

The sacred system of Sparta: local cults and colonial identity

[SLIDE] The current presentation considers the complex of Spartan divinities and sacred areas with the view of analysing their interconnection with the internal social organisation of the city and its relations with other *poleis*, notably the colonies.

The presentation will begin by discussing the several cults attested in Sparta and their topographical dislocation; the second part will focus on the Laconian features of the ritual actions performed for Athena, Apollo, Artemis and the Dioskouroi; finally, the last part will deal with their impact on the international Spartan network.

In fact, the Spartan pantheon acts as a privileged laboratory to explore the religious system of a Greek city-State other than Athens and its external contacts, providing a privileged view on the multifaceted nature of ancient Hellenic cults.

[SLIDE] Besides the central role kept by the gods Zeus, Athena, Apollo and Artemis, further honoured deities were the Dioskouroi, Aphrodite, Dionysus, Demeter and Kore, Poseidon, Asclepius, Tyche, the Charites and the Nymphs, the Muses, the Moirai, Eileithyia, Hestia, Hermes, Herakles, Enyalios (god of violent war, sometimes identified with Ares and sometimes believed to be his son).

In addition to the canonical Olympian gods, Sparta was renowned for the cult paid to the *pathemata*,¹ personification of abstract concepts and feelings - namely Phobos (“the fear”),² Aidos (“the modesty”),³ Hypnos (“the sleep”),⁴ Thanatos (“the death”),⁵ Gelos (“the laughter”),⁶ Eros (“the love”),⁷ Limos (“the hunger”) - and to a plethora of heroic cults, including Agamemnon, Menelaus, Orestes, Cassandra, Astrabakos, Hyakynthos, the Leukippidai⁸ - as it is going to be illustrated in the next contribution by Dr. Golino.

The several divinities were venerated through various epithets, according to their sphere of action, often concerned with the formation of the young Spartan citizens, the war activities of the adults as well as the daily life of common men and women.

¹ Richer 2021, pp. 48-51.

² Plutarch, Life of Cleomenes 9.1

³ Paus. III 20, 10-11.

⁴ Paus. III 18, 1.

⁵ Plutarch, Life of Cleomenes 9.1; Paus. III 18, 1

⁶ Plutarch, Life of Cleomenes 9.1

⁷ Paus. III 26, 5

⁸ A Companion to Sparta, p. 184.

As other Greek urban communities, Spartans created and corroborated their civic identity through shared cults and periodical public rituals aimed to strengthen the social bonds among the participants, to express their political cohesion and to promote a sense of unity and belonging. Furthermore, in the peculiar Spartan context, the educational and military aspect was strongly rooted in the religious practice.

And again like elsewhere in Greece, the most suitable setting for the performance of public worship acts involving the Spartan community was the sanctuary, a consciously circumscribed area permanently assigned to the implementation of rituals fostering the interaction between mortals and immortals and dedicated to a specific god or hero, who was thus his owner.

Coherently, Sparta gradually equipped itself with a remarkably extended range of sacred spaces, whose monumentalization went hand in hand with the formation of the *polis*' polity.⁹ Such spaces fall in the categories of urban, sub-urban and extra-urban sanctuaries and are variously attested by ancient authors' and epigraphic sources and, to a lesser extent, by architectural remains and archaeological records.

[SLIDE] Some of the Spartan urban *temene* were located at the hearth of the city, such as the one consecrated to Athena Chalkioikos on the Acropolis, marked by a polyadic significance, holding a primary position in guaranteeing and protecting its civic body. The Bronze House of the goddess was flanked by a shrine of the Muses to the left (Paus. III 17, 5) and a bronze statue of Zeus Hypatos to the right (Paus. III 17, 6).

In the Acropolis district and its close surroundings, also the following deities were honoured: Aphrodite Areia, whose sanctuary was not far from that of Athena; Poseidon, whose cult place was next to the later Roman theatre on the southern side of the hill (Paus. III 15, 10); Zeus Cosmetas ("the orderer"), owner of a temple mentioned by ancient sources (Paus. III 17, 4).

In the agora, Apollo Pythaeus, Artemis and Leto were venerated through statues; other cults of the district included Zeus Agoraios, Athena Agoraia and Poseidon Asphalios ("Securer"), Ge, the Moirai (Paus. III 11, 9-10), Hermes with child-Dionysus and Hestia.

