix 1972: 140). Even when they were at odds politically, as were Agesipolis I (395–380 BCE) and Agesilaus II (400–360 BCE), they could remain intimate personally. One might have expected, says Xenophon, that Agesilaus would have been pleased when he heard of Agesipolis’ death, as one is at the death of a rival,

but in fact he wept and mourned for the loss of a comrade; for, of course, the Spartan kings mess together when they are at Sparta. And in all their conversations about their young days, hunting, horsemanship or love affairs, Agesipolis was excellent company for Agesilaus. He also treated him, as the elder man, with becoming respect in all relations which arose out of their shared quarters (*Hell.* 5.3.20).

The constitutional necessity that there be two kings, of two lines, sharing both public functions and private lives, implies that they were a single royal person. Herodotus (6.50) recounts certain incidents involving the disposition of hostages in which the other cities concerned, Aegina and Athens, refused to comply with Spartan demands on grounds that they had been made by one king only; whereas, admitted the Aeginetans and the Athenians, they would have been liable if the

Spartan kings had acted jointly. Ste. Croix's probable conclusion about these episodes seems of more general applicability: in principle, only on the condition that they acted in concert could the king represent the Spartan state (1972: 150–51).

Just what did this principle mean? And why were the Spartans so tenacious of it? Certain answers, we shall argue, can be deciphered from the precedents and paradigms of Hellenic myth. Myth tells that the Spartan kings were not the first such twinned rulers in Hellas. At the same time, these ancient mythic prototypes give the sense of Spartan historical practices. For they organize the historical experience and practice of kingship.

### **The mytho-praxis of dual kingship**

We take Spartan kinship as a good instance of what has been called “mytho-praxis”: the projection of the relationships of cosmological myth onward into historical action (cf. Sahlins 1981, 1985). This is not to prejudge whether any such relationship found in myth is “historically true,” wholly or partially. Nor do we allege that the Spartan kingship is the mere “survival” of Homeric or other venerable prototypes, without functional significance. Our understanding is that the mythical tradition of dual sovereignty was selectively and uniquely elaborated in Sparta by an unfolding relation to the historical conjuncture. It was a claim, based on ancient pan-Hellenic authority, to the legacy of “Dorian,” and beyond that “Mycenaean,” dominance in the Peloponnese. And as the Mycenaean (or Achaean) kingship had even greater pretensions, the same claims could be made, as the occasion arose, to leadership against the Persians and superiority over earth-born Athens.

### ***Dynastic succession in the Peloponnese***

Sparta's pretensions as against Athens, the claims of the allochthonous people over the autochthonous, invoke a theory of sovereignty widespread in ancient Hellas, not to mention Indo-European peoples generally (cf. Sahlins 1985, chap. 3). The concept was especially marked in the Peloponnese. The so-called Dorian conquest was the last only in a series of dynastic successions of the same type. Nor does it exaggerate to say that in terms of the categories at issue the prototype was Cronus' emasculation of the Sky (Uranus) and appropriation of the fruits (the daughter, Rhea) of the Earth (Gaia). Zeus immediately followed with a repetition of such exploits at the expense of his father Cronus, whence the universal domination of the Olympian sovereign god. What marks the Peloponnese in general and Sparta in particular is the claim of a sovereign devolution from Zeus, hence a parallel human hegemony over other kings and peoples, whether born of the earth or of other heroic ancestry.

Cosmogony is translated into an epic tale of dynastic succession: the advent of a stranger king of violent dispositions and Zeusian antecedents, who typically marries the daughter of an earlier or indigenous ruler, assassinates the latter, and so gains the kingdom. Such usurpers are foreign, celestial or what is a transformation of the last one on a human plane, migratory. Their predecessors are aboriginal, or relatively so by contrast, and terrestrial. Twin kings are part of this theory of sovereignty, we shall see, as are certain forms of royal incest and royal endogamy (father's brother's daughter marriage). And all these structural features conspire to make usurpation itself the principle of the legitimacy.

The seeming paradox of a “legitimate usurpation” expresses the double descent of the conquering dynasty. On the one side, through the appropriation of the indigenous princess, the stranger-king bestows the royalty of his predecessors on his descendants, i.e., through matrilineal affiliation. On the other side, the paternal, the dynasty is heir to the favor and charismatic powers of the sovereign Zeus. Such was the double legacy of the Heraclids, as of the Perseids and the Atreids before them.

Ancestor of the Dorian conquerors, Heracles of valorous feats was the son of Zeus by the woman Alceme (fig. 2). Alceme was the daughter of a Mycenaean king, Electryon, and through Electryon the granddaughter of Perseus, founder of the city. As for Mycenae in pre-Dorian Argos, it was the seat of Agamemnon and the ancient Achaeans, thus the legendary (as well as historical) source of a kingship supreme among the peoples of Greece. The founder Perseus, whose own legendary feats Heracles would equal (e.g. slaying of the gorgon Medusa) and surpass, this Perseus, says Herodotus, had “no human father by whose name he could be called,” but only Zeus (6.53). And Perseus had come to power by a crime against kinship, purportedly accidental: he killed his mother’s father Acrisius, effectively putting an end to the earlier dynasty of the Danaides. On the one side, affinal succession. On the other, conquest, regicide, and more: the anti-structural exploits of a usurping king that are the proof of his own transcendent lineaments. The stranger-king is worthy of his descent from Zeus.

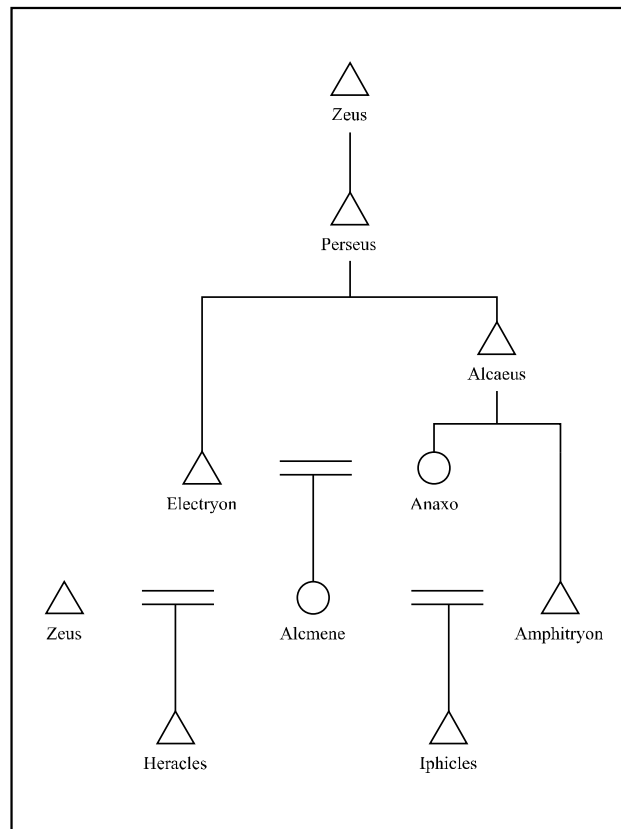


Figure 2. Genealogy of Heracles.

Between the house of Perseus and the return of the Heraclids (the Dorian conquest), the Atreids ruled in the Peloponnese (fig. 3). Agamemnon, son of Atreus, held the sceptre of Zeus, as Homer tells in a well-known passage (*Il.* 2.100-108), and therefore the leadership of all the Greeks against Troy. The Atreids had achieved their distinction by the same combination of marital and martial exploits. Their migratory ancestor was Pelops, Atreus' father, author of a famous ruse that allowed him to carry off the royal woman Hippodameia and cause the death of her father Oenomaus, king of Pisa and Elis. Thereafter Pelops' sons spread over the Peloponnese, taking the kingships of many cities and elevating their father to the status of eponym of the whole region. Pelops' own father Tantalus, a king in Asia Minor (Lydia), was said by some to be a son of Zeus—thus accounting for the passage of the sceptre to Agamemnon via Pelops, as Homer tells. The sinister character of the Atreids was passed down in the same line. Their history was an unending tale of incest, fratricide and parricide (*cum* regicide); and of the acquisition of kingship by marriage—Menelaus and Orestes in Sparta, Aegisthus in Mycenae. The historic Spartans were eager to identify with these Achaean kings, and with their legendary sway. They would even appropriate and take to Sparta the bones of Orestes and again of his son Tisamenus, so metaphorically capturing an Achaean ancestry (see below).

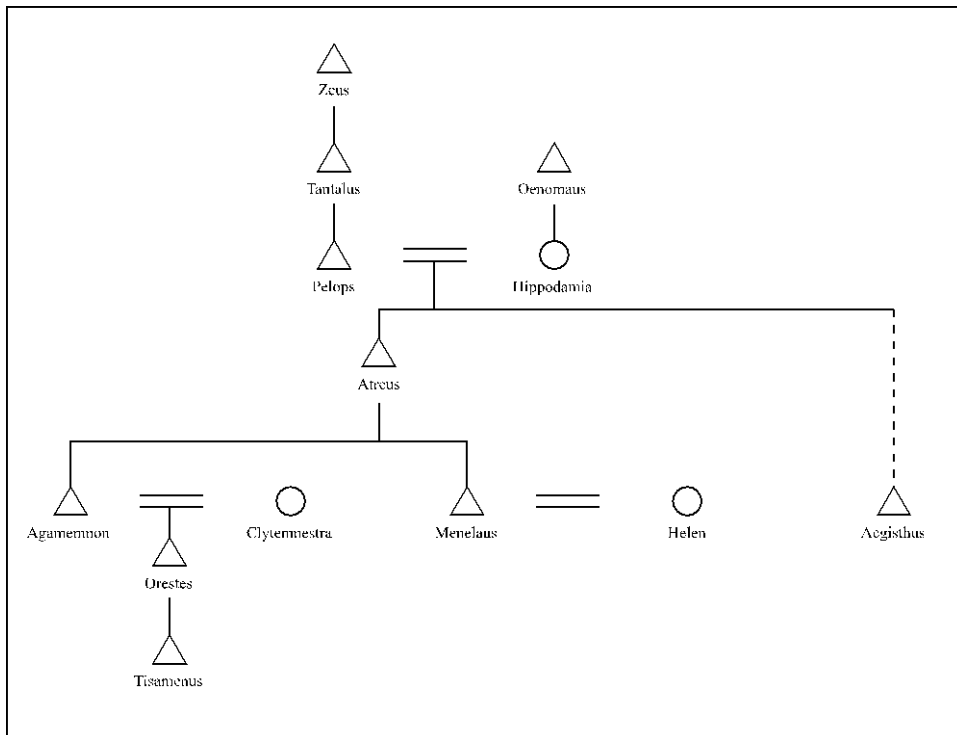


Figure 3. The line of Tantalus.

