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Graeco-Latina Brunensia. 2014, vol. 19, iss. 1, pp. [77]-92

ISSN 1803-7402 (print); ISSN 2336-4424 (online)

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/130051>

Access Date: 16. 02. 2024

Version: 20220831

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THE ONLY WOMEN THAT ARE MOTHERS OF MEN.
PLUTARCH'S CREATION OF THE SPARTAN MOTHER

In the opinion of some researchers, the family was not highly valued in Sparta. Nevertheless, certain pieces of evidence confirm that the Spartans appreciated their families more than we previously thought. The author who most influenced the ancient and modern image of Spartan mothers and their role in society is Plutarch. Unfortunately, his accounts on Sparta are in part a figment of literary imagination and present the Spartan mirage. Plutarch depicts members of both the royal families and of the elite as they rear their offspring, indicating the essential role the mothers played in both the private and public spheres. The question is whether Plutarch's works are a reliable source for Spartan history. This paper focuses on Plutarch's portrayal of the Spartan mother in Sayings of Spartan Women, as compared to the one in the rest of his works. Most apophthegms focus on a relationship between a mother and a son – on the role a mother plays in creating a Spartan citizen. Her attitude to her offspring supposedly mirrors the customs and expectations of their state and society. Thus, in this paper I present the Spartan mother, a literary composite of virtues and a model parent, as not necessarily equal to actual women of Sparta who lived in the complex realities of that city-state.

Keywords: *Spartan family, Spartan women, Spartan mothers, motherhood in Sparta, Plutarch, Spartan sayings*

Recently, there has been a trend in research on Sparta to re-examine its society.¹ This encompasses, among other things, deconstruction of the common image of Spartan women as radically different from other women in Greece and, more generally, study of the role of women in Spartan society as something that seems to be crucial to understanding the Spartan system. To grasp it can elucidate the functioning of Spartan family and

¹ It is known now that the former researchers' image of Spartan women was distorted by idealisation, exceptionalism of customs and norms and belief in militarily oriented society. A new study on Spartan society is connected with the fundamental volumes of OLLIER (1933–1943) and TIGERSTEDT (1974–1978).

society.² Unfortunately, it must be stressed that apart from the limited quantity of literary evidence, the character and interpretation of certain pieces of it are highly ambiguous. Almost all the evidence comes from works of non-Spartan writers, who discussed a much earlier time period than their own. Their image of Sparta, in many cases lacking any chronological reference, could be affected by mythological idealisation, a philosophical idea of the ideal state, the didactic concerns of philosophers, the propaganda of the third-century revolution.

“The only women that are mothers of men” is a quotation from a collection of *Sayings of Spartan Women* (*Lacaenarum Apophthegmata*), which celebrated Spartan women among ancient Greeks qua mothers. I employ these apophthegms as examples illustrating the stereotypical representation of a mother in Sparta as the model mother who, in accordance with the city-state, assists in forming an ideal citizen in terms of an exemplary warrior. In other words, she is portrayed as playing an essential role not only in the family as a life giver but also in the organization of the city-state. The paper is designed to confront *Sayings of Spartan Women* with other works of Plutarch, to reveal the creative input of the narrator. The following study could not be an exhaustive, complete treatment of this topic due to the sheer breadth and depth of these issues; however, it aims to prompt further discussion about Plutarch as a source for Spartan identity and about his reliability as evidence about Spartan woman.³ It is a part of broader study of Plutarch’s references to and uses of motherhood in Sparta in his works.

The collection of *Sayings of Spartan Women*, which are included in Plutarch’s *Moralia*,⁴ was probably prepared by Plutarch as an independent work, as a draft to use in his future writing.⁵ A saying is a short piece of

² About Spartan women e.g. REDFIELD (1978); BRADFORD (1986); FRENCH (1987); KUNSTLER (1987); DETTENHOFER (1993); ZWEIG (1993); FANTHAM (1994); THOMMEN (1999); CARTLEDGE (2001); POMEROY (2002); FIGUEIRA (2010); MILLENDER (2010).

