

## SECTION A

### SPARTA FROM CONTEMPORARY SPARTAN POETRY

#### INTRODUCTION: THE EVIDENCE OF POETRY

Our best, and arguably only reliable literary evidence for Sparta comes from the works of two early poets, Tyrtaios and Alkman. But both pose a variety of problems for the historians. Firstly, of course, they were writing poetry not history, whatever the original intentions or the purposes to which they were later put. Then of course ‘poetry is what gets lost in translation’: the translations here are presented in short lines and verses where appropriate, to remind the reader of the original form, but they are certainly not poetry in English, nor is there any attempt to represent the difference between Tyrtaios’ elegies written in traditional Ionic dialect (as used by Homer) and Alkman’s lyric poetry, written in Doric dialect. A further difficulty is the way in which the poems survive. They were considered classics in later Greek and even Roman times, and were copied by hand for private and public libraries, but do not survive in anything like book or codex form: instead Tyrtaios, Alkman and Simonides survive either on original papyrus copies preserved in inevitably fragmentary condition in the sands of Egypt, or by being selectively quoted by writers, sometimes as historical evidence, sometimes to illustrate a word or literary feature, or sometimes in anthology. Finally we have no direct evidence about the authors themselves: the anecdotes and even mini-biographies that survive are sometimes by authors writing a thousand years later. All ancient *Lives* of poets tend to treat anything in the poems as autobiographical, and in addition the non-contemporary authors have potentially fallen victim to the reputation of the Spartans; or the irony, surely too good to be true, of Sparta’s poet being a crippled Athenian schoolmaster. For more from these poets, see M. L. West, *Greek Lyric Poetry* (Oxford University Press, 1993).

#### TYRTAIOS: A1–A12

Tyrtaios seems to have lived in the mid-seventh century BC, and had a lasting influence not only on later sources but also on Spartan culture. His poetry continued to be recited in public and private contexts in Sparta, and it illustrates some of the ideals for which the Spartans were so famous. Today Tyrtaios’ poetry is considered an invaluable primary source for early Sparta which gives us some insight into a time when momentous changes such as the earliest constitutional laws and the conquest of Messene were still a matter of living memory, and some aspects of Spartan life had not yet reached their ‘final’ form. Tyrtaios’ poems therefore allow us to question some later ideas about the development of Spartan society, especially the ‘Lykourgan reforms’. Later authors (e.g. Plutarch) also realised that Tyrtaios was a crucial authentic source for early Sparta, and therefore quoted passages to illustrate arguments about early Spartan history. Apart from a few lines of Tyrtaios that were discovered on papyrus, these quotations ensured the survival of the few poems which are known today. Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 6.5 (D48 and A4) offers an excellent example, which can be used to compare ancient authors’ use of earlier texts with modern approaches.

#### A1 The Suda encyclopaedia on Tyrtaios

Tyrtaios: son of Archembrotos, Lakonian or Milesian, elegiac poet and piper; it is said that by means of his lyric poetry he encouraged the Lakedaimonians when they were at war with the Messenians and thus gave them the upper hand. He is of very ancient date, contemporary with the so-called Seven Sages, or even older. At any rate, he flourished in the 35<sup>th</sup> Olympiad (640–637 BC). He wrote ‘Constitution’ for the Lakedaimonians, and ‘Advice’ in elegiac verse, and ‘Martial Songs’; five books.

Tyrtaios: the Lakedaimonians vowed that they would either take Messene or die. When the god’s oracular response told them to get a general from the Athenians, they got the poet Tyrtaios, who was lame; he inspired them to courage and captured Messene in the twentieth year of the war. They razed it to the ground and drafted the prisoners into the helots.

[Suda, *Lexicon*, “Tyrtaios”]

The Suda (meaning Fortress) is the name of a tenth-century AD lexicon or encyclopaedia compiled from earlier reference works. Pausanias (4.15.6) has the Athenians deliberately choosing someone likely to be a bad general for the Spartans.