The pre-Perseid dynasty of the “Egyptian Danaides”—that of Perseus’ grandfather Acrisius—had had similar stories to tell of their own success. Acrisius indeed had married Eurydice, daughter of Lacedaemon, eponym of the Spartan kingdom (Lacedaemonia). And with Lacedaemon we reach the original and minimal form



of Peloponnesian usurpation: the replacement, through the mediation of marriage, of the indigenous son of Earth by the immigrant son of Zeus (fig. 4). So run local tales of the first times in Argos, Arcadia, Laconia and Messenia. Later royal houses, such as the Heraclids, formulated an ideology of dominance that could apply to the Peloponnese or Hellas in general, especially as the successors of Mycenaean rulers. But in the myths of early kingship, as collected by the renowned tourist Pausanias, these encompassing claims diverge into the local pedigrees and founding traditions of independent peoples or cities. Still, as closer to the gods and to the Hesiodic Golden Age, the protagonists of the initial dynastic dramas represent abstract concepts only slightly more delimited than those figured in the gods at the beginning of world.

In the core regions of Arcadia and the southern Peloponnese, Pausanias gathered several such traditions, recounting the coming of heroes from elsewhere who replaced the aboriginal kings of Pelasgian or Lelegean stock. We would privilege these tales over versions sometimes found elsewhere (e.g., in Apollodorus or Hyginus): not only because of their local provenience, but for their logically motivated relations at once to ancient cosmogony (the *Theogony*) and to the traditions of later royal lineages (the Atreids, Heraclids, etc.). The whole set of myths then forms a series of transformations, built up recursively on the same basic theory of sovereignty. The passage from cosmogony to “history” sees a progressive expansion of the scale of sovereignty, but also its humanization, which is a reduction of its conceptual or categorical scope.

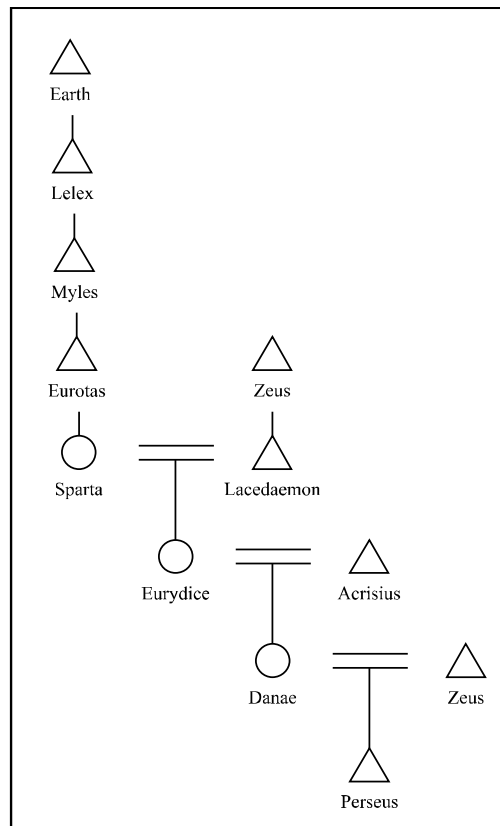


Figure 4. Peloponnesian usurpation

The first human times are epitomized in the antecedents of Sparta particularly (fig. 4). Lacedaemon, the aforementioned, gained the kingdom that would bear his name by marrying the royal woman Sparta, giving her name to the city. Sparta was the daughter of [the] Eurotas [river]—“it was Eurotas who channelled away the marsh-water from the plains by cutting through to the sea” (Paus. 3.1.1). For his part, Eurotas was the son and heir of Myles, and Myles of the original king Lelex. Lelex was autochthonous, a son of Earth. Just as the universe effectively begins by the union of male Heaven (Uranus) and female Earth (Gaia), so in Lacedaemonia the landscape and polity are constituted by the conjunction (through marriage) of celestial and terrestrial lineages. At the same time, the kingdom myth evokes usurpations of cosmogonic memory: by Cronus and Zeus successively, who through the mediation of women (their mothers), dethroned and killed their respective fathers and took the latter’s daughters (their own sisters).

Pausanias had similar tales to tell of the other major Peloponnesian countries. Arcadia became known as such from the ancestor Arcas, a son of Zeus by the woman Callisto. She was a descendant of Pelasgus, who was the first king of the region and another son of Earth (Paus. 8.1.4–8.4.1). Similarly, the eponymous king Argus was a son of Zeus by the woman Niobe (2.22.5). She was the daughter of Phoroneus, the first man and ruler of the country (2.15.5). In another context, Pausanias brings the aboriginal Pelasgians into the Argive account, as he notes that the acropolis at Argos was named from Larisa, a daughter of Pelasgus (2.23.9). The Messenian story is incomplete and obviously reflects the historic subjugation by Sparta. The aboriginal Leleges who founded Messene were a branch of the Spartan Leleges. But the fate of the earliest kings is not recorded. In Eleia we find a transformation characteristic of the Peloponnesian peripharae. Here the first king (Aethlius) was said to be a son of Zeus by the daughter of Deucalion, but his line was superseded through affinal succession by the eponymous Eleius, who was a son of Poseidon (Paus. 5.1.8). This opposition of Poseidon and Zeus is worth a brief digression.

Poseidon rather than Zeus figures as the divine ancestor of kings in several places around the central and southern Peloponnese (e.g. Pylos or Troezen). Poseidon was likewise the ancestor, in Egypt, of the pre-Mycenaean Danaides, who migrated thence to the Peloponnese (to be superseded by the Zeus-born Perseus). Again in later periods, Poseidon was adopted as the answer to Zeus by historic enemies of Sparta: Idas of Messenia, rival to the Dioscuri, is said (by some) to be a son of the ocean god, as also Theseus of Athens. But then, the rivalry of the divine brothers goes back to the beginning, when Poseidon, dissatisfied by the sovereignty accorded to Zeus, joined in an unsuccessful revolt against him. (The ambitious Poseidon went on to contest with various others for the patron status in Corinth [against Helios], Argos [against Hera] and Athens [against Athene].) We say “ocean god,” as Poseidon was of course, but it is notable that his force takes the form of earthquakes, if that of Zeus the celestial form of thunderbolts. One senses a translation, in terms of the Olympian gods, of the ancient opposition between Zeus-born heroes and autochthonous kings. Such again would be the main ideological issue in Sparta’s conflict with Athens.

Whatever the final judgment on Poseidon, it is clear that the dominant royalty of the Peloponnese preferred to calculate their sovereignty from Zeus. And it is from Zeus that they derive the structural characteristics by which they were mythologically and historically known. This includes the twin kingship. Heracles

himself was a twin. But he was conceived on Alcmena by Zeus; whereas his brother Iphicles was sired by the human husband, the Perseid king Amphitryon. Such was the prototype of Dorian twinship; however, the paradigm is most developed for the Dioscuri, the famous doubles of the Spartan kings. We turn first to their story.

### *The Dioscuri and the war of twins*

The divine twins Castor and Polydeuces (Pollux) have mythical cognates across the old Indo-European world, from Vedic tradition to the Scandinavian—including the Theban twins Zethus and Amphion. The Dioscuri's own cult was widespread in classical Greece (as well as Rome). But this cult was centered in the Dorians of the Peloponnese, specifically in Sparta: "Il faut encore remarquer le caractère essentiellement dorien du couple des Dioscures" (Darembert 1892: 253).

The Dioscuri were native to Sparta, indeed of ancient Lacedaemonian lineage. They were born to Leda the wife of the Spartan king Tyndareus; hence, according to the pedigree collected by Pausanias (3.1.1–5), they were of the dynasty founded by Lacedaemon himself. An allusion of Pausanias' in this context indicates they succeeded Tyndareus as kings of Sparta. (This would have to be a Spartan variant, making them rather than their father the last rulers of the Lacedaemonian line.) Except for their exploits on the voyage of the Argonauts, the twins' famous battles were fought on behalf of the Spartan kingship. They recaptured their sister Helen, with whom they had been raised in the house of Tyndareus, from the Athenian hero Theseus; they defeated the rival royal twins, Idas and Lynceus, kings of Messenia. The Dioscuri presided over Spartan games as well as Spartan battles. And as we already know, as tutelaries of the historic kings of Sparta, their image accompanied the latter to war.

The name Dioscuri means "sons/youths of Zeus" (Burkert 1985: 212). In Laconian inscriptions they appear as the Tyndaridae, "sons of Tyndareus." The apparent ambiguity is already meaningful: the sign of a double nature, human and divine. The same ambiguity attends their parentage in classical mythology generally. Alternately (according to the version), they were both sons of Zeus or both sons of Tyndareus, although in either case Polydeuces was the elder. But the version that accords with their ritual presence and mythical action in Sparta, as well as with other royal twinships of Peloponnesian legend, is that Polydeuces was fathered by Zeus, who first lay with Leda, Castor by the human sovereign Tyndareus (Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.10.7). Polydeuces, then, is full brother to the divine Helen, Castor to the more infamous Clytemnestra (fig. 5). This motivated tradition is also logically the most general, as it includes the transformations represented by a uniquely Zeusian or uniquely Tyndarean parentage. The twins were the social sons of Tyndareus, if Polydeuces was the natural son of Zeus, and both were eventually translated by Zeus to immortality—thus "youths of Zeus."