³ This study is a response to, in my view, not comprehensive enough analysis and insufficiently nuanced interpretation of Plutarch as a source, which results in distorted reception of Spartan women. Some controversial ideas of women’s reality in Sparta are voiced by e.g. KUNSTLER (1987); ZWEIG (1993); FANTHAM (1994); POMEROY 2000. Figueira, in the most general statement, explains this phenomenon in following words: “One particular danger is that we simply recast ancient polemics into contemporary talking points”, see FIGUEIRA (2010: 265). The opinion of Powell from the review of the book of Pomeroy is similar, see POWELL (2004: 466).

⁴ *Moralia* includes also collections of sayings titled: *Sayings of kings and commanders*, *Sayings of Spartans*, *The Ancient Customs of the Spartans*. Extensive discussion about Plutarch’s apophthegms in TIGERSTEDT (1974: 16–30) and OLLIER (1943: 21–54), cf. BECK (2002: 163–173).

⁵ The most reasonable explanation for me is that the collection of the *Sayings* was prior

text, giving a direct, accurate, but often surprising, reply or a reaction to someone's words. Aristotle explains that this kind of a maxim has a persuasive purpose, as people like listening to the common universal truth in a particular context. Its purpose is a general declaration of moral principle and they deal with human actions - what should be chosen or avoided.⁶ Tigerstedt said that, like a gnome and an anecdote, they express "popular imagination", claiming that their "essential characteristic is the combination of general human wisdom-often satirical or humorous-with a concrete historical setting or person, something that separates this kind of literature from the 'proverb', in the proper sense of the word, which by nature belongs to humanity in general, though there are exceptions".⁷ Apophthegms display a laconic way of speech, something that was admired by the ancients: "the speech of Spartans has no dross, but being disciplined by the removal of all superfluities, it is tempered to complete efficiency; for this capacity of theirs for aphoristic speech and for quickness and the ability to turn out a neat phrase in repartee is the fruit of much silence".⁸

Sayings of Spartan Women consist of forty statements, ten of which are made by women whom we know by name (mothers of kings or commanders).⁹ The rest are made by anonymous women. The majority of utterances – twenty five out of forty – are ascribed to mothers.¹⁰ Several of them present relationships between daughters and fathers,¹¹ wives and husbands,¹² sisters and brothers¹³ and women in other contexts.¹⁴ In this paper, I focus on the analysis and interpretation of ones that deal with the relationship between a mother and a son. The situations depicted are always related to war and involve a mother talking about or to her son the warrior. The sayings are of general character and are relevant to the education of future warriors. However,

to *Lives* and Plutarch used them as an examples, I make this assumption in this paper. See further e.g. BECK (2002: 168); STOCK (2004: 332–335); STADTER (2008: 53); cf. PELLING (2002).

6 Arist. *Rh.* 1394a 1–1395b 16.

7 TIGERSTEDT (1974: 16).

8 Plut. *De garrul.* 510f; cf. *Lyc.* 18.3 (cf. *Pl. Prt.* 342d–342e).

9 There appear: Archileonis, Damatria, Gorgo, Gyrtias, Teleutia.

10 The two examples of one grandmother's sayings I classify as mothers' sayings (Plut. *Lac. Apophth.* 240e–f 1f.).

11 Plut. *Lac. Apophth.* 240d–e 1–3; 242c 2.

12 Plut. *Lac. Apophth.* 240e 6; 242c 25.

13 Plut. *Lac. Apophth.* 242b 22.

14 Plut. *Lac. Apophth.* 240e 5; 242b 23f.; 242c–d 27–30.

they predominately depict a situation before, during or after a battle, and the Spartan women “come before us as the fierce enforcers of the warrior code”.¹⁵

The first apophthegm, ascribed to Gorgo, introduces the idea of the Spartan mother as the model mother,¹⁶ who gives birth and shapes her male offspring as the model warrior:¹⁷

Being asked by a woman from Attica, ‘Why is it that you Spartan women are the only women that lord it over your men,’ she said, ‘Because we are the only women that are mothers of men.’¹⁸

ἐρωτηθεῖσα δὲ ὑπὸ τινοῦ Ἀττικῆς, ‘διὰ τί ὑμεῖς ἄρχετε μόναι τῶν ἀνδρῶν αἱ Λάκαιναι;’ ‘ὄτι,’ ἔφη, ‘καὶ τίκτομεν μόναι ἄνδρας’ (Plut. *Lac. Apophth.* 240e 5)¹⁹

Assimilation of a warrior and a mother is attested in Greek antiquity.²⁰ The Spartan rule by which a gravestone inscription was only allowed to someone who had died in a battle or in childbirth²¹ can prove this, as Demand notes.²² Portraying the Spartans as different or exceptional, in customs and belief, in contrast to women from other *poleis* is a feature of the apophthegms as well.²³ The mothers (as women) in the *Sayings* are characterized for being beautiful, austere and loyal in general.²⁴ A female parent’s beauty is reflected both in

¹⁵ REDFIELD (1978: 149).