### A2 Spartan use of Tyrtaios' poetry

(Of the Pyrrhic Dance) The martial character of the dance makes it clearly an invention of the Lakedaimonians. The Lakonians are warlike, and their sons actually learn by heart these marching songs, which are also called 'Songs-in-Arms'. The Lakonians themselves, too, in their wars march rhythmically while reciting the poems of Tyrtaios from memory. Philochoros says that after the Lakedaimonians had defeated the Messenians through the generalship of Tyrtaios they established the custom on their campaigns that, when they had finished their dinner and sung the Song of Thanksgiving, one by one they should sing the songs of Tyrtaios; and the Commanding Officer should be the judge and give a prize of meat to the winner.

[Athenaios, *Scholars at Dinner* 14.29 = Philochoros, *FGrH* 328 F216]

### A3 Tyrtaios 2: 'Eunomia' (Rule of Law)

[ ... ] let us obey [the kings who are] 10

Nearer to the race [of the gods?]

For Zeus himself, the son of Kronos and husband of fair-crowned Hera,

Has given this city to the sons of Herakles;

Together with them we forsook windy Erineos

And arrived in the wide island of Pelops. 15

[Tyrtaios 2, *Rule of Law* = Strabo, *Geography* 8.4.10]

Part of a longer poem, found on Papyrus Oxyrhynchos 38.2824, with traces of several previous and one subsequent line visible. Lines 12–15, also fragmentary on the papyrus, are quoted by Strabo who wrote, 'Tyrtaios indeed says he is from that place in the elegiac poem which is entitled 'Eunomia''.

### A4 Tyrtaios 4: Delphi's advice on governing Sparta

Having listened to Phoibos, they brought home from Delphi

God's oracles with their verses of certainty;

The leaders in counsel are the kings, honoured of the gods,

For they look after the lovely city of Sparta,

Together with the eldest-born; and after them the men of the People, 5

Responding in their turn with straight ordinances

Are to say the right things and do everything justly

And not give the city any crooked counsel,

And so victory and power go with the mass of the People.

This was the revelation of Phoibos to the city on these matters. 10

[Tyrtaios 4 = Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 6 + Diodoros 7.12.5–6]

The text is a combination of passages from Plutarch and Diodoros, see **D48** and **F5**.

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**A5 Tyrtaios 5: The capture of Messene**

[...] to our king, dear to the gods, Theopompos,  
 Through whom we captured spacious Messene,  
 Messene good to plough and good to plant.  
 For it they fought ceaselessly for nineteen years  
 With their spears, our fathers' fathers  
 With ever long-suffering hearts;  
 And in the twentieth they abandoned their rich tilled fields  
 And fled the great ranges of Ithome.

5

[Tyrtaios 5]

These verses on the conquest of Messenia are actually put together from three separate quotations of Tyrtaios in later authors: lines 1–2 are from Pausanias 4.6.5; lines 3–4 from an ancient commentator on Plato, *Laws* 629a; lines 5–8 from Strabo 6.3.3.

**A6 Tyrtaios 6&7: The fate of the captured Messenians**

Like asses distressed by great burdens,  
 Bringing to their masters from grievous necessity  
 Half of all the produce the ploughland bears.

Lamenting for their masters, both they themselves and their wives,  
 Whenever the baneful fate of death overtook one.

[Tyrtaios 6&7 = Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 4.14.4–5]

Pausanias in his (largely invented) history of Messenia quotes Tyrtaios for how the captured Messenians were maltreated (lines 1–3) and that they were even forced to mourn their masters (4–5). Hdt. 6.58 (D10) notes the compulsion for some *perioikoi* to mourn a Spartan king.

**A7 Tyrtaios 10: 'Dulce et decorum est ...'**

[106] For everyone in Greece knows that they got Tyrtaios from our city as the general with whom they overpowered their enemies and also set up the way they look after their young; thus they made fine decisions not only in face of the present danger but also for the whole of their future. For he composed elegiac poems which he bequeathed them, which they listen to and are taught to be courageous. [107] And though they have no regard for the other poets, they have valued this one so highly that they passed a law, that whenever they have taken the field under arms they summon everyone to the king's tent to hear the poems of Tyrtaios, in the belief that this would make them especially willing to die for their country. It is useful actually to hear these elegiac poems, in order to understand what sort of deeds made men famous among them.