Like the two Spartan kings, the Dioscuri were both divine and human; or alternatively, one was divine but the human one was his very image. So like the Spartan kings, they were minimally differentiated by some mark or attribute, in other respects they were the same. In the representations of the Dioscuri on ancient coins, reliefs and the like, there is often some detail that distinguishes them, but evidently there was no fixed tradition in this regard (Darembert 1892: 253). Sometimes Polydeuces is shown as a boxer, consistent with the Homeric description: "Kastor, tamer of horses, and the strong boxer, Polydeukes" (*Il.*

3.237). But in these terms of martial capacities, perhaps the more pertinent contrast is that Castor was the general (he taught the arts of strategy to Heracles), and Polydeuces the fighter (he had scars of battle on his face). Polydeuces appears to play the protective part of Zeus, Castor the human *cum* social part. Thus Castor proved to be mortal in the fight with the rival royal twins of Messenia (see below), but Polydeuces avenged him and survived. Yet in all their adventures the Dioscuri acted as one, and in the end not even Castor's death would separate their fates.

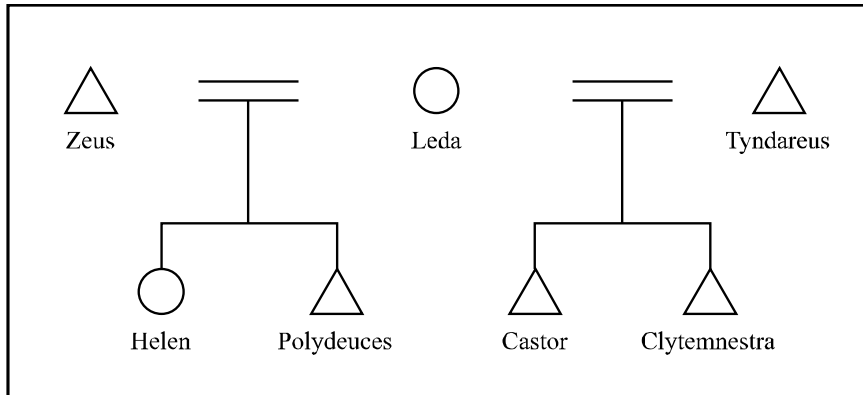


Figure 5. Parentage of the Dioscuri

These adventures included the rescue of Helen, who had been abducted by Theseus (Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.10.7-8). Foreshadowing the *Iliad*—Helen's abduction by Paris and rescue by the brother-kings Agamemnon and Menelaus—the incident establishes an analogy between the Dioscuri and the Achaean heroes. Transitively, then, this makes another connection between the two kings of Sparta and the legendary hegemony of the pre-Dorian Achaean rulers. We reserve this point for the moment, to attend to the other defense of Spartan honor by the Dioscuri: their battle with the Messenian twins Idas and Lynceus.

This war of twins, as we shall call it, was a revelatory affair. The myth puts royal twinship in the context of a number of structural elements that are all (we claim) related parts of the same general *system* of sovereignty: capture of the ancestry of the established dynasty through appropriation of royal women, incest, and the marriage of parallel cousins (FBD marriage). Besides, paralleling the historic conquest of Messenia by Sparta, the narrative demonstrates the supremacy over other kings that could be claimed by royal twins of Zeus.

The genealogy of the war of twins presents the political issues *en jeu*. There are two principal variants: one consistently developed by Pausanias (3.1.4-7; 4.3.1), and an alternate interwoven with the first, sometimes confusedly, by Apollodorus. Essentially, they come down to local and regional versions of the same conflict. By inserting Perieres into the Lacedaemonian line, as father to the Spartan king Oebalus (Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.10.4), the Apollodorian variant confines the struggle for supremacy within the Spartan dynasty. The Pausanian account, however, by making Perieres king of Messenia and the successor of its own Lacedaemonian royalty, opposes the hegemonic claims of the Messenians and the Spartans (Paus. 4.2.2). But in either case, at issue is superiority in the Peloponnese, that is, as affinal successor through Perseus' daughter Gorgophone of the founder of

Mycenae in Argos. Set before the advent of the Heraclids, the war of twins becomes the mythic charter of the later struggles between the Dorian kings of Argos, Messenia and Sparta. As the outcome is the triumph of the Spartan Dioscuri, who nonetheless disappear from the mortal stage, the myth sets up the universal pretensions of their earthly counterparts, the twinned kings of Sparta.

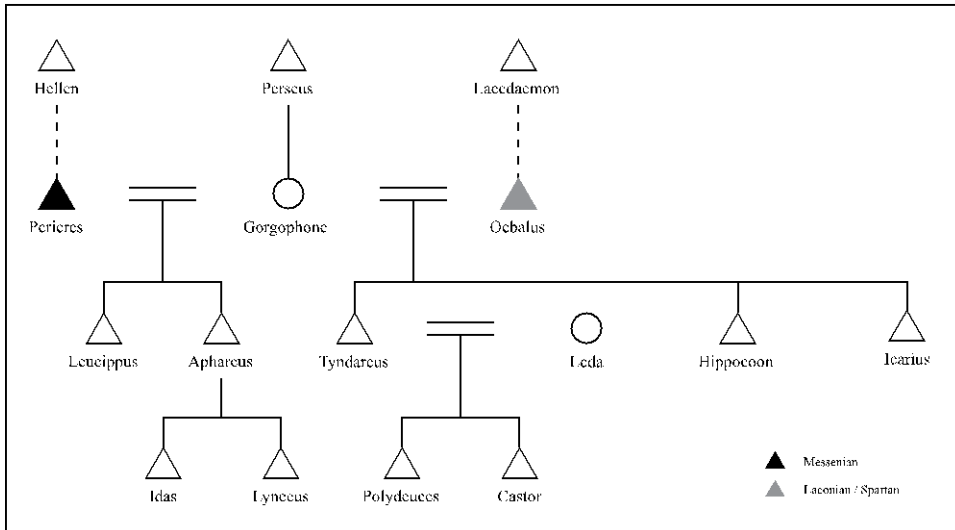


Figure 6. Genealogy of the war of the twins I

We will follow the Pausanian version, being the more general and of definite local origin, although the variant Apollodorian genealogy leads to the same conclusions (on a reduced scale). The key figure is the royal woman Gorgophone, she of excessive marital relations (fig. 6). Again, Gorgophone was the daughter of Perseus, the son of Zeus and founder of Mycenae. By Pausanias' telling (2.21.8), Gorgophone was the first widow to remarry. Wedded initially to Pericles, king of Messenia, by whom she had twin sons, Aphareus and Leucippus, she upon her husband's death married the Spartan king Oebalus, bearing him Tyndareus, Hippocoon, and Icarus. Gorgophone thereby effects the triple conjunction of the Argive, the Messenian and the Laconian kingships, setting the stage for the last two to fight it out over the ancestral legacy of the first.

The struggle unfolds by repetition of the same issue, the capture of ancestry through women. Gorgophone's Messenian and Spartan descendants, the rival sets of twins, fight it out over women who are their own sisters and cousins. Whoever takes these women will become son-in-law to the other lineage: classic relationship of the change of dynasties. And there is also more than the suggestion in the texts that the joint kingship of brothers signifies such encompassment. Aphareus and his younger brother Leucippus appear to rule Messenia together, as (less certainly) do Tyndareus and Icarus in Laconia. In the succeeding generation, where the co-kings of Messenia, Idas and Lynceus, do battle with Castor and Polydeuces, this suggestion becomes compelling. Moreover, it matches the oral-historical record. When the famed wars between Dorian Messenia and Sparta began (in the eighth century BCE), both kingdoms were ruled by co-kings, according to Pausanias: "when Teleklos's son Alkamenes was king of Lakonia, and the king of the other

family was Theopompos, the sixth in line from Eurypon, when Messenia was under Antiochos and Androkles the sons of Phintas, the mutual hatred of the Lakonians and Messenians came to a head” (Paus. 4.4.4). But in the course of their losing struggles, the Messenians saw their own dual kingship dissolve into the unique rule of one king, and eventually into the dictatorship of the valiant Aristomenes. With the decline of kingship, the Messenians also abandoned all claims to sovereign devolution from Zeus: “the Messenians,” Pausanias found, “do not foist Aristomenes on Herakles or on Zeus, as the Macedonians do Alexander on Ammon...I know myself that when they pour the ritual wine the Messenians call Aristomenes the son of Nikomedes” (4.14.8).

Parenthetically, one has to wonder how much the glories of the Spartan kingship contributed to the decline of Hellenic monarchies generally, among states rival to Spartan power. For if it were true that “Zeus is king in heaven by the universal reckoning of mankind” (Paus. 2.24.5), as all Hellas acknowledged, still no other people could hope to match Sparta’s rights to the kingship of Zeus on earth. Except, perhaps, by the denial of the sceptre-doctrine altogether, in favor of some other. If any other people had a king, he had a king in Sparta. No doubt there were internal reasons that monarchy outside Sparta (and, e.g., Macedonia) had become obsolete by the classical period. But beset by turbulent Sparta—as well as Persia with its own archetypal king of kings—other Greeks must have discovered that the royalty they had been dealt was not the winning hand. Conversely, as the Spartans realized the historic strength of their Zeus-born kingship, they were satisfied to maintain it, until it was virtually alone. Could such a process confirm Finley’s suspicion that “survival” is not the right term?