¹⁶ About Spartan women as ‘prototypes’ see THOMMEN (1999: 134) and especially ROMERO GONZÁLEZ 2008.

¹⁷ Cf. the saying of Archileonis no. 1, p. 5.

¹⁸ All translation from *Sayings of Spartan Women* in this paper are by F. C. Babbitt.

¹⁹ Cf. Plut. *Lac. Apophth.* 227e 13; *Lyc.* 14.4.

²⁰ Eur. *Med.* 250–251. This passage shows the parallel between war burden and childbirth.

²¹ Plut. *Lyc.* 27.3. Recently some aspects of authenticity of this practice had been challenged by DILLON 2007.

²² DEMAND (1994: 121).

²³ Plut. *Lac. Apophth.* 240c 1; 240d 1; 240e 5; 240f 2; 241c–d 9. It is worth mention the resemblance of the aforementioned idea of “μόναι” with the inscription from the 4th c. BC, which reports that Cynisca is the only one woman among all in Greece, whose horse was victorious at Olympia:

πατέρες καὶ ἀδελφοί, ἄ[ρματι δ’ ὠκυπόδων ἵππων]
νικῶσα Κυνίσκα εἰκόνα τάνδ’ ἔστασε. μόν[αν]
δ’ ἐμέ φαμι γυναικῶν Ἑλλάδος ἐκ πάσας τῶ[v]-
δε λαβὲν στέφανον.

Ἀπελλέας Καλλικλέος ἐπόησε (IG V 1.1564a). About Cynisca see Plut. *Lac. Apophth.* 216d–e; *Ages.* 20.1.

²⁴ ROMERO GONZÁLEZ indicates that the ‘prototype’ Spartan women were: austere, obedient their men and loyal for the city-state and their love for children reflects their love

her physical and intellectual excellence, austerity in her outfit and behavior, and loyalty in obedience to male members of her family and to the city-state.

Motherhood is the natural role of a woman (it is her function to reproduce and care for offspring and thus prolong a family) and it seems to be a norm for all mothers to endeavor to excellence of their child, still the particular emphasis on the Spartan to be a mother is placed in the *Sayings*. The role of her is unique because she brings into life ἀγαθὰ τίκτειν – as has been said by Leonidas to Gorgo.²⁵ According to other apophthegms, the Spartan mother's priority is the city-state. Therefore, she utterly accepts the deaths of her sons in the name of the fatherland, as is emphasized in the following saying:

One woman sent forth her sons, five in number, to war, and, standing in the outskirts of the city, she awaited anxiously the outcome of the battle. And when someone arrived and, in answer to her inquiry, reported that all her sons had met death, she said, 'I did not inquire about that, you vile varlet, but how fares our country?' And when he declared that it was victorious, 'Then,' she said, 'I accept gladly also the death of my sons.'

ἐκπέμψασά τις τοὺς υἱοὺς αὐτῆς πέντε ὄντας ἐπὶ πόλεμον, ἐν τοῖς προαστείοις εἰστήκει καραδοκοῦσα τί ἐκ τῆς μάχης ἀποβήσοιτο: ὡς δὲ παραγενόμενός τις πυθομένη ἀπήγγειλε τοὺς παῖδας ἅπαντας τετελευτηκέναι, 'ἀλλ' οὐ τοῦτο ἐπυθόμην,' εἶπε, 'κακὸν ἀνδράποδον, ἀλλὰ τί πράττει ἡ πατρίς,' φήσαντος δὲ ὅτι νικᾷ, 'ἀσμένῃ τοίνυν,' εἶπε, 'δέχομαι καὶ τὸν τῶν παίδων θάνατον.' (Plut. *Lac. Apophth.* 241b–c 7)²⁶

Hence, in the honorable Spartan woman's framework of values, her sons give her a reason to be proud by behaving properly.