For it is a noble thing for a good man to fall in the front line  
 And die fighting for his country.  
 But to abandon his city and its fertile fields  
 And be a beggar is most wretched of all,  
 Wandering about with his dear mother and aged father,  
 Together with his little children and wedded wife,  
 For he will be hated among all those whom he approaches  
 For surrendering himself to need and hateful poverty.  
 He shames his birth and belies his splendid appearance,

5

And is dogged by all evil and dishonour. 10  
 So since no one cares about a man who wanders like this,  
 Or feels respect or pity and the gods do not favour him,  
 Let us fight passionately for this land and die  
 For our children, no longer sparing our lives.  
 But come on, young men, stand firm beside each other and fight, 15  
 And do not start shameful flight or panic,  
 But make the spirit in your hearts great and valiant,  
 And when you fight against men, do not cling to life;  
 Do not abandon and run away from your fallen  
 Elders, who no longer have nimble knees, 20  
 For it is indeed disgraceful, when an older man fighting  
 In the front line lies fallen in front of young men,  
 And now with his white hair and grey beard  
 He breathes out his stout heart in the dust,  
 With private parts all bloody in his dear hands – 25  
 A sight for the eyes that brings shame and wrath –  
 And his skin is laid bare; but for a young man everything is all right,  
 As long as he keeps the glorious bloom of his lovely youth;  
 Wonderful for men to behold and lovely to women,  
 When he is alive, but also fine when fallen in the front line. 30  
 But let a man stand steadfast with both legs astride  
 Set firm on the ground, biting his lips with his teeth.

[Tyrtaios 10 = Lykourgos, *Against Leokrates* 106–7]

Lykourgos, c. 390 – c. 325 BC was an important Athenian statesman, one of whose speeches, against a political opponent, survives, and includes disproportionately long (but useful!) quotation of poets.

**A8 Tyrtaios 11: Fight bravely!**

But be confident, for you are descended from invincible Herakles;  
 Zeus is not yet averting his head from you;  
 And do not feel fear and terror at the host of men,  
 But let a man hold his shield straight in the face of their front line,  
 Thinking life hateful and the black fates of death 5  
 Dear as the rays of the sun.  
 For you know the destructive works of Ares who brings many tears,  
 And you have learnt well the temper of grievous war,  
 And often you have tasted both flight and pursuit,  
 You young men, and have had more than your fill of both. 10  
 For of those who are brave enough to stand beside each other  
 And go and fight hand to hand in the front line,  
 Fewer die, and they save the host behind them;  
 But when men tremble their valour is completely lost;  
 No one could ever finish recounting all 15  
 The evils that befall a man if he is dishonoured.  
 For in blazing war when a man runs away  
 You seize the chance to stab him in the shoulder-blades,  
 And it is a disgrace if a corpse is lying in the dust

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Pierced behind by a spearpoint in the back.	20
But let a man stand steadfast with both legs astride	
Set firm on the ground, biting his lips with his teeth,	
Covering his thighs and shins below and chest and shoulders	
With the belly of his broad shield;	
In his tight hand let him brandish his mighty spear,	25
And shake the fearsome crest above his head;	
By doing mighty deeds let him learn how to make war,	
And not stand with his shield beyond missile range.	
But let a man go near and wound his enemy with his long spear	
Or sword at close quarters and kill him;	30
Putting foot beside foot and pushing shield against shield,	
And even bringing crest to crest, helmet to helmet,	
Chest to chest let him fight with a man,	
Seizing the hilt of his sword or his long spear.	
And you lightly armed men, crouch behind shields in various places	35
And hurl your great stones,	
And fire your smooth javelins at them,	
Standing close by the men in full armour.	

[Tyrtaios 11 = Stobaeus, *Anthology* 4.9.16 (on war)]

Stobaeus or John of Stobi put together, probably in the early fifth century AD, an anthology from earlier writers arranged by topic to educate his son.