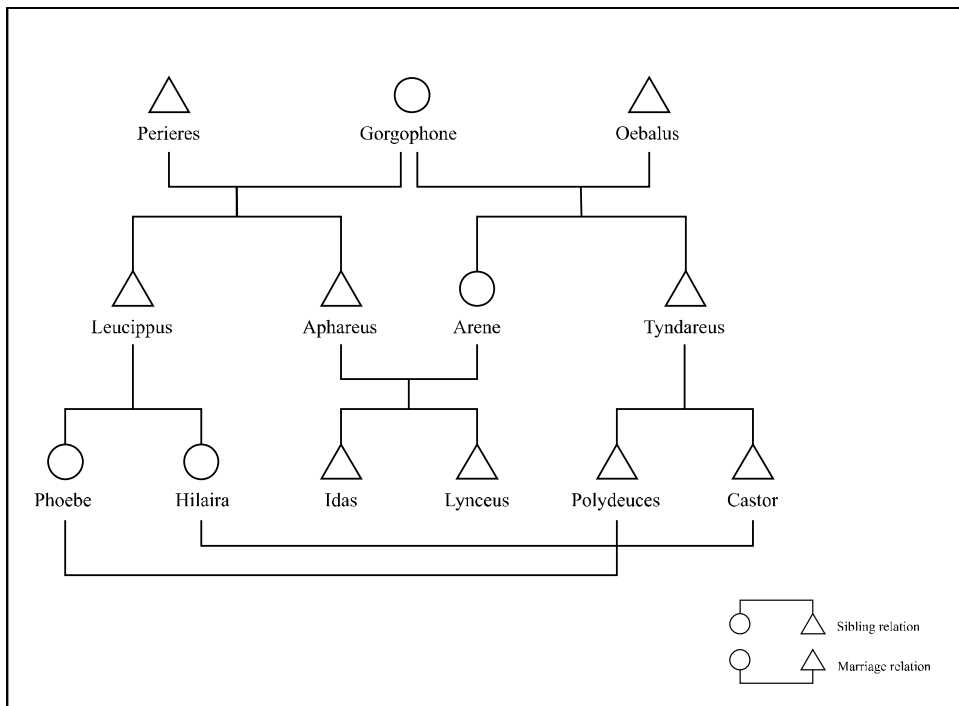


Figure 7. Genealogy of the war of the twins II

We close the parenthesis and return to the mythical war of twins, taking note that it was also marked by a certain incestuous relation and a specific form of royal marriage, between the children of brothers (FBD marriage). Excessively close from the point of view of kingship, the incest was also a political excess on Messenia's part. Aphareus the Messenian king married his half-sister Arene (fig. 7). She was, however, the daughter of the Spartan Oebalus—and we know what kind of challenge this means to an established lineage. (Arene appears to be the mother of the Messenian twins, Idas and Lynceus, according to Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.10.3) In the next generation, the marital/martial issue turns on father's brother's daughter marriage. Idas and Lynceus are betrothed to their parallel cousins (FBD) Phoebe and Hilaira, priestesses respectively of Athene and Artemis. The two women, however, are successfully abducted and married by Castor and Polydeuces. Sometimes alleged to be the *causus belli* of the war of twins, this abduction again entails father's (half-)brother's daughter marriage: the women are also parallel cousins of the Dioscuri. We shall examine the mythical analogies and meanings of such marriage practices in the next section. Suffice it to note here that they are imitations of the incestuous excesses of Zeus. But then, the Messenians who lost the battle, are also said to have given up the pretext of kingship from Zeus: Idas, the elder of the Messenian twins, was a son of Poseidon, according to some (cf. Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.10.3).

The proximate cause of war was either the Spartan twins' abduction of the Messenian princesses, or their quarrel with Idas and Aphareus over some cattle that had been taken in a joint raid on Arcadia. In the latter tale, the Dioscuri had been tricked by their Messenian counterparts, who made off with the booty, upon which the Spartans marched on Messenia and seized the cattle. The symbolic issue in the two versions, however, is not that different, since either may signify a contest of kingship. The right to distribute the booty—which in this case the Messenian Idas had taken on himself, only to cheat the Dioscuri—is a royal prerogative. Besides, cattle are the most noble sacrifice (recall the historic privileges of Spartan kings in this regard); whereas, women are the means of acquiring the descent of royal predecessors. To complete the symbolic triad: “Dans une civilisation masculine comme celle de Grèce,” cattle and women are ritual equivalents, and equally the object of heroic acts of seizure. So Vernant tells us:

Dans sa forme la plus ancienne (et dans un milieu de noblesse que la poésie épique nous fait atteindre), le mariage est un fait de commerce contractuel entre groupes familiaux... Parmi les présents... il y a une prestation qui a valeur spéciale parce qu'elle a lieu, de façon expresse, en contrepartie de la femme dont elle constitue le prix : ce sont les ἔδνα [*hedna*]. Il s'agit de bien précieux meubles, d'un type très défini: bêtes de troupeaux, spécialement des bovins... Par la pratique du mariage par achat la femme apparaît équivalente à des valeurs de circulation. Mobile comme eux, elle fait comme eux l'objet de cadeaux, d'échanges et de rapt (Vernant 1985: 170–171).

In its oldest form (and among the nobility to whose circles epic poetry introduces us), marriage is a formalized transaction between family groups. . . . Among the gifts exchanged. . . there is one of particular value because it is explicitly given in exchange for the woman, and is in fact the price paid for her. This is the ἔδνα [*hedna*], a very valuable commodity of a very definite type: prize animals from the flocks and herds,

especially male cattle. . . . By this practice of marriage by purchase, the woman appears equivalent to the values in circulation. Being mobile in the same way, she is similarly the object of gifts, exchanges, and abduction (Vernant 1983: 139; translation modified).

The events of the final battle are also variously told, but the dénouement is generally agreed upon. Idas killed Castor; thereupon Polydeuces, with the help of Zeus (n.b.), destroyed the Messenian brothers. Polydeuces then pleaded with Zeus to share his brother's fate. Acceding to the request, Zeus ruled that the two should pass their days alternately living as the gods on Olympus and buried as men under the earth:

Turn and turn about they pass  
 One day with their loving father Zeus,  
 The other hidden by earth in Therapne's caverns  
 And fulfill a like fate.  
 This life, and not to be fully a god and live in the sky,  
 Polydeuces chose, when Castor was killed in war.  
 (Pind. *Nem.* 10.55-59).

In the end, both Polydeuces and Castor acquire a double nature, mortal and immortal. The complex onto-logic is the same, we say, as attends their historic alter-egos, the two kings of Sparta. One, the senior is more godly; yet as the two are to all social appearances identical, the godly one is also human, and the human one also godly. Like the metaphysics of the king's two bodies as perceived by the Norman Anonymous, both king and god are twinned persons.

The twinship can then function to proclaim the legitimacy of a given ruling line. These twinned kings seem to intervene at critical points of royal genealogies: to transform the original usurpation of a divine heir into a principle of dynastic continuity; or else to transfer (via the mother) the sceptre from one human line to another. In either case the political virtue is a reign at once of established human pedigree and of Olympian descent.

### *Imitations of Zeus*

The several aspects of the Peloponnesian theory of sovereignty—including twinship, usurpation and the exploits of conquest and assassination—are interrelated by the common signification of a human succession of Zeus. Hence the iconic resemblances between cosmogonic myth and kingship legend. The argument can be extended to the mythic testimony of royal incest and parallel cousin marriage. In fact father's brother's daughter marriage, we shall show, is a humanized mode of sororal incest. This kind of transformation progressively appears over time in the mythic corpus, a humanization of divine practice, affecting also the character of royal twinships. The anti-structural outrages of the first gods are gradually sublimated into human-social customs, until among the protohistoric and historic kings they present symbolic reflexes of their original forms.

Let us go back to the beginning. We analyze the kinship relations of the genealogical line that leads down from the gods to Hellen, ancestor of the Greeks, as recorded in the *Theogony* and by Apollodorus (1.7.2-4). Here are found the same kinship practices as informed the war of twins, but expressed in cosmological dimensions that lend them a greater significance and a readier intelligibility. In the broadest terms, the permutations of marriage practice in these first generations of



the human career represent the working-out of a Hesiodic degeneration from the Golden Age. Progressively removed from the immortals, the practices of human kings become ever more distant imitations of Zeus.

Consider for example the progression from divine incest—more precisely, its extreme form, parthogenesis—to the father’s brother’s daughter union that gave rise to Hellen. As a social reproductive capacity, incest is a modality of the famous autonomy of the Olympian gods, their self-sufficiency, of which their freedom from labor is another. In social terms, incest is a denial of dependence on others for reproduction, hence another aspect of immortality. And as it is among humans a crime against kinship, a transcendent anti-structural act, it becomes for the gods the proof that they are stronger than society—and thus able to constitute it. Conversely then, the replacement of divine incest by human parallel cousin marriage proves that mankind is condemned to a state of dependence. Just as men, unlike gods, are dependent on nature and cannot live without travail, so they are dependent on others for the (natural) means of their reproduction, with all the problems such alliances breed. Exogamy is the analogue of human mortality, or even in myth—e.g. the war of twins—the cause.

On the other hand, the solution of parallel cousin (FBD) marriage is a close human approximation to the sexual excesses of the Olympians. Hence its incidence among the gods’ royal successors. In structural terms, this passage from cosmogonic incest to human marriage is a transformation constructed on a critical invariant. Taking place between the children of twin brothers, who are thus one-in-two, parallel cousin marriage amounts symbolically to the incestuous union of siblings.

The genealogy of Hellen is careful to make the point, as it takes the development of human marriage step-by-step through a finely graded series of decreasing incest. First, parthogenesis: the creation of male Heaven, Uranus, from female Earth, Gaia, which is immediately followed by the sexual union of the two. The mother-son relationship of Gaia and Uranus is followed by the brother-sister mating of their offspring, Oceanus and Tethys (Hes. *Theog.* 337). Brother-sister marriage gives way to union of brother’s daughter and father’s brother, Asia and Iapetus. And two generations later, the series culminates in the marriage of Deucalion to his father’s (younger) brother’s daughter, Pyrrha—the “primal couple”, as West (1985: 139) describes them.

The marriage is indeed prototypical. In later kingship myths, as we have seen, it recurs between the children of twin rulers. Something of the same sort is being said cosmogonically, inasmuch as Deucalion and Pyrrha (his FBD) are the children of the brothers Prometheus and Epimetheus. While it is not said that the latter were twins, their fraternal solidarity and resemblance is well-enough remarked (Forethought and Afterthought). Also like the twin kings of later fame, Prometheus and Epimetheus were minimally distinguished on the axis of divinity and humanity, even as in tandem they were intermediate between the two, and effected the transition from one to the other. Prometheus, the elder, is more like the gods; while Epimetheus, with his well-known failings, proved all too human.

Parallel again to the senior of twinned kings, Prometheus especially acts as a being of double nature. A Titan who challenges Zeus, he does so on behalf of humanity. According to some accounts, he fashioned the first human beings out of clay. But Epimetheus, by virtue of his imperfections, could not resist the “beautiful evil” Pandora, the first woman made of such mortal stuff (Hes. *Theog.* 585; cf.