Further sacred areas played a part in defining the borders of the city and at the same time expressing its control over the surrounding region.

⁹ Frangkopoulou F. 2011, Spartan Sanctuaries and Lakonian Identity Between 1200 and 600 B.C. (Ph.D. Dissertation, King's College London), London.

[SLIDE] The *polis*, although lacking an encircling defensive wall until the Hellenistic age, was guarded on all sides by her gods. In fact, as summarised in the slide, a series of sanctuaries delimited the extension of the settlement through their peri-urban or sub-urban location: the area of Artemis Orthia, at the edge of the city, on the bank of Eurotas; that of Helen and Menelaos at Therapne, on a hill on the eastern bank of the river Eurotas, where the Dioskouroi (Castor and Pollux), Helen's brothers, were said to live under the earth; the Dioskouroi were also venerated in the Phoibaion, a shrine south-east of the town and on the west bank of the River Eurotas, below the cliff which was the site of a sanctuary of Helen and Menelaos; that of Demeter Chtonia ("subterranean") and Kore Soteira ("Saviour"), south-west of the city, at the foot of Mount Taigetos; [SLIDE] that of Zeus Messapeus at Tsakona, north-east of Sparta and that of that of Zeus Tropaios ("who turns the armies") at the southern limit of the city, at the beginning of the processional way of the Aphetais (Paus. III 12, 9).

[SLIDE] Still other sanctuaries acted as territorial markers, declaring the Spartan dominion of the region. These include the extra-urban sanctuary of Artemis Limnatis at Volimnos, at the Mount Taigetos, on the border between Laconia and Messenia; that of Apollo at Phoiniki; and above all the *Amyklaion* reflecting the conquest of Amyklai in the middle of the Lakonian strategic plain south of the city, whose achievement was further stressed by a Sacred Way, the just mentioned Aphetais.

[SLIDE] The polyadic sanctuary of Athena Poliouchos,¹⁰ the tutelary goddess of the city, also known with the epithet Chalkioikos deriving from the bronze panels affixed to the interior walls of the temple, was situated on the Acropolis (Paus. III 17, 2),¹¹ on the Palekastro hill.

The cult of the polyadic Athena dates back to the post-Dark Age period and a first temple was constructed already in the VII century B.C. Subsequently, in the last quarter of VI century, a new edifice was built, with walls panelled with the just mentioned bronze reliefs and accordingly known as the 'Bronze House'. The structure, quite simple, was made out of limestone and its foundations indicate a structure of limited dimensions. On the bronze plaques were wrought in relief images of Amphitrite and Poseidon, many of the labours of Heracles, the birth of Athena (Paus. III 17, 3).

The edifice hosted a cult statue depicting a warrior Athena with spear and shield (as it can be elicited from its reproduction on coins issued on the III century A.D. portraying an Archaic simulacrum)¹²

¹⁰ A new reading of the Damonon stele, p. 9.

¹¹ Athena Chalkioikos is referred to in two brief fragments of Alkman (fr. 43 Page-Davies = 43 Calame and fr. 87 (c) Page-Davies = 112 Calame: references to her cult in Calame (1983) 506–8).

¹² Grunauervon Hoerschelmann 1978, LVI R 6; LVII R 1-6; LX R 5.

made by the famous sculptor and bronzesmith Gitiadas (late VI century), mentioned twice in Pausanias' *Periegesis* (III 17,2).

[SLIDE] The peculiar technique of decorating the edifice with bronze plaques, some of which recovered during the archaeological excavations and in some cases showing a *gorgoneion*, led the scholars to acknowledge the role of Sparta in the diffusion of this architectural-decorative style in its colonies, spreading its artistic language in the *apoikiai*. Bronze panels have been discovered, in fact, in relation to the temple of Zeus at Cyrene;¹³ even in this case *gorgoneia* are reproduced over some of the bronze items. Exactly the same type of *gorgoneion* can be found also at Taras, another Spartan colony, on a clay acroterion.¹⁴

The *temenos*¹⁵ was provided by a peribolos enclosure documented by a wall, an altar, a southern stoa and a western one, the latter decorated by eagles surmounted by Nikai, offered by Lysander to celebrate the victory over the Athenians in the Peloponnesian war (Paus. III 17, 4)¹⁶.