#### A9 Tyrtaios 12: Excellence in war

I would neither mention nor have any regard for a man	
For his prowess in running or wrestling,	
Not even if he had the size and power of the Cyclopes,	
And defeated Thrace's North Wind in running;	
Not if he were more handsome in stature than Tithonos,	5
And richer than Midas and Kinyras;	
Not even if he were more kingly than Pelops, son of Tantalos,	
And had the soft-tongued voice of Adrastos;	
Nor even if he was renowned for everything except impetuous courage;	
For a man is not good in war,	10
If he could not bear to see bloody slaughter	
And lunge at his enemies close at hand.	
This excellence, this prize is the best and finest	
In the world for a young man to win.	
This is a general benefaction for the city and all its people,	15
Whenever a man stands foursquare in the front line and abides	
Unceasingly, and completely forgets shameful flight,	
Steadfastly risking his life and spirit,	
And standing beside the next man gives verbal encouragement.	
This man is good in war.	20
All of a sudden he turns and routs the jagged ranks	
Of the enemy, and stems the tide of battle with his heroic effort;	
And moreover if he falls in the front line and loses his dear life	

Stabbed from in front many times through the chest,  
 Through bossed shield and breastplate, 25  
 Bringing glory to his city and its people and his father,  
 This man is bewailed by young and old alike,  
 The whole city is distressed by a grievous sense of loss;  
 His tomb and his children and their children,  
 And all his line thereafter are renowned among men; 30  
 Never does his good fame perish nor his name,  
 But though he is beneath the earth, he is immortal,  
 Since raging Ares laid him low when he was standing firm,  
 Excelling while fighting for his land and his children;  
 And if he escapes the long fate of woeful death, 35  
 And his victory maintains the proud boast of his spear,  
 Everyone honours him, young and old alike:  
 He goes down to Hades only after many delights;  
 As he grows old he is pre-eminent among his citizens, and no one  
 Wants to cheat him of his respect or his rights, 40  
 But both the young and his peers and the elders,  
 All alike give up their place for him on the benches.  
 So now let every man aim to reach this peak  
 Of excellence with all his heart, not coasting in the battle.

[Tyrtaios 12 = Stobaeus, *Anthology* 4.10.1 and 6 (on war)]

**A10 Tyrtaios 19: In battle**

[...] and [pouches?] of stones and [...]  
 Like hosts of [swarming flies?].  
 [Some were taken] by Ares, bane of mortal men, [...]  
 [In open battle?], while others [he hurled] over [crag]. 5  
 [So let us] like [locusts or cranes?]  
 [Advance] behind the protective fence of our concave shields,  
 Pamphyloi and Hylleis and [Dymanes] independently  
 [Holding up] our ash spears in our hands.  
 [In this way, entrusting] everything to the immortal gods 10  
 We shall give obedience to our [sacrosanct] leader.  
 But in a trice, one and all [together], we shall be thrashing away,  
 [Standing firm] at close quarters with spearmen;  
 And awesome will be the clashing of both sides  
 As rounded shields strike shields, 15  
 And terrifying will be their war-cries as they fall upon each other,  
 [Impaling] men's breasts on their [spear];  
 And they will give no ground though pounded [with missiles];  
 Battered with [great] slingstones  
 [Helmets] will ring out with the clatter of war [unflinchingly]. 20

[Tyrtaios 19 = Berlin Papyrus 11675]

Pamphyloi, Hylleis and Dymanes were Dorian tribal names (see Hdt. 5.68 and cf. Plut. *Lycourgos* 6 = D48).

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**A11 Fighting the Argives**

[ ... (9 lines unintelligible) ... ]

[...] fierce missiles [...] 10

The grey-eyed daughter of Zeus who bears the aegis.

Many men with javelins [ ... ]

Sharp points [ ... ]

Lightly-armed men running forwards [ ... ]

[Ar]kadians [ ... ] of the Argives [ ... ] 15

[ ... ] by the wall [ ... ]

[ ... ] water [ ... ]

[ ... ] from [grey-eyed] Athena

[ ... ] ditch [ ... ]

They will kill all [ ... ] 20

Of the Spartiates who [ ... ]

Flee back [ ... ]

[Tyrtaios 23a = Oxyrhynchos Papyrus 3316]

**A12 Tyrtaios on Argive and Arkadian alliance with Messenia**

They fought several wars because of Messenian revolts. Tyrtaios says in his poems that the initial annexation of the Messenians took place in the time of their fathers' fathers; and the second, when they revolted after making alliance with Argives, [Arkadians] and Pisatans; the Arkadians provided King Aristokrates the son of Orchomenos as their general, and the Pisatans Pantaleon the son of Omphalion, and in this war he says that he himself was the Spartan general.