Vernant 1979: 98–101). The consequences were tragic for all of us. The Deucalian flood is not numbered among them by our authors, but it wipes out Prometheus' creative work, leaving only Deucalion and Pyrrha to recreate men and women from stones—with the help of Zeus. But then, does not the marriage of Deucalion and Pyrrha, children of the fraternal pair of Titans, appear as a human translation of the sororal incest for which Zeus was well enough known? This must be the reason that of Hellen, Deucalion's supposed son, "some say Zeus was his father" (Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.7.2).

The subsequent success of Hellen and his sons was another reproduction of Zeus, of a kind with the achievements of Lacedaemon and kindred heroes who replaced the indigenous kings of the Peloponnese. Except that the Hellenic conquest, eventually covering all of mainland Greece and the islands, is set on a wider scale. Giving rise to the several Greek nations, the descendants of Hellen everywhere superseded the aboriginal inhabitants: Pelasgians, Carians, Lelegeans, and other sons of the soil. But as generations passed and the distance of mortals from the gods increased, such counterparts of Olympian exploits in human practices became ever more reduced versions of the divine ideal. The differentiation of a specifically human nature continued, until even kings had to reconcile themselves to exogamy.

The rule of twin kings and parallel cousin marriages are specifically associated in legends of the pre-Dorians. The combination of twinship followed by father's younger brother's daughter marriage makes a nice ideal type. It not only represents brother-sister marriage in a humanized form, but by virtue of the hypogamy retains the sovereignty in the more godly line, while it recapitulates within the dynasty the appropriation of the earthly/feminine by the celestial/masculine side. In at least one such affair, concerning the children of Aegyptus and Danaus (see below), the demand of cousin marriage (FyBD), is taken as the sign of the senior brother's attempt to secure the whole power. In the traditions of Spartan kingship, there is a remarkable testimony to the continuity of parallel cousin marriage between the children of twin rulers, but in a still more humanized—i.e. exogamous—form.

Like the Dioscuri, the original royal twins of Sparta, Procles and Eurysthenes, married twin sisters, Lathria and Anaxandra (fig. 1; Paus. 3.16.6). The sisters were relatives of their royal husbands in a collateral branch of the Heraclids: they descend in the paternal line, from Heracles' second son (Ctesippus); while the Spartan kings trace to the eldest son (Hyllus). Thus the initial royal marriage of Sparta is a "classificatory" father's brother's daughter union, a marriage of women of the cadet branch to men of the senior. But if this is an exogamous version of parallel cousin marriage, it should be remembered that true cousin marriages among royal twins had not always worked out well. Both the Aphareids and the Dioscuri had tried it, yet the descendants of neither would inherit the throne over which the rival twins had given battle.

There is a double bind in Greek mythology, which is the mechanism of the Hesiodic distantiation from the Golden Age. Descended from the sovereign gods, the human kings presumed to duplicate the exploits of the Olympians. But such is the essence of hubris, and they suffer for it. In the event, such feats as incest or practices as cousin marriage became a mythical memory: doings of the ancestral predecessors that could validate the divinity of the royal lineage, but in later times were not repeated, and in the historical accounts not remarked. The twinned kingship itself suffered a similar symbolic reduction. In Sparta it continued to serve

as a legendary precedent, but of course the historic kings were twinned rather in function than by birth.

Heracles himself could have been a lesson to Spartans in the hubris of real twinship and actual incest. His mother Alcmena of the Persidae had married her mother's brother, who was also her father's brother's son (fig. 2). Or taking it from the point of view of her royal husband Amphitryon, an eldest son and descendant in the senior line from Perseus, he married his sister's daughter, who was also his parallel cousin (FyBD). However, Zeus was the father of Alcmena's oldest, Heracles, as he disguised himself as Amphitryon and lay first with her; whereas, Heracles' twin Iphicles was sired by the human husband. Neither of the twins succeeded to Perseus' legacy. Jealous with Zeus for his affair with Alcmena—his last, recall, with a mortal woman—Hera delayed the birth of Heracles in a celebrated ruse, depriving the hero of his Mycenaean birthright, which passed instead to Eurysthenes. Iphicles never amounted to much. Besides, Heracles killed Iphicles' sons as well as some of his own (by the oldest daughter of the Theban king) when driven mad by Hera.

Before Perseus, the Danaids had ruled Argos, and practiced endogamous marriages with similar tragic consequences. Even in the Egyptian prehistory of the dynasty, the twin sons of Poseidon disagreed and split the rule, Agenor going off to Phoenicia, leaving Belus to reign alone over the Nile kingdom. As for the twin sons of Belus, Aegyptus and Danaus, their quarrels were fierce, and turned specifically on the father's (younger) brother's daughter marriage (fig. 8).

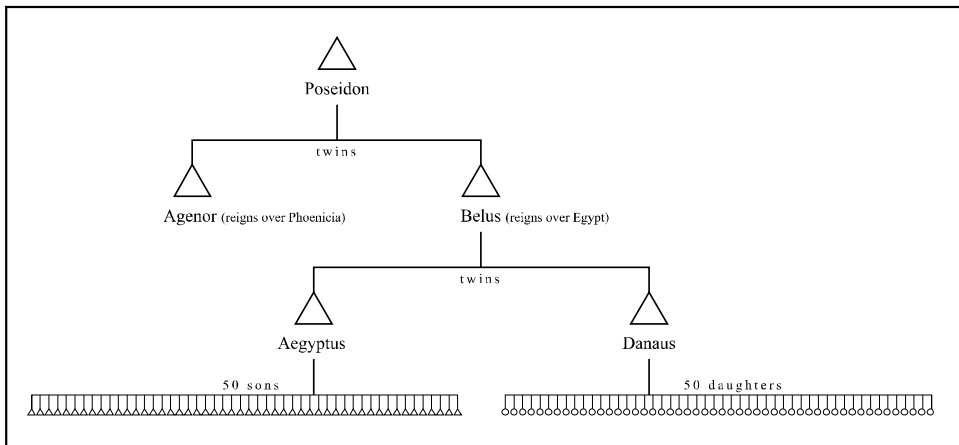


Figure 8. Origins of the Danaids

Aegyptus had fifty sons by many wives, as likewise Danaus had fifty daughters. But when Aegyptus asked for his brother's children as wives for his own sons, Danaus fled to Argos with his daughters, fearing (n.b.) that Aegyptus was thus plotting to take the whole kingdom. By Pausanias' account, Danaus was accorded the throne (of Gelanor) by virtue of his descent from an Argive royal woman (Io). But Aegyptus' sons did somehow manage to marry Danaus' daughters, who thereupon slew their husbands on the wedding night—all but the oldest daughter who spared her cousin-husband. The famous descendant of the surviving couple was the ill-fated Acrisius: from the womb he quarrelled with his twin brother Proetus (Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.2.1), with whom he was finally forced to divide the kingdom; nor,

for all the cruelties he practiced on his daughter Danae, could he avoid being slain by the latter's son Perseus, as the oracle had foretold (fig. 9). One is naturally reminded of the Theban Oedipus, whose incestuous hubris (mother-son marriage) could rival Heaven (Uranus) himself. His own twin sons likewise failed to alternately share the kingdom, and ended by killing each other.

There were other twins who did not get along too well, e.g. Pelias and Neleus of Pylos. The mutual love of the Dioscuri seems exceptional and, in light of their special relation to the Spartan kings, significant. But by historic times, so far was humankind distanced from the marvellous exploits of Zeus on the wives of kings, true royal twinship was rather in disrepute, even in Sparta. Hence Herodotus' repetition, with respect to the original Spartan twins, of what was by now a mythical saw: that Procles and Eurysthenes had quarrelled with one another all their lives, as, he added, have their respective descendants ever since. The last half of the observation was patently false; while the first, invoking the disadvantages of twinship, neglects the singular structural parallel preserved in myth between the dominance of the Spartan twins among the Dorians, and the earlier dominance of the Achaeans among all the Hellenes.

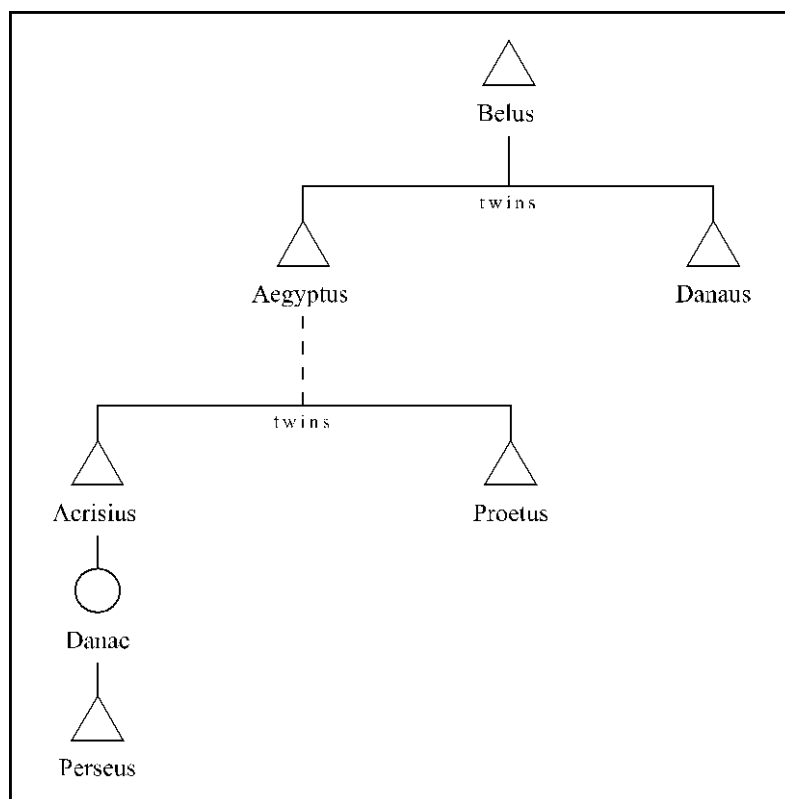


Figure 9. Antecedents of Perseus.