The sacred area served a plurality of functions, variously connected with the socio-political and military life of the city and summarized in the slide.

The sanctuary was known as a place of asylum. Lykourgos himself fled and took refuge in the precinct after having caused the rage of the rich, due to the introduction of his reforms (Plut. Lyk. 11.1–2, cf. Plut. Mor. 227a), and also Leonidas did likewise (Plut. Agis 11.8). Again, Pausanias the regent, accused of alleged correspondence with the king of Persia (Thuc. I, 128-129 and 132-133), sought

¹³ Kane S. 2006, 'Bronze Plaques from the Archaic Favissa at Cyrene', E. Fabbricotti - O. Menozzi (a cura di) 2006, *Cirenaica: studi, scavi e scoperte. Parte I: nuovi dati da città e territorio* (Chieti 24-26 novembre 2003), (BAR International Series MCDLXXXVIII), Oxford, 205-216.

¹⁴ Gagliano 2017, p. 89.

¹⁵ Dickins G. 1905-1906, 'Laconia. Excavations at Sparta, 1906. Topographical Conclusions', *ABSA* 12, 431-439.

Dickins G. 1906-1907, 'Laconia. Excavations at Sparta, 1907. The Hieron of Athena Chalkioikos', *ABSA* 13, 137-154.

Dickins G. 1907-1908, 'Laconia. Excavations at Sparta, 1908. The Hieron of Athena Chalkioikos', *ABSA* 14, 142-146.

Lamb W. 1926-1927, 'Excavations at Sparta, 1927. Bronzes from the Acropolis, 1924-1927', *ABSA* 28, 82-95.

Piccirilli L. 1984, 'Il santuario, la funzione guerriera della dea, la regalità: il caso di Athena Chalkioikos', M. Sordi (a cura di), *I santuari e la guerra nel mondo classico*, Contributi dell'Istituto di storia antica, vol X, Milano, 3-19.

Spallino G. 2016, 'Athena Chalkioikos a Sparta: riesame dei dati archeologici e topografici del santuario', F. Longo - R. Di Cesare - S. Privitera (a cura di), *ΔΠΟΜΟΙ. Studi sul mondo antico offerti a Emanuele Greco dai suoi allievi della Scuola Archeologica Italiana di Atene, Atene-Paestum*, 695-710.

Woodward A.M. 1923-1925, 'Laconia. Excavations at Sparta, 1924-25. The Acropolis. The Finds', *ABSA* 26, 253-276.

Woodward A.M. 1926-1927, 'Laconia. Excavations at Sparta, 1927. The Acropolis', *ABSA* 28, 37-48.

Woodwar A.M. 1927-1928, 'Excavations at Sparta. Terracottas, Plastic Vases, Relief. (From the Acropolis, 1907-8 and 1924-7)', *ABSA* 29, 75-107. Woodward A.M. 1928-1930, 'Excavations at Sparta, 1924-27. Votive Inscriptions from the Acropois', *ABSA* 30, 241-254. Woodward A.M. - Hobling M.B. 1923-1925, 'Laconia. Excavations at Sparta, 1924-25. The Acropolis', *ABSA* 26, 240-252.

¹⁶ Gagliano 2017, p. 83.

refuge in the sanctuary as a suppliant around 470 B.C. and was walled up there, before being dragged out just before death.¹⁷ Later on, also Agesilaos claimed asylum in Athenaion, to no avail.

Military victories were celebrated in the sacred area: Besides the mentioned offers dedicated by Lysander, two statues of the regent Pausanias, victor at Plateia (479 a.C.), were erected beside the altar upon order of the oracle of Delphi (Paus. III, 17, 7; Thuc. I 134, 4).

[SLIDE] In addition to military achievements, also agonistic victories were publicly flaunted in the *temenos*, as documented, for instance, by the Damonon stele recording the victories that two Lakedaimonians, Damonon and his son Enymakratidas, won in the late V century B.C. in equestrian contests and footraces at nine different local festivals.¹⁸

Honorary acts, starting from *proxenia* decrees, were displayed in the sanctuary, too - as it can be elicited by a II century B.C. inscription containing a *proxenia* decree for Carneades of Cyrene.¹⁹

[SLIDE] In the sanctuary, a singular statuette of a trumpeter²⁰ has been recovered; among the discovered items, it is noteworthy of mentioning the unusual abundance of votive clay and especially bronze bells,²¹ dedicated from the VII century onward and particularly during the classical age. Although their interpretation is not clear, they are almost a unicum in the panorama of votive offerings, exception made for the Samian Heraion.²² Interestingly, an inventory list from a sanctuary (whose divinity is discussed) at Taras (Torricella) mentions a “new bell” among the belongings of the deity and a trumpet,²³ thus stressing the impact of the Spartan influence on the colony.