[Tyrtaios 8 = Strabo, *Geography* 8.4.10]

Fragments from a papyrus from Oxyrhynchos (A11) seem to mention Arkadians and Argives fighting against the Spartiates. This may be the poem Strabo refers to above. The text actually mentions Argives, *Elians* and Pisatans, but then an *Arkadian* general. As Pisa was a region of Elis and the terms tend to be used interchangeably to refer to the people living around Olympia, it is very likely that an explanation of one or the other term accidentally replaced the name 'Arkadians' in the process of copying the manuscripts.

**ALKMAN: A13–A20**

Alkman lived perhaps one generation later than Tyrtaios, but wrote poetry different in all respects. It was lyric poetry, i.e. to be accompanied on the lyre; composed in a range of different metres; written in Doric (i.e. Spartan) dialect; most significantly, his subject-matter was startlingly different. The two longest fragments to survive of his poetry were written for girls' choruses, and show 'a pronounced homoerotic tenor' (*OCD*<sup>3</sup> under 'Alkman': the entry on Sappho – the Lesbian poetess – describes Alkman as an important and contemporary parallel for Sappho's love poetry). Other fragments suggest a considerable range to his poetry.

**A13 An ancient potted biography of Alkman**

Alkman: a Lakonian from Messoa: *pace* Krates who mistakenly says he was a Lydian from Sardis. A lyric poet, son of Damas or Titaros. He lived at the time of the 27th Olympiad (672 BC) when Ardys, the father of Alyattes was King of Lydia. Being a great lover he was the founder of love-poetry. He was born of household slaves. He wrote six books of lyric poetry and the *Diving Women*. He first introduced poetry sung not in hexameter. He used the Dorian dialect as Lakedaimonians do.

[Suda, *Lexicon* "Alkman"]

For Suda, see **A1**. Messoa was one of the villages that made up Sparta. Alkman's birthplace was widely disputed, as shown by the alternative attributed here to Krates (second-century BC scholar): as a Hellenistic epigram on Alkman put it (Antipater of Thessalonica 12 (Gow-Page) = *Palatine Anthology* 7.18), he was fought over by two continents: 'Poets have many mothers'. Ardys ruled Lydia c. 652–619 BC and was the grandfather of Alyattes. The dating to Ardys' reign is probably about right. The statement that he was a great lover is typical of the tendency of ancient biographies to draw conclusions about poets from their subject matter.

**A14 Alkman 1: 'Maiden-song'**

[ ... ] Polydeukes;	
[ ... ] I do not rate Lykaithos among the dead Nor Enarsphoros and fast-footed Sebro	
[ ... ] and the violent [ ... ]	
[ ... ] and helmeted [ ... ]	5
[And Euteiches] and lord Areios	
[ ... ] and [ ... ] mightiest of demigods;	
And [ ... ] great leader	
[Of the host] and Eurytos	
In the turmoil of [Ares'] misery,	10
And [Alkon], mighty warriors,	
We shall [not?] pass them over:	
All of them [were overpowered] by Fate	
[And Deive], most ancient powers,	
And their strength, being unshod, [was loosed].	15
[Let no] mortal man fly up to heaven	
[Or at]tempt to marry Aphrodite	
[The Cyprian] queen or some	
[ ... ] or a child of Porkos,	
[The sea-god]; but the Graces [look after]	20
The house of Zeus, with eyes full of love.	
[ ... ] most [ ... ]	
[ ... ] of gods [ ... ]	
[ ... ] to friends [ ... ]	
[ ... ] gave gifts [ ... ]	25
[ ... ( <i>unintelligible</i> ) ...]	
[ ... ] youth lost [ ... ]	
[ ... ] time [ ... ]	
[ ... ] vain [ ... ]	
[ ... ] went; one of them by an arrow	30
[ ... ] by a marble millstone	
[ ... ] Hades [ ... ]	
[ ... ( <i>unintelligible</i> ) ...]	
[ ... ] and unforgettable	
Were their sufferings, as they plotted evil deeds.	35