We refer to the recurrent set of relationships among the sons of Hellen and the sons of Heraclid Aristomachus (fig. 1). Hellen is the proximate ancestor of the main Greek peoples; Aristomachus, of the Dorian conquerors of the Peloponnese. The story of the first refers to the original advent of the Greeks, of the second to

the so-called Heraclid return, several generations after the initial conquests of Heracles' son Hyllus. The two migrations have very similar genealogical codes. They are also versions, set on different scales and in different eras, of the same concepts of political hegemony. Both indeed speak to a two-fold supremacy: of the foreign invaders over the settled inhabitants of the country, and of one group among the invaders over the other, collateral groups.

The several nations of Greeks sprung from these descendants of Hellen and were named after them: the Dorians from Dorus, Aeolians from Aeolus, Achaeans from Achaeus, Ionians from Ion. (Hellen was king of Thessaly; of Xuthus we shall speak presently). The sons of Aristomachus the Heraclid likewise divided the Dorian conquest—this by lot—each taking one of the three main countries of the southern Peloponnese (Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.8.4; Paus. 4.3.3-5). Temenus, the oldest, received Argos, traditionally the leading kingdom; Cresphontes, by trickery in the draw, got fertile Messenia; and the twin sons of Aristodemus, Procles and Eurysthenes, took Sparta, perhaps the least desirable. In the same way Hellen's patrimony had been divided among three sons, one of whom was a father of two. So far: so alike—but there is more than formal parallel.

Following the Dorian conquest, Sparta embarked on a career of sustained aggression against the brother kingdoms of Messenia and Argos. (We are passing now from myth into history.) The Messenians were subjugated completely and their Heraclid kings eliminated. The Dorian Argives drove out the descendants of Temenus, and by the time of the Persian invasion repeated wars with the Spartans left the Argolid prostrate. The dual kings of Sparta were then the sole survivors of the royal lineage of Heracles, thus the exclusive heirs to the Mycenaean legacy of which Heracles had been deprived. Here, then, is a triple correlation between: (1) the distinctive kingship of Sparta, alone among the Dorians to begin in twins; (2) the unique derivation of sovereignty from Zeus, which such twinship is known to signify (cf. the Dioscuri); and (3) the pretensions of dominance over other kings and kingdoms, a human parallel to Zeus' divine sway.

Politically as well as genealogically, the system of relationships among the descendants of Hellen is virtually the duplicate. Of Hellen's three sons, only Xuthus is noted (Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.7.3) to be the father of two (i.e., in this context of constituting myth and eponymous classification). Achaeus and Ion are not reckoned as twins, so far as we know, but the pair achieve a political position in the Peloponnese—and later in all Hellas—analogue to Aristodemus' twin sons, or again to the Argive brothers Agamemnon and Menelaus, who effectively connect the two genealogical charters. Like Aristodemus, Xuthus will soon disappear from the scene. Xuthus steals his brothers' inheritance, is exiled, and goes to Athens. Notice that Aristodemus was struck down by a thunderbolt, according to the prevalent account (Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.8.2), a sure sign that he had invoked Zeus' displeasure. The key term of the sibling triad, the father of the two sons, has a sinister character. But then, Xuthus and Aristodemus are the fathers of conquests, and of aggressions against their fraternal kinsmen. The disposition of the ancestor is realized in the political expansion of the line. Xuthus had received the Peloponnese in Hellen's division of the country. Before the Heraclid return, the Achaeans and Ionians, who sprung from Xuthus' sons, respectively dominated the southern and northern Peloponnese. And by a set of equations well known in the classical period, the myth could retain a certain currency, as it had by then a much wider political import.

By classical times, the myth of Hellen’s sons could oppose the Spartans to the Athenians, as Achaeans to Ionians. Descended from Dorus, the Spartans however had absorbed the identity of the Achaeans. From Achaean predecessors they took the sceptre of Zeus—and a certain identity. They reburied the bones of Orestes and Tisamenus in Sparta, acts that gained them certain victories and the imagery of paternal descent from the house of Atreus. Pausanius’ comparison of the Spartan king Agesilaus (early fourth century BCE) with Agamemnon seems more than a simile of his own invention: “Agesilaos thought himself king of a richer city than Agamemnon and like him the lord of all Greece, and he believed that to overpower Artaxerxes and possess the riches of Persia would be a more glorious achievement than the destruction of the kingdom of Priam” (3.9.4). So would the Spartan Cleomenes I, of equally megalomaniac reputation, announce to the Athenians (late sixth century BCE) “I am no Dorian, but an Achaean” (Herod. 5.72).

For their part the Athenians, by a mytho-praxis at least as arbitrary, took themselves to be Ionians, thus lords of nearly all as far as Asia Minor. This identification too was a kind of mythical *passe-passe*—and contradictory to their self-proclaimed autochthony. Neither Ion nor Xuthus ever ruled Athens. Ion, however, once served as Athens’ military lord (polemarch), an episode deemed sufficient to give the Athenian *phylae* their Ionian names and Athenian colonization its “Ionian” character.

The arbitrariness of all this is, from another perspective, its logical value. The two sons of Xuthus could thus continue to represent the dominant stocks of all the Hellenes. And the Hellenic charter structure turns out to be very like the Dorian, not in form only, but in linking a political hegemony with a sovereign duality.

The traditions of Hellen and Xuthus open into another set of mythic permutations, again involving royal endogamy, but only to radically distinguish Athens from the whole Dorian concept of a Zeus-born usurpation. To spell out all the transformations would need another essay. Here we concentrate merely on a few incidents of early kingship legend in Athens. Hellen and Xuthus have their parts in these events, but the parts are negative. The episodes in question constitute an explicit disavowal of such stranger-kings in favor of the aboriginal sons of Earth.

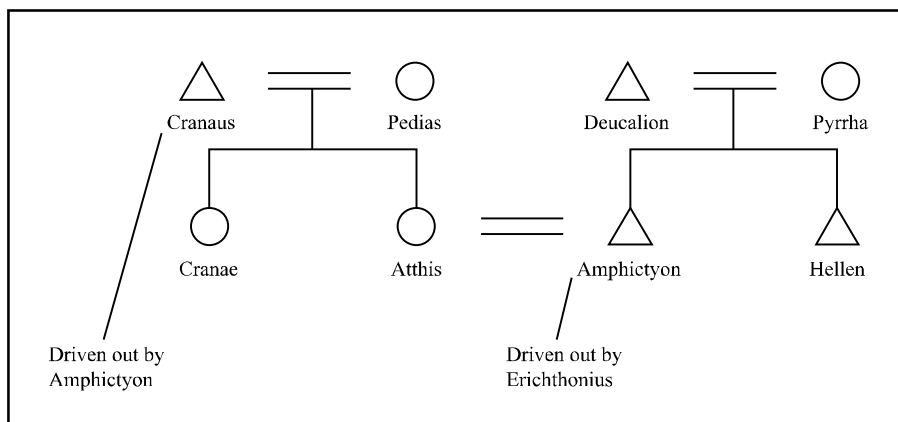


Figure 10. Athenian permutations I

### *Athenian permutations*

Not that the early Athenian kingship was innocent of dynastic succession through the woman. Cecrops (I) replaced the original ruler Actaeus through marriage to the latter's daughter. And Cranaus was elected to succeed Cecrops, though not apparently related to him. But if Actaeus was a "son of the soil," so were Cecrops and Cranaus; there is no question here of the accession of an heroic outsider. The question does arise, however, with the coming of Hellen's brother Amphictyon (fig. 10). Amphictyon migrates to Athens from the Peloponnese, marries Cranaus' daughter (Atthis), expels his father-in-law, and becomes king. But only for a brief interval. Amphictyon is driven out by Erichthonius, the great chthonic hero and king of Athens—he was half serpent. Erichthonius was born of Earth, in consequence of the hilarious and futile attempt of the limping god (another chthonic sign) Hephaestus on the chaste Athena. In disgust, Athena brushed Hephaestus' seed from her leg, whence it fell to the ground, inseminated Earth and issued in Erichthonius (Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.14.6). So by driving out Amphictyon, Erichthonius preserved Athens' own purity. The Athenians succeeded in doing what the aboriginals of the Peloponnese (Pelagus et. al.) could not: rid themselves of would-be heroic usurpers (Lacedaemon et. al.)

The Athenian legends go on to mark the contrast by inventive permutations of the common Peloponnesian versions of dynastic origins. Erichthonius' son, Pandion (I) marries his mother's sister, a matrilinear incest as opposed to the typical patrilinear forms of the Olympians and their royal avatars (fig. 11). As we might expect, Pandion's wife Zeuxippe (a suggestive name) then gives birth to twin sons, Erechtheus and Butes. Indeed "Butes, it is said, was a son of Poseidon: so Hesiod in the *Catalogue*" (*Cat. Wom., Frag. Hes.* fig. 223). Still in the same line of mythical thought: Erechtheus and his twin Butes share Pandion's kingdom—but in a way quite different from the joint rule of their Dorian and Achaean geminal counterparts.

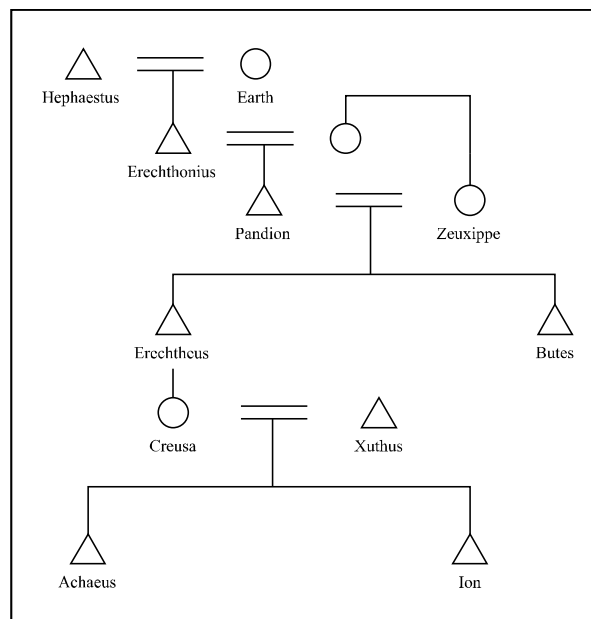


Figure 11. Athenian permutations II

The Athenian tradition now produces the great transformation of dual sovereignty: the complementary rule of king and priest rather than the symmetrical, twinned kingship. Erechtheus' share is the kingship, and Butes' is the priesthood of Athena and Poseidon-Erechtheus. The Eteobutadae continued to administer these central cults of the Acropolis into the historic period, by which time the kingship itself was resolved and differentiated into the complementary offices of the archon, *basileus*, and polemarch.