The goddess Athena was worshipped as Promachos, too. An archaic statue of Athena Promachos (“who fights in front”), with an Amazonomachy depicted on her shield, is documented by several fragments recovered from the Acropolis.²⁴ The festivals of the Promacheia are documented by Sosibos, who states that: “In this festival the boys from the countryside [i.e. boys who were *perioikoi*] are crowned with wreaths of reeds or with a tiara, but the boys from the *agōgē* [i.e., who are participating in the system of education for Spartan youths] follow without wreaths” (Sosibios FGrH 595 F 4, cited by Athenaeus 674a–b).

¹⁷ Eventually Pausanias was rehabilitated as the avenger of his uncle Leonidas. And in fact, in the following decades, his corpse was reburied in the place where he had died. Two bronze statues were dedicated in the sacred precinct by order of Delphi (A Companion to Sparta, p. 285).

¹⁸ A new reading of the Damonon stele, p. 1.

¹⁹ IG V 1, 5, 15 (... εἰς τ[ὸ] / [i]ερὸν τᾶς Ἀθάνης τᾶς Χαλκιοίκου...). Cf. Lo Monaco 2009, 673–674.

²⁰ Whibley L. 1909, ‘The Bronze Trumpeter at Sparta and the Earthquake of 464 B.C.’, CQ 3.1, 60–62.

²¹ Villing A. 2002, ‘Whom Did the Bell Toll in Ancient Greece? Archaic and Classical Greek Bells at Sparta and Beyond’, ABSA 97, 223–295.

²² Cartledge P. 1982, ‘Sparta and Samos in the Archaic Period: a ‘special relationship’?’, CQ n.s. 32, 243–265.

²³ Gagliano 2017, 94–95.

²⁴ Palagia 1993, ‘An Athena Promachos from the Acropolis of Sparta’, in Palagia and Coulson, eds, 167–75.3.

Moreover, somewhere in Acropolis district also stood a temple of Athena Ergane (Paus. III 17, 4) and of Athena Ophthalmitis, commissioned by Lykourgos to commemorate his loss of an eye during an assault by Alkandros, a young aristocrat who revolted against his laws (Paus. III 18, 2).

Next to the *dromos* there was a shrine of Athena Axiopoinos (“of deserved revenge”) (Paus. III 15, 6), whose construction was traced back to Herakles, and in the agora cult was paid to Athena Xenia and Athena Agoraia.

[SLIDE] The central role held by Apollo is testified by the pervasive worship reserved to the god by the Spartans, who praised him especially as Karneios, as is going to be stressed by Prof. Nenci and Hyakinthios in the *Amyklaion*, as the contribution of Proff. S. Vlizos and A. Delahaye is going to outline, and through the festival of Gymnopaidiai taking place in the theatre (Hdt. VI 67) or in the agora, inside a place known as Chorus (Paus. III 11.9).

Apollo Karneios, was the holder of two sacred areas inside the city, probably located inside the agora, where a shrine stood (Paus. III 13.3–6; see also IG 5.1.497) and on a hill, to the west, near a *dromos*, where he was worshipped with Eileithyia and Artemis Hegemone (Paus. III 14, 6).

The *Amyklaion*, with its huge statue of an armed Apollo, with a helmet, a spear and a bow acted as one of the most relevant sacred areas of the city, till the point that public decrees, such as the one concerning the Peace of Nikia, were here exhibited. The colossal statue stood on a pedestal resembling an altar functioning as the tomb of Hyakinthos.