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<p>There is vengeance from gods;          And blessed is the man who, sound in mind,          Weaves life's web to the day's end          Unweeping; and so I sing          The radiance of Agido;</p>	40
<p>I see her like the sun, which          Agido summons to shine on us;          But our renowned chorus leader          In no way allows me either to praise,          Or to find fault with her; for she herself          Seems to be supreme, just as if          One were to put a horse among cattle,          A strong prize-winner with thundering hooves          That one dreams about from the shade of a cave.</p>	45
<p>Why, don't you see? The racehorse is          Venetian; but the mane          Of my cousin          Hagesichora has a bloom          Like pure gold;          And her silvery countenance –</p>	50
<p>But why am I telling you face to face?          This is Hagesichora here;          And the next in beauty after Agido          Will be a Scythian horse up against an Ibenian;          For as we bring our plough,          The Pleiades fight against us,          Rising through ambrosial night,          To dawn like the star Sirius.</p>	55
<p>For an abundance of purple          Is not enough to give any protection,          Nor an intricate snake of solid gold,          Nor yet a headband          From Lydia, the glory          Of dark-eyed girls,          Nor the hair of Nanno,          Nor again godlike Areta,          Nor Thylakis and Kleeisisera;</p>	60
<p>Nor if you go to Ainesimbrotas and say:          'If only Astaphis were with me          And Philylla were to look towards me          And Damareta and lovely Vianthemis?'</p>	65
<p>But no, Hagesichora keeps her eye on me.</p>	70
	75

For is not Hagesichora  
 With her pretty ankles present here,  
 And does she not stay near Agido 80  
 And praise our festival?  
 But accept, you gods, their  
 [Prayers]; for fulfilment and completion  
 Belong to gods. Chorus leader,  
 I would like to speak: as for myself, 85  
 I'm just a girl, vainly screeching from a beam,  
 An owl; but even so, most of all I long  
 To please Aotis; for she it was  
 Who cured our troubles;  
 But thanks to Hagesichora, the girls 90  
 Have trodden the path of lovely peace.

For just like the trace-horse  
 [ ... (*one line lost*) ... ]  
 In a ship too you must  
 Listen above all to the helmsman; 95  
 And she is admittedly not  
 More musical than the Sirens,  
 For they are goddesses, but this ten of ours  
 Sings as well as [eleven] girls;  
 And gives voice like a swan on the streams 100  
 Of Xanthos; and she with her lovely golden hair.

[ ... (*the last four lines of the poem are lost*) ... ]

[Alkman, fragment 1 = Louvre Papyrus E3320]

This poem was found on a first-century AD papyrus in Egypt in 1855 and known as the Louvre Papyrus from where it was taken to. The papyrus was clearly part of a scholarly edition of Alkman, since it also has editorial comments which sometimes elucidate the poem (though the commentary too is fragmentary and sometimes confuses the issue!). The text proclaims itself to have been sung by a chorus of ten girls (98–99: the use of first person singular forms, e.g. line 2, seems to be traditional). This fits the genre of *partheniai* ('maiden-songs') attributed to Alkman by several ancient writers on Alkman (*Testimonia* 8, 9, 15 in Campbell, *Greek Lyric II*). It is in Doric dialect. The first part of the poem as we have it relates to a Spartan myth, in which Hippocōon and his ten sons exiled his younger brother Tyndareos, but were punished by Herakles (see Paus. 3.15.3 on a statue of Herakles in Sparta, connected to this myth), helped by the sons of Tyndareos (Kastor and Polydeukes). The chorus draws appropriate moral lessons (lines 1–39), which are appropriate to the apparent context of a religious ceremony (81–84). The girls then turn to praise of their own chorus-leader, their clothes, and themselves, and with some suggestion of a (Lesbian) love element.

Several elements (besides the gaps in the papyrus) remain obscure: it is not certain whether the chorus is part of a competition – it has been suggested that the reference to the Pleiades (61), normally the star-group, is actually to a rival choir; while the fragmentary commentary seems to suggest that the Pleiades represent Hagesichora (whose name means 'Leader of the chorus' and Agido). Ainesimbrotā and Aotis are unknown, perhaps some purveyor of love-spells and a goddess, respectively.