Finally, let us go back to the wandering Xuthus, son of Hellen. He married Erechtheus' daughter Creusa; it was by her he had Achaeus and Ion. It seems a perfect set-up for usurpation in the classic Peloponnesian style. Except that Xuthus, when called upon to adjudicate the succession of Erechtheus, chose the latter's eldest son Cecrops (II), thus depriving his own sons and Cecrops' younger brothers. For these good offices, he and his sons were thrown out of the city. And Athens could sustain its claims to autochthony, an ideology of no little service in the historic opposition to Sparta. The ancestors of the Athenian dead, said Socrates,

were not strangers, nor are these their descendants sojourners only, whose fathers have come from another country, but they are children of the soil, dwelling and living in their own land. And the country which brought them up is not like other countries, a stepmother to her children, but their own true mother; she bore and nourished them, and in her bosom they now repose. . . . And a great proof that she [Earth] brought forth the common ancestors of us and the departed is that she provided the means of support for her offspring. For as a woman proves her motherhood by giving milk to her young ones. . . . so did this our land prove that she was the mother of man. . . . And these are truer proofs of motherhood in a country than in a woman, for the woman in her conception and generation is but an imitation of the earth, and not the earth the woman. (Plato, *Menex.* 237b-238a).

### ***Dual kingship in the Iliad***

The "Achaean" claims of the later Spartans pose the vexed question of dual kingship in the *Iliad*. This will be our final consideration—and our own ultimate hubris. It does not seem possible that anything we can say about Homeric kingship has not already been said by our scholarly betters. Still, I risk. . . .

The problem of diarchy in the *Iliad* breaks down naturally into two parts. First and most obvious, the relationship of Agamemnon and Menelaus. Second, and perhaps less remarked, the several instances of dual leadership among other forces than the Achaeans proper, as noted in the Catalogue of Ships and elsewhere. This dualism occurs alike on the Argive and Trojan sides, particularly among the Lycian allies of the Trojans. It is customary to refer to such as dual "captaincy," as if it concerned leadership in war only, but this is to ignore the explicit designation of the personages concerned as heroes and royals (*basileis*). Nor should Odysseus' celebrated remark that "many lords are not good," that there should be but one king "to whom crafty Cronos' son gave the sceptre" (*Il.* 2.204-6) be taken as definitive, since it was addressed to the unruly mob. It appears rather that the Spartan dual kinship had many more—and more widespread—ancient precedents than are generally acknowledged.



Agamemnon, ruler of Mycenae, was of course *primus inter pares* with respect to Argive kings, and his brother Menelaus was ruler of Sparta. The “secundogeniture” (as Nilsson called it; 1972: 69) need not detain us, since it is well known that Agamemnon was at home in Sparta, where his son Orestes succeeded (through a father’s younger brother marriage), and it is well attested as a division of rule among twin kings of greater mythical antiquity (e.g. Belus and Agenor, Acrisius and Proetus, etc.). Interesting in this connection is Eric Hamp’s argument that the two names “Agamemnon” and “Menelaus” are based on the same root-term for “ruler”: “It seems that in Indo-European society the term for supreme ruler or chief among petty rulers was of the form \*GREAT + the term for ruler; this seems to have formed a close compound” (personal communication). Elsewhere Hamp writes: “as Heubeck. . . has pointed out, \*Μένμων is nothing but an apocopation of the name-set epitomized by \*Μενέλαος; it is therefore the formulaic equivalent so to speak. \*Ἄγα-μένμων is then ‘great, Ober-\*Μένμων.’ He is the principle *wanakts* of the coalition, whatever such a contemporary office exactly was” (Hamp 1971: 24).

Such etymology is functionally expressed in the *Iliad* by a number of references to the joint responsibility of Agamemnon and Menelaus for the expedition, their shared status as its leaders, and their coupling in these respects by opposition to other kings of the Argive host. Among the relevant passages are:

(1) the invocation of Atreus’ two sons by Chryses in Book 1 when he offers to ransom his daughter, allotted to Achilles in the division of booty. Chryses

suppllicated the Achaeans,  
but above all Atreus’ two sons, the marshals of the people [*kosmetore laon*]:  
“Sons of Atreus and you other strong-greaved Achaians” (*Il.* 1.15–17).

(2) It is specifically Menelaus’ and Agamemnon’s honor that is being served by this war, Achilles says in his protest over the loss of the woman (*Il.* 1.159–160); and then in explaining his sorrow to his goddess-mother, he confirms that Chryses has “suppllicated all the Achaians, but above all Atreus’ two sons” (*Il.* 1.374–75).

(3) This sense that the expedition or the rescue of Helen belongs jointly to Agamemnon and Menelaus and redounds specifically to their honor is repeated a number of times:

- at the end of the Catalogue: “Tell me then, Muse, who of them all was the best and bravest . . . who went with the sons of Atreus” (*Il.* 2.760–762).
- at the death in the first great battle of Orsilochus and Crethon, twin sons of Diocles of Phere (n.b.), who had followed along to Ilion (Troy), “winning honor for the sons of Atreus, Agamemnon and Menelaus” (*Il.* 5.552–53).
- after the battle, Antenor counsels the Trojans to give back Helen “to the sons of Atreus” (*Il.* 7.351).
- with Agamemnon out of action, Menelaus, “shepherd of the people” assumes command, and calls upon the Achaeans to help prevent Hector’s taking Patroclus’ body: “Friends, o leaders and men of counsel among the Argives, you that beside Agamemnon and Menelaus, the two

sons of Atreus, drink the community's wine and give, each man, his orders to the people" (*Il.* 17.248f).

(4) But in fact, Agamemnon and Atreus do not drink wine like the other kings. When the ships came with wine from Lemnos, sent by Jason's son Euneus, the sons of Atreus were given theirs apart and as a gift, unlike the other Archives: "Apart to the sons of Atreus, Agamemnon and Menelaus, Jason's son had given wine as a gift, a thousand measures; and thence the rest of the flowing-haired Achaians bought wine" (*Il.* 7.470-473).

(5) Agamemnon and Menelaus are of twin-minds and shared yet unspoken disposition, that is, by nature. When Agamemnon calls a counsel of battle, Menelaus appears without a summons: "of his own accord came Menelaus of the great war cry, who knew well in his own mind the cares of his brother" (*Il.* 2.408-409). After Achilles had refused to rejoin the fight, Agamemnon could not sleep (*Il.* 10.3); neither could Menelaus (*Il.* 10.5).

The *Iliad* also suggests a more direct connection between the sons of Atreus and Sparta's twinned kings: through mutual parallels to the Dioscuri. The whole story recapitulates the earlier rescue of Helen by her brothers Castor and Polydeuces, she having been abducted while still a maid by Theseus. And then, the text itself uniquely identifies the Atreid brothers with the Dioscuri as "marshals of the people" (*kosmetore laon*). Both Chryses and Achilles so refer to Agamemnon and Menelaus in Book 1, a designation not otherwise found except when Helen speaks of Castor and Polydeuces. This is in Book 3, as Helen attempts to descry the Lacedaemonian twins from the Trojan ramparts, not knowing they are already dead:

Yet nowhere can I see those two, the marshals of the people,  
Kastor, breaker of horses, and the strong boxer, Polydeukes,  
my own brothers, born with me of a single mother (*Il.* 3.236-238).

Agamemnon together with Menelaus and Castor with Polydeuces may be the only "marshals of the people," but they are hardly the only pairs of royal brothers in the *Iliad*. There were a number of such on both sides, both from Greece (including the islands) and from Asia Minor. Among the Argives,

They who lived in Aspledon and Orchomenos of the Minyai [adjoining Boeotia],  
Askalaphos led these, and Ialmenos, children of Ares (*Il.* 2.511-12).

Schedios and Epistrophos led the men of Phokis (*Il.* 2.517).

Idomeneus the spear-famed was leader of the Kretans, those who led Knossos  
and Gortyna [etc.]. . . .

Of all these Idomeneus the spear-famed was leader, with Meriones, a match for  
the murderous Lord of Battles (*Il.* 2.645-51).

They who held Nisyros and Krapathos and Kasos, and Kos, Eurypylos' city, and  
the islands called Kalydnai,  
of these again Pheidippos and Antiphos were the leaders,  
sons both of Thessalos who was born to the lord Herakles (*Il.* 2.676-79).

They who held Argissa and dwelt about Gyrtone [in Thessaly]. . . .  
 of these the leader was Polypoites, stubborn in battle,  
 son of Peirithoos whose father was Zeus immortal . . . not by himself for Leonteus  
 was with him, scion of Ares (*Il.* 2.738–45).

There may be a few other such pairs—the descriptions are sometimes unclear—and a few Argive groups were lead by three or more. While it is certainly true that those brought to Troy by a single king were more numerous, the characterizations of dual leadership are reminiscent of (other) mythic paradigms of twinned sovereignty, including the differentiations of senior and junior and references to descent from gods. Perhaps not too much should be made of the last, since in principle this was a war of heroes. Yet in at least one instance on the Trojan side, the description of dual sovereignty becomes classic: it could have been lifted from Herodotus on Spartan kings.

Among the Trojan allies there were the co-leaders: Adrestus and Amphius of Adrestia (near Troy); Hippothous and Pylaius (“scion of Ares”) of Pelasgian Larissa; Odius and Epistrophus from the shores of the Black Sea; Nastes and Amphimachus who were Carians of Miletus in Crete; and last-mentioned by Homer but not least for our purposes, Sarpedon and Glaucus of Lycia in Asia Minor. If anything, dual leadership is more common on the Trojan side than among the Argive host. On the other hand, Sarpedon and Glaucus, the most Spartan-like kings here, descend from Aeolus, son of Hellen, and more proximately from forebears who ruled in Argos. This if one takes the Homeric genealogy; by other variants, they are linked to the ancestors of the Peloponnesian Danaids, and to Minos and Crete. Crete historically had a strong Dorian component, and a constitution famously like Sparta’s (cf. Aristotle, *Pol.* 1271b20).