The cult of the Doric/Spartan Apollo, particularly with the epithets Karneios and Hyakinthios, turns out to be a paramount element in the wider frame of Sparta international relations. The identity value attributed to the cult of the god is for instance reflected on the colony of Taras, where it is attested by an acrolith pertaining to a not-identified temple, by statuettes of the god recovered at Castel Saraceno sul Mar Grande and especially by the tumulus, sited outside the Temènide Entrance, dedicated to Hyakinthos or Apollo Hyakinthios (Polyb. VIII 28,2).²⁵ Furthermore, in the Doric Gortyn of Crete, an *Amyklaion* (mentioned in the Great Inscription) was situated, once again, just outside the city - thus corroborating the local tradition conceiving Gortyn as a Spartan colony²⁶.

Similarly, the Spartan cult of Apollo Karneios was imported in the colony of Thera and subsequently from Thera to Cyrene.

²⁵ Luisa Moscati Castelnovo, Iloti e fondazione di Taranto, *Latomus*, T. 50, Fasc. 1 (janvier-mars 1991), pp. 64-79.

²⁶ Gortina VIII.1, p. 36. Sporn k. 1996, ‘apollo auf kreta. zum problem der Lokalisierung der kultorte des apollo amyklaios’, in F. Bubenheimer et alii (hrsg.), *Kult und Funktion griechischer Heiligtümer in archaischer und klassischer Zeit 1*. (archäologisches Studentkolloquium, heidelberg, 18.-20. Februar 1995), (schriften des deutschen archäologenverbandes 15), mainz, 83-93.

[SLIDE] The divine sister of Apollo, Artemis, protector of the youth, often concerned with the passage from adolescence and childhood to mature life, held a main role in the Spartan pantheon too. In fact, the local religious system reserved a special attention to the preparation to adulthood and therefore to full citizenship and many of the festivals for the goddess can be ultimately regarded as passage rites in the broadest sense.

The goddess is worshipped as Hegemone (“the leader”, possibly “who leads the marriage procession or chorus” given its association with Eileithyia in the mentioned shrine in the agora, Paus. III 14, 6); as Limnatis in the sacred area at the borders with Messenia; as Pellane;²⁷ as Corythalia, with Kourotrophic features in a sanctuary located between Sparta and Amyklai; but above all as Orthia, alias “who makes things straight”, in the prominent sub-urban sanctuary whose celebrations - including the whipping of the boys at the altar as a test of endurance and strength and the ritual inversion of the commonly accepted values, order and hierarchy - preserved the Lykourgan tradition of social order, ordered by the Delphic Apollo.

[SLIDE] The sacred precinct was provided with its first all-stone temple in the first half of the VI century, exactly when it became a chief locus for the rites of passage and initiation that were connected with the public upbringing of the young, both male and female. Even in this case, the *xoanon* depicted an armed goddess, with spear in the right hand and a bow in the left one.

Here too, Artemis is associated with Eileithyia, given that her sanctuary was located next to the one of Orthia (Paus. III 17, 1).

Once again, the Laconian cult of Artemis finds has parallels in the Spartan colonies. In Taras, several terracotta figurines document periodical ritual actions implemented for Artemis, especially venerated as Bendis, but above all, the cult of the Spartan Artemis Hyakinthotrophos is documented at Taras²⁸ and a Cnidos,²⁹ possibly another Spartan colony.

[SLIDE] As far as the Dioskouroi are concerned, their cult had a great military, social and political value, being the twins a sort of emblem and guarantee of the Spartan dual kingship. Moreover, their respective features mirrored the basic Spartan values, connected to the education of young males: Castor is a soldier and a knight, Pollux is an athlete and an ephebus.³⁰

²⁷ Spyropoulos 2002, 24–5.

²⁸ G. Pugliese Carratelli, Artemis Hyakinthotrophos a Taranto?, in PP, XLIV, 1989, 463–469.

²⁹ ED 77, III- II s.a. PP 42 (1982): 110–23, and, with Gauthier's corrections (BE [1989], no. 269), in SEG 38, 812A and IKnidos 220

³⁰ Lippolis 2009, 143.

As for the military meaning associated with them, the Spartan kings - who were, *inter alia*, priests of Zeus,³¹ worshipped in Sparta also as Agetor (“who leads the army”) - were entitled to carry images of the Dioskouroi to the battles, so that they could assist the army. Moreover, the battle itself was preceded by sacrifices offered to the divine brothers, who happened to appear in epiphany during several wars, to bring victory, such as when they appeared to Lysander at Aegospotami - *that’s why they were represented in the monument offered at Delphi to commemorate the event (Plut. Lysander 12, 1; 12, 18; Cic. div. 1, 75; Paus. X 9).*³²

The military tradition connected to them is brought from Sparta to the Italian peninsula: to Taras, as we are going to observe shortly, but also to Epizephyrian Locris, which apparently defeated Croton due to their appearance in the battlefield (Strab. VU 1, 10; Ius. 20, 3, 8-9), and finally to the Latium Region, as the Roman victory at Lake Regillo indicates.