Argileonis, the mother of Brasidas, when her son had met his death, and some of the citizens of Amphipolis arrived at Sparta and came to her, asked if her son had met his death honourably and in a manner worthy of Sparta. And when they proceeded to tell of his greatness, and declared that he was the best of all the Spartans in such enterprises, she said, 'Sirs, my son was a gude and honourable mon, but Sparta has mony a mon better than him.'

Ἀργιλεωνὶς ἡ Βρασιδίου μήτηρ, τελευτήσαντος αὐτῆ τοῦ υἱοῦ, ὡς παραγενόμενοι τινες τῶν Ἀμφιπολιτῶν εἰς Σπάρτην ἦγον πρὸς αὐτὴν ἠρώτησεν εἰ καλῶς καὶ ἀξίως τῆς Σπάρτης ὁ υἱὸς ἐτελεύτα: μεγαλυνόντων δ' ἐκεῖνον καὶ λεγόντων ἄριστον ἐν τοῖς τοιοῦτοις ἔργοις ἅπαντων Λακεδαιμονίων εἶναι, εἶπεν, 'ὦ ξένοι, καλὸς μὲν ἦν κάγαθος ὁ παῖς μου, πολλοὺς δ' ἄνδρας Λακεδαιμίων ἔχει' (Plut. *Lac. Apophth.* 240c 1)²⁷

for the city-state, ROMERO GONZÁLEZ (2008: 680–686).

²⁵ Plut. *Lac. Apophth.* 240e 6; cf. *Lac. Apophth.* 225a 2.

²⁶ Cf. Plut. *Lac. Apophth.* 241b 6; 241c 8; 242a–b 20.

²⁷ Cf. Plut. *Lac. Apophth.* 219d 4; *Reg. et imp. apophth.* 190b–c 3; *Lyc.* 25.5.

Demand suggests that women preferred to have sons because giving birth to male offspring would give her a stronger position in the new family.²⁸ In any case, producing a καλὸς and ἀγαθὸς offspring is certainly a reason for boasting:²⁹

When a woman from Ionia showed vast pride in a bit of her own weaving, which was very valuable, a Spartan woman pointed to her four sons, who were most well-behaved, and said, ‘Such should be the employments of the good and honourable woman, and it is over these that she should be elated and boastful.’

Σεμνονομένης γυναικὸς τινοῦ Ἰωνικῆς ἐπὶ τινὶ τῶν ἑαυτῆς ὑφασμάτων ὄντι πολυτελεῖ, Λάκαινα ἐπιδείξασα τοὺς τέτταρας υἱοὺς ὄντας κοσμιωτάτους, τοιαῦτα, ἔφη, δεῖ εἶναι τὰ τῆς καλῆς καὶ ἀγαθῆς γυναικὸς ἔργα καὶ ἐπὶ τούτοις ἐπαίρεσθαι καὶ μεγαλαυχεῖν. (Plut. *Lac. Apophth.* 241c–d 9)

A mother together with a grandmother, teaches future warriors valour (ἀρετή) from their very childhood. She does not teach them to feel self-pity but to make use of experience in the future to become stronger:

Gyrtias, when on a time Acrotatus, her grandson, in a fight with other boys received many blows, and was brought home for dead, and the family and friends were all wailing, said, ‘Will you not stop your noise? He has shown from what blood he was sprung.’ And she said that people who were good for anything should not scream, but should try to find some remedy.

Γυρτιάς, Ακροτάτου ποτὲ τοῦ θυγατριδοῦ αὐτῆς ἕκ τινος τῶν παιδῶν μάχης πολλὰς πληγὰς λαβόντος καὶ ἀπενεχθέντος οἴκαδε ὡς τεθνηκότος, κλαιόντων τῶν οἰκείων τε καὶ γνωρίμων, ‘οὐ σιωπήσετε;’ ἔφη: ἔδειξε γὰρ οἴου αἵματος ἦν: καὶ οὐκ ἔφη δεῖν τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς βοᾶν ἀλλ’ ἰατρεύεσθαι (Plut. *Lac. Apophth.* 240e 1)

These lessons from their childhood are reiterated in their adulthood in times of war. The best known sentence describes a situation in which a shield is given to a son who is leaving for battle.³⁰ From it we learn that it is the warrior’s role to fight in the name of the state and the mother’s role to remind him about it. There is another very similar saying:

“Another, as her son was going forth to war, said, as she gave the shield into his hands, ‘This shield your father kept always safe for you; do you, therefore, keep it safe, or cease to live.’”