In the long history of Classical scholarship has not someone remarked that the “godlike” Sarpedon’s speech, rousing his co-king Glaucus and the Lycians to the attack, describes a dual sovereignty that point-for-point matches Herodotus (6.56–57) on the prerogatives of the Spartan kings? The scene is in Book 2 of the *Iliad*, before the defensive ramparts of the Achaeans, who had rallied there to protect the ships and temporarily halted the Trojan onslaught. Sarpedon now urges the Lycians to make a rush, addressing Glaucus:

Glaukos, why is it you and I are honored before the others  
 with pride of place, the choice meats and filled wine cups  
 in Lykia, and all men look upon as if we were immortals,  
 and we are appointed a great piece of land by the banks of Xanthos,  
 good land, orchard and vineyard, and ploughed for the planting of wheat?  
 Therefore it is our duty in the forefront of the Lykians  
 to take our stand, and bear our part of the blazing of battle,  
 so that a man of the close-armoured Lykians may say of us:  
 “Indeed these are no ignoble men who are the lords of Lykia,  
 these kings of ours, who feed upon the fat sheep appointed  
 and drink exquisite sweet wine, since indeed there is strength  
 of valor in them, since they fight in the forefront of the Lykians”  
 (*Il.* 12.310–321).

The pride of place—presumably the seats of honor as well as the priorities in the feast—the choice meats and filled wine cups, the rich lands set aside on a body of water (recall the Spartan kings’ lake), the duty to lead in war, and all these the joint privileges of two kings whom men look upon as if they were immortals: the

resemblances to Spartan kings are surely striking. When it is added from the genealogy recited by Glaucus, son of Hippolochus, that his senior co-king Sarpedon is the son of Zeus, the paradigm is virtually complete. Here is Homer's genealogy, given by Glaucus before he is about to do battle with Diomedes (fig. 12):

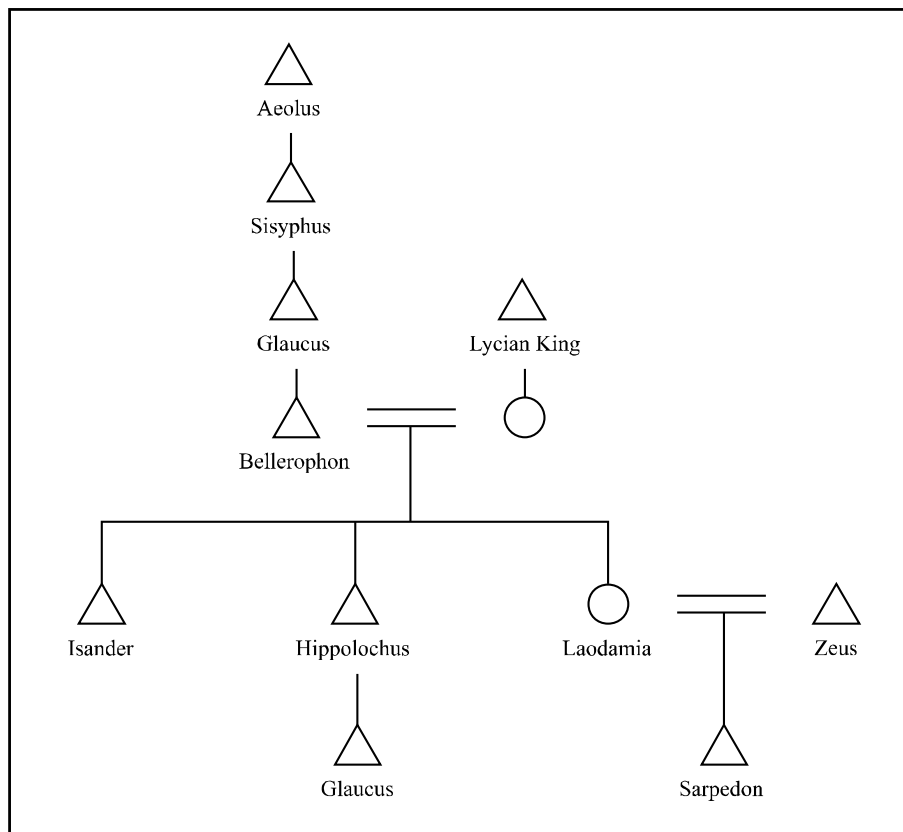


Figure 12. Genealogy of Glaucus (according to Homer)

Bellerophon, the ancestor of the Lycian kings, was a Heracleian-like figure. Driven from Argos by the Danaid ruler Proetus over a marital contretemps, he was sent by the latter to his father-in-law, the king of Lycia. Bellerophon carried a secret message from Proetus to the Lycian king with instructions to do Bellerophon in. The Lycian king set him a series of dangerous tasks, the slaying of monsters, as Eurystheus did to Heracles. But when Bellerophon accomplishes these impossibles, the tasks turn out to have been marriage ordeals: the king accords him his daughter and the succession to the throne of Lycia. Bellerophon has three children by the Lycian princess. The first Isander was killed by Ares, the second Hippolochus sired Glaucus, the co-king of Sarpedon, who was the son of Bellerophon's third child, a daughter Laodamia. The latter lay with Zeus and bore his son (Sarpedon).

Between this and the ideal Peloponnesian genealogy of dual sovereignty, there is one significant difference only. Glaucus and Sarpedon are children of a human brother and sister, the senior Sarpedon being father's sister's son to Glaucus. If this were a Dorian succession, one would expect the two kings to be sons of the

brothers Isander and Hippolochus. Rather, everything happens as if it were consistent with another social transformation for which the Lycians were uniquely known: they were, as Herodotus told, matrilineal “during the rule of Sarpedon.” They came from Crete, according to Herodotus, and in their customs they resemble the Cretans in some ways, the Carians in others but in one of their customs, that of taking the mother’s name instead of the father’s, they are unique. Ask a Lycian who he is, and he will tell you his own name and his mother’s, then his grandmother’s and great-grandmother’s and so on. And if a free woman has a child by a slave, the child is considered legitimate, whereas the children of a free man, however distinguished he may be, and a foreign wife or mistress have no citizen rights at all (Herod. 1.173).

Hence, the permutation of the paradigm: Isander is eliminated without issue, killed by Ares; and instead of his son, the child of the sister (and of Zeus) is superior to his human co-king, the child of the brother.

### Conclusion

The mention of Crete, the distribution of Homeric dual kings in Asia Minor as well as mainland and island Greece, all this could lead to speculations about the historic sources of the Spartan kingship. Such speculations seem to be a favored game of classical scholarship, as if the location of the origins, preferably somewhere outside Greece, would somehow be a satisfactory explanation of the Spartan case. Some such external source, Phoenicia for example (Drews 1983: 81), would have the special advantage of accounting for the uniqueness of Spartan kingship among the Hellenes, while at the same time it invokes the apparent self-evidence of explanations by cultural diffusion. Diffusion may be marginally better than “survival,” but for several reasons we would not follow these common historicist modes of “explanation.”

For one reason, like “survival,” diffusion merely postpones the problem rather than resolves it. Just as survival tells us nothing unless we know the contemporary values of the institution, the meanings and functions that give it continuity, so diffusion must contend with the fact that borrowing is always selective, hence likewise depends on the cultural system of the borrowers. Even if it were true that Sparta got dual kingship from somewhere else, why just Sparta, and of Sparta, just why? Besides, everything in myth looks like dual kingship of the Spartan kind was ancient and widespread in Greece, much more so than is commonly supposed. And in any event, the problem of dual kingship can never be solved by its historical traces alone. We have to understand its structural values: in the broadest sense its meaning in the given social context. From the meaning we can make more sense of the history than vice versa.

We have tried to show that Spartan dual kingship is a mytho-praxis, endowing the Laconian sovereignty and its existential situation with a treasure-house of mythic values. It evokes famous exploits of conquest and hegemony, the usurpations of indigenous kings, and reminiscences of universal domination. Its structural features are imitations of the sovereignty of Zeus and implications of the dominance of Mycenae.

When Athens, in opposing such pretensions, put forth the opposed ideology of autochthony, the two ideals of sovereign right could only reinforce each other. The contemporary political contest evoked a dialectic present from the beginning of

human history. And the more the Athenians insisted on their own superiority as native sons of the soil, the more virtues the Spartans could find in an *ancien régime* of (immigrant) heroic kings. “Survival” can be applied to the doctrines of both sides, but the doctrines survived because they were functionally predicated on each other. The Athenian apologist Isocrates once remonstrated with the Spartans, that they ought to stop splitting hairs about leadership in Hellas. The Lacedaemonians, he wrote,

have inherited the false doctrine that leadership is theirs by ancestral right. If, however, one should prove to them that this honor belongs to us rather than to them, perhaps they might give up splitting hairs about this question and pursue their true interests (Isocr. *Paneg.* 18).

Yet for Spartans, splitting heirs was hardly splitting hairs. Their dual kingship was proof that leadership in Hellas belonged to them: by ancestral rights that went back on the human side to hegemonic kings of yore, and on the divine side to the universal sovereignty of Zeus.

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## Naitre jumelé avec grandeur : la double royauté à Sparte

Résumé : Cet article examine les configurations dyarchiques par le biais d’une analyse détaillée de la double royauté en Grèce ancienne. Jumelés et inséparables, à la fois humains et divins, les rois spartiates étaient eux-mêmes vus comme descendants de jumeaux célestes. Dès lors, on peut penser la diarchie spartiate comme une réalisation empirique des deux corps du roi – la double royauté comme gémellité souveraine. Cet essai se poursuit par un examen des autres jumeaux royaux de la mythologie grecque, dont l’un était habituellement vu comme descendant directe d’un dieu, et avance l’idée que de tels mythes sur les origines dynastiques constituent une cosmologie du droit souverain par laquelle le mythe spartiate des rois-étrangers d’origine divine était opposé à l’idéologie athénienne de l’autochtonie.

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