The divine brothers are already mentioned in the Iliad (Hom. III, 236-239) and are defined by Pindar as “the intendants of Sparta” (Pind. N. X 52). Their cult is subsequently attested in the Laconian city in the VII century B.C. by the Spartan poet Alcman³³ and is documented in the colony of Thera, too.

The ritual actions performed in their honour were numerous and dislocated in several spots of the city: They were venerated as Apheterioi (“who foster the starting”, “Starters”) at the entrance of the *dromos* for the races of the boys (Paus. III 14, 7); a tomb of Castor was located next to the Skias and in the surroundings of the agora they were worshipped as Ambouliai (“Counsellors”); finally, at Therapne there were a spring and a sanctuary consecrated to Pollux, connected to a temple of the Dioskouroi in the Phoibaion (Paus. III 20, 2), *probably a sanctuary dedicated to Phoibe, one of the Leukippides sisters married by the Dioskouroi, where the ephebes performed sacrifices to Enyalios.*

The *theoxenia*, comprising an offer of a meal to the sacred guests, was the commonest form of ritual performed in their honour. The scene, frequently depicted on Laconian vessels and reliefs, is usually marked by the presence of two amphorae, whose ritual usage is a peculiarity of the Spartan religious practice and has been variously explained³⁴ as a reference to the funerary sphere, to the domestic dimension³⁵ or even to the agonistic victory.³⁶ The two amphorae are so intimately linked to the twin sons of Zeus that they ultimately become a metaphor of their divine presence.

³¹ Richer 2012, 27-28.

³² Shapiro 1999, p. 107.

³³ POxy 2389, fr. 3a; D.L. PAGE, *Poetae Melici Graeci* 1962, p. 11.

³⁴ A summary of the different positions can be found in Lippolis, 138, and Le Roy 1961.

³⁵ On the possible chthonian significance cf. Hermans 1986, Nilsson 1906, 417.

³⁶ Sanders 1992.

[SLIDE] In Taras, the cult of the Dioskouroi is a widespread phenomenon as well, revealing the eternal bonds between the Western colony and Sparta. In the Magna Graecia city, 18 votive deposits contained *pinakes* representing the divine brothers, *either standing, on horseback or lying over a kline*. More rarely, they appear standing in front of the horses, hunting the Kalydonian boar, raping the Leukippides, leading a chariot, during the *theoxenia* ritual, in front of or next to a *trapeza*.

Meaningfully, in three cases the findings are associated to even numbers of amphorae: The fact that the amphorae are dedicated in couples should not be underestimated, being a sign that the two vases actually acquire a religious meaning precisely in reference to the couple of brothers.³⁷ Not only the amphorae have been recovered from the sacred deposits, but they are also frequently depicted on the Tarantine and Spartan supports (vessels, reliefs and *pinakes*) representing the Dioskouroi.

[SLIDE] Another element connecting the Laconian tradition with the Tarantine one is the recurring presence, on the scenes (*depicted over the vessels, on the reliefs of Sparta and on the pinakes of Taras*) of the wooden elements known as *dokana* (two wooden pillars linked by one or more transversal timbers), that in Sparta, according to Plutarch, represent the brothers themselves and their *philadelphia* (“brotherly love”) (*Plut. De fraterno amore*, 478). So, in Sparta as in Taras, aniconic images of the Dioskouroi could be provided by couples of amphorae and by *dokana*, and in both places the main ritual took the form of a *theoxenia*, showing a phenomenon of clear cultural derivation and ethical adhesion to the Spartan model.³⁸

What’s novel and uncommon in the Spartan religion is the capacity of the citizens to reshape the gods turning them into super-natural beings with strong local features, rooted in the city’s ethical, educational and military mindset.