ἄλλη προϊόντι τῷ υἱῷ ἐπὶ πόλεμον ἀναδιδούσα τὴν ἀσπίδα, ‘ταύτην,’ ἔφη, ‘ὁ πατήρ σου ἀεὶ ἔσωζε: καὶ σὺ ὄν ἢ ταύτην σῶζε ἢ μὴ ἔσο.’ (Plut. *Lac. Apophth.* 241e 17)

²⁸ DEMAND (1994: 17).

²⁹ She boasts not only about her son, but also – and perhaps chiefly – about her own virtue as in the first quotation.

³⁰ Plut. *Lac. Apophth.* 241e 16.

A mother, giving her son a shield and reminding him of his father, who had preserved the shield for him, is drawing attention to tradition. The saying stresses that the destiny of every man is to fight and win, never turn out to be a coward. In the following saying a mother encourages her son to fight, keeping in mind his aretê – valour that he has been taught:

Another, as she accompanied a lame son on his way to the field of battle, said, ‘At every step, my child, remember your valour.’

ἄλλη χολὸν υἱὸν ἐπὶ παράταξιν προπέμψουσα, ‘τέκνον,’ εἶπε, ‘κατὰ βῆμα τῆς ἀρετῆς μέμνησο.’ (Plut. *Lac. Apophth.* 241e 13)³¹

There are a couple of utterances directed by a mother to her son when his behavior in war has been improper. A mother, hearing that her son has been saved and run away from the enemy, admonishes him in writing and indicates that unless he shows proper behavior, she will wish him to “stop living”.³² After the battle a mother rebukes her son for his misdeeds. When the son has been a coward, she rejects him because he has been unworthy of her (‘he is not mine!’)³³ and because he is unworthy of Sparta she wishes him dead or even kills him:

Damatia heard that her son had been a coward and unworthy of her, and when he arrived, she made away with him. This is the epigram referring to her:

‘Sinner against our laws, Damatrius, slain by his mother, Was of the Spartan youth; she was of Sparta too.’

Δαματρία τὸν υἱὸν δειλὸν καὶ ἀνάξιον ἐαυτῆς ἀκούσασα, παραγενόμενον ἀνεῖλε: τὸ δ’ ἐπίγραμμα ἐπ’ αὐτῆς τόδε, τὸν παραβάντα νόμους Δαμάτριον ἔκτανε μήτηρ ἁ Λακεδαιμονία τὸν Λακεδαιμόνιον. (Plut. *Lac. Apophth.* 240f 1)³⁴

She prefers him dying an honorable death to shamefully existing as a coward.³⁵ On the other hand, when a son dies in a battle, the Spartan mother is proud. She believes that it is the highest honor for a man.³⁶ She tries to show that the fear of death is pointless:

Another, hearing that her son had fallen on the field of battle, said:

Let the poor cowards be mourned, but, with never a tear do I bury
You, my son, who are mine, yea, and are Sparta’s as well.

³¹ Cf. Plut. *Lac. Apophth.* 241e 14f.; 18; (cf. *Alex. fort.* 331b).

³² Plut. *Lac. Apophth.* 241e 12; cf. 241a 3; 241b 4; 241d–e 10–12.

³³ Plut. *Lac. Apophth.* 241e–242a 19.

³⁴ Cf. Plut. *Lac. Apophth.* 241a 1 (cf. *Tymn. AP* 7.433); 241b 5; (cf. *Eurycius. AP* 7.230); cf. *Parallela Graeca et Romana* 308b–c.

³⁵ Plut. *Lac. Apophth.* 240f 2.

³⁶ Plut. *Lac. Apophth.* 242b 21.