[SLIDE] So, the panhellenic deities Athena, Apollo, Artemis, are introduced into a strongly Spartan dimension, also reflected in a meaningful passage of the *Lysistrata* by Aristophanes (*Aristophanes, Lysistrata* 1296–1312), where a Laconian chorus is set. Here, in contrast to the divinities of panhellenic scope invoked by the chorus of Athenians, the gods hymned by the choral voice of Laconia are all reduced to the local pantheon: Amyklaian Apollo, Athena Chalkioikos, the Dioskouroi sons of Tyndareus who play sports near the Eurotas, Artemis the chorus-leader.³⁹

[SLIDE] Another peculiarity of the Spartan religion is the success of armed statues of the gods, till the point that Plutarch claims that all the statues of Spartan gods and goddesses were armed, so to

³⁷ Lippolis 2009.

³⁸ Lippolis 2009, 147, 149.

³⁹ A Companion to Sparta, p. 178.

inspire courage and braveness to the mortals (Customs of the Spartans 28 = Mor. 239a⁴⁰ and Sayings of the Spartans, Charillos 5 = Mor. 232d⁴¹).

Besides the mentioned armed statues of Athena Calkioikos and Artemis Orthia, in Sparta also Dionysos was represented holding a bow (Macrobius, Saturnalia, I 19, 1-2); the cult statue of Herakles was armed as well (Pausanias III 15, 3); in the sanctuary of Morpho/Aphrodite, the wooden cult statue was equipped with helmet, spear, and shield (Paus. III 15, 10; Antipater of Sidon, Appendix Planudea of the Palatine Anthology poem 176⁴²) and she was possibly represented armed also in the other *temenos* where she was worshipped as Areia.⁴³ The whole Spartan *ethos* and system of values is verily condensed in the image of the armed god.

Exactly some of the Spartan religious peculiarities, that make its sacred system somehow unique, were exported outside the city, playing a key-role in weaving the international network of Laconian colonies.

The bronze revetment of the Acropolis 'Bronze House' of Athena is replicated, no doubt with an identitary implication, in the temple of Zeus of Cyrene. Taras is also marked by the presence, epigraphically recorded, of bells and trumpets, similarly attested, in this case on an archaeological base, in the Spartan sanctuary of Athena.

The *Amyklaion*, being one of the outmost relevant shrines of the city, is replicated in the Doric Gortyn and the same cult of Apollo Hyakinthios is testified at Taras, too. The god's epiclesis Karneios is to be found in the colony of Thera, too, and in the sub-colony of Cyrene as well.

The Spartan Artemis Hyakinthotrophos is venerated in Taras and in Cnidus.

The Spartan Aphrodite Basilis ("Queen") is duplicated in Satyrion,⁴⁴ in the territory of Taras, and the Aphrodite Areia is reiterated in Taras,⁴⁵ where the military aspect of the Spartan Dioskouroi is echoed in their particular cult, distinguished by the peculiar presence of *dokena* and twin amphorae, possibly in the context of *theoxenia* rituals.

⁴⁰ They worship Aphrodite in full armour, and they make statues of all the gods, male and female, holding spears, on the grounds that they all possess the excellence that pertains to war.

⁴¹ When someone asked why all of the statues of the gods that are set up among them have weapons, he (Charillos, a king ruling in the VIII century B.C.) said "So that we may not ascribe to the gods the reproaches that are spoken against men because of their [men's] cowardice, and so that the young may not pray to the gods while they [the young men] are unarmed".

⁴² Cypris [= Aphrodite] belongs to Sparta too, but her statue is not, as in other cities, draped in soft folds. Rather, on her head she wears a helmet instead of a veil, and she holds a spear instead of golden branches. For it is not fitting that she should be without weapons, being the wife of Thracian Ares and a Lakedaimonian.

⁴³ A Companion to Sparta, p. 434.

⁴⁴ Osanna 1990, p. 87.

⁴⁵ Osanna M. 1990, 'Sui culti arcaici di Sparta e Taranto: Afrodite Basilis', PP 45, 81-94.

In conclusion, the distinctive characters that distinguish the Spartan religious system and ritual practice from the rest of the Helladic world, and that are ultimately embedded in the Spartan ethical approach and behavioural pattern, act as factors underlying the *polis* relations with its colonies and sub-colonies. The latter indeed express their adherence to the Laconian model through the religion and the adoption of such Spartan ‘uncommon’ elements.