ἄλλη ἀκούσασα τὸν υἱὸν ἐν παρατάξει πεσόντα ἔφη, δειλοὶ κλαιέσθωσαν ἐγὼ δέ σε, τέκνον, ἄδακρυς θάπτω τὸν καὶ ἐμὸν καὶ Λακεδαμόνιον (Plut. *Lac. Apophth.* 241a 2)³⁷

In brief, the Spartan mother models her behavior in order to become an embodiment of moral imperatives and warrior code.³⁸ Her priority is the city-state and only after that the family. Thus she is able to accept the death of a son as his destiny as a warrior and she cannot condone his cowardice because it dishonors the city-state, the family and herself. She rears sons according to traditional laws and customs, guarding the family tradition and its good name; she also teaches *aretê* and judges the behavior of her adult son. If one accepts the sayings as textual sources for researching Spartan mothers, one should also consider the date of origin of this genre to gauge how reliable they were as representations of the realities of motherhood in Sparta. Unfortunately, they cannot be dated precisely. Undoubtedly, items included in the *Sayings* had been appearing in literature before Plutarch's lifetime. For example, some of them were known to Herodotus,³⁹ the Epigrammatists,⁴⁰ and within the philosophical milieu (e.g. the Peripatetic and the Cynics);⁴¹ as well as to Aristotle.⁴² Lack of precise dates makes it difficult to embed these sayings in a socio-political context. One characteristic of apophthegms is their repetitiveness: one and the same utterance can be ascribed to different persons or its authorship can be textually transferred from an anonymous person to a famous one.⁴³ Cases of this type only strengthen the opinion that the *Sayings* are historically inauthentic.⁴⁴ It is tempting to interpret them as real because they are in direct speech. However, we have to resist this feeling, bearing in mind that "what they tell us is not what the Spartans really were but what they were believed to be (...) Of doubtful value as sources of Spartan history, the Laconian apophthegms are thus of the greatest value as sources of the history of the Spartan legend."⁴⁵

³⁷ The most intriguing detail is that this saying appears as well in *Sayings of Spartans* and in this case is ascribed to a father Plut. *Lac. Apophth.* 234f–235a 5; cf. Diosc. *AP* 7.229.

³⁸ I made an assumption that the modelled behaviour of Artoxerxes and Lycurgus would be similar for mothers in general, see BECK (2002: 165).

³⁹ Hdt. 5.50–51.

⁴⁰ Diosc. *AP* 7.229, Erycius *AP* 7.230, Tymn. *AP* 7.433.

⁴¹ TIGERSTEDT (1974: 27–30); OLLIER (1943: 21).

⁴² Arist. *Rh.* 1394b 8.

⁴³ TIGERSTEDT (1974: 17–18).

⁴⁴ As for the role of the examples to imitate, about *mimesis* in contrast to *historia*, see Zadorojnyi (2012: 181–183).

⁴⁵ TIGERSEDT (1974: 18).

The foundation of Spartan model behavior stems from the law code of the legendary lawgiver Lycurgus (8th century B.C). It teaches that the Spartan family, marriage and parenthood exist primarily for the purpose of reproducing healthy warriors for the welfare of the state.⁴⁶ It stresses communal responsibilities. Spartan women are fully integrated members of the *oikos* and community. In other words Sparta aims to create the perfect mother, who would be able to produce the perfect children of both sexes (the next generation of hoplites and mothers). All boys, future citizens, are taught to obey the law.⁴⁷ The Spartans aretê is improved⁴⁸ through their punishment or praise in public.⁴⁹ They would rather die with honour than live as cowards.⁵⁰ They are aware that their cowardice could ruin the city-state.⁵¹

Another type of influence on Plutarch's portrayal of Lycurgus had come from writings of Plato and Aristotle.⁵² The idealized picture of mothers from archaic Sparta appears in Plato's vision of the life of the city-state. In Plato's *Republic* the women of the ruling class (the guardians) are the best of all the women.⁵³ Mothers (and the elderly) since early childhood teach their sons the most important quality, aretê.⁵⁴ In other works, Plato says that proper behaviour is inculcated into the young by frequent repetition of admonitions and examples.⁵⁵ One who does not obey the law (i.e. doesn't behave according to aretê) cannot be a citizen,⁵⁶ and is thus rejected.⁵⁷ According to Aristotle's *Politics*⁵⁸ "the city-state is prior in nature to the household and to each of us individually".⁵⁹ "For since every household is part of a state, and these relationships are part of the household, and the excellence of the part

46 Plut. *Lyc.* 14–15; cf. *Lac. Apophth.* 227d 12; 228a 16; 230a; 232c 2.

47 Xen. *Resp. Lac.* 8.1, 10.7.

48 Xen. *Resp. Lac.* 10.4.

49 Xen. *Resp. Lac.* 10.5.

50 Xen. *Resp. Lac.* 9.1–6.

51 Xen. *Resp. Lac.* 10.6.

52 About the influence of Plato on Plutarch's image of Lycurgus see e.g. SCHNEEWEISS (1979) and DE BLOIS (2005).

53 Pl. *Resp.* 456d–e.

54 Pl. *Resp.* 604c–d; *Resp.* 377c; *Tim.* 18c–d, *Prt.* 325c–e.

55 Pl. *Tim.* 26b–c; *Resp.* 377a–b.

56 Pl. *Tim.* 19a.

57 Pl. *Prt.* 324e–325c.

58 Aristotle makes an evaluation of city-states and criticizes Sparta and Spartan women as well, see e.g. CARTLEDGE (1981: 86–89).

59 Arist. *Pol.* 1253a 11.

must have regard to that of the whole, it is necessary that the education both of the children and of the women should be carried on with a regard to the form of the constitution, if it makes any difference as regards the goodness of the state for the children and the women to be good. And it must necessarily make a difference; for the women are a half of the free population, and the children grow up to be the partners in the government of the state.⁶⁰ We see that the family is the most fundamental socio-economic institution creating legitimate descendants who ensure the continuance of the state.⁶¹ The organization of the Spartan state was praised for being devoted to war and the rearing of warriors held in special esteem.⁶²

Therefore, an assumption can be made that the Spartan mothers (from the *Sayings*) themselves and their attitude to sons were regarded by the ancients as a model. Nevertheless, in my view, apophthegms should be analysed in a much richer context of Plutarch's writings to interpret them properly. In *Lives* – especially in *Life of Lycugrus, Agesilaos, Agis, Cleomenes* – they are embedded within a specific situational context. The author frequently presents women as mothers of the most prominent men from Greece and Rome in his biographies. They appear in various contexts e.g. of ancestry, education, and a parent-male child relationship.⁶³ They usually are known by name and always are portrayed in correlation with men. Among them, one can enumerate a notable group of representatives from Sparta: Agesistrata and Archidamia,⁶⁴ Agiatis,⁶⁵ Chilonis,⁶⁶ Eupolia,⁶⁷ Gorgo,⁶⁸ Cleora,⁶⁹ Cratesicleia,⁷⁰ Timea.⁷¹ The question then arise: whether focusing on them might get a glimpse of what the Spartan mothers really were?

Taking into consideration that examples of mothers which reveal the relationships between them and their sons both similarities and differences

60 Arist. *Pol.* 1260b 12.

61 Arist. *Pol.* 1259 b 3.

62 Arist. *Pol.* 1333b 10; 1337a 2–3; cf. *NE.* 1180 a 10.

63 See e.g. Le CORSU (1981: 99–112).

64 Plut. *Agis* 4.1; 6.4–7.4; 18.4; 19.7; 20.1–5.

65 Plut. *Cleom.* 1.1–2.

66 Plut. *Agis* 17.1–18.2.

67 Plut. *Ages.* 1.1; 2.3.

68 Plut. *Lyc.* 14.5.

69 Plut. *Ages.* 19.6.

70 Plut. *Cleom.* 6.1; 22.3–7; 31; 38.1–5.

71 Plut. *Ages.* 3.1–5; *Alcib.* 23.7–9.

may be observed in comparison to the idea from the *Sayings*. The situations depicted are related to politics – a mother is involved in her son’s program of reforms. Agesistrata (the mother of Agis IV) and Archileonis (his grandmother), as being the richest people in Sparta, are criticized for rearing Agis amidst the wealth (πλοῦτος) and the luxuries (τρυφή).⁷² This image is far from the modelled austerity. Agesistrata is described as a powerful and influential woman,⁷³ who uses her authority for the sake of welfare of the city-state and the glory (δόξα) and ambition (φιλοτιμία) of her son.⁷⁴ Although other wealthy women in Sparta,⁷⁵ being afraid of losing their status (τιμή and δύναμις), stay in opposition to her son’s plan of reform,⁷⁶ she aids it. The similar devotion of the mother to her son occurs in the pair of Cratesicleia and Cleomenes III. She even assists his plan by remarrying with reputed and influential men.⁷⁷ Consequently, it seems that the motif of loyalty to the city-state and male members of the family can be used for the purpose of moralising. It can be seen more clearly in the speech of Agesistrata, which she gives before her death. She says: “My only prayer is that this may bring good to Sparta.”⁷⁸ (‘μόνον,’ ἔφη, ‘συνενέγκαι ταῦτα τῇ Σπάρτῃ.’);⁷⁹ and of Cratesicleia alike: “(...) send this frail body where-soever thou thinkest it will be of most use to Sparta, before old age destroys it sitting idly here” (‘ὅπου ποτὲ τῇ Σπάρτῃ νομίζεις τὸ σῶμα τοῦτο χρησιμώτατον ἔσεσθαι, πρὶν ὑπὸ γήρωσ ἀυτοῦ καθήμενον διαλυθῆναι;’),⁸⁰ and subsequently: “Come, O king of the Lacedaemonians, when we go forth let no one see us weeping or doing anything unworthy of Sparta. For this lies in our power, and this alone; but as for the issues of fortune, we shall have what the Deity may grant” (‘ἄγε,’ εἶπεν, ‘ὦ βασιλεῦ Λακεδαιμονίων, ὅπως, ἐπὶ ἔξω γενώμεθα, μηδεὶς ἴδη δακρύνοντας ἡμᾶς μηδὲ ἀνάξιόν τι τῆς Σπάρτης ποιοῦντας. τοῦτο γὰρ ἐφ’ ἡμῶν μόνον αἱ τύχαι δέ, ὅπως ἂν ὁ δαίμων διδῶ, πάρεσι.’).⁸¹ There is also emphasized the gradation of values: being worthy of the city-state, then the family, and at least themselves.

72 Plut. *Agis* 4.1.

73 Plut. *Agis* 6.4.

74 Plut. *Agis* 7.1–2.

75 Plut. *Agis* 7.3–4.

76 Plut. *Agis* 7.4.

77 Plut. *Cleom.* 6.1.

78 All translation from *Life of Agis* and *Life of Cleomenes* in this paper are by B. Perrin.

79 Plut. *Agis* 20.5.

80 Plut. *Cleom.* 22.4.

81 Plut. *Cleom.* 22.6; cf. 22.4.

The similar attitude can be observed in their sons behaviour – model statesman.⁸² He wants to be deemed worthy not only of the city-state⁸³ but also of his mother, whom holds in considerable respect.⁸⁴ The partial discrepancy between the image from the *Sayings* and from the *Lives* occurs in the motif of mourning as well. On the one hand, it is clearly stated that the warriors dying an honourable death are not publicly mourned, in contrast to cowards⁸⁵ which seems to have a political role.⁸⁶ On the other hand, mourning practices are different in private relationships between a mother and a son of a royal family. A mother cries after the death of her son,⁸⁷ embracing her children and grandchildren.⁸⁸

In short, the most significant feature which Plutarch wants to be seen of the Spartan mother as presented in the *Lives* is her role as the person who forms political spirit in her son, supports his ambitions and makes the self-sacrifice for her city-state and her son.

What both the *Sayings* and the *Lives* present as common is care for legitimate children, the role the mother plays in the socialization of her son, in supporting his ambitions and in guarding customs and laws. All of these, in my view, are a kind of cross-cultural notion. The main differences are that in the *Sayings* mothers represent the warrior code, generally are ‘uncanny’ in their attitude to sons and devoted their sons’ lives to war, when in the *Lives* mothers represent the political code, express their maternal love and their devotion.⁸⁹ Therefore, it is easily observed that some traits of the heroic characters of females were no longer present in their image of Hellenistic times. However, the Spartan reality must have been more complex. There existed a kind of exclusion of cowards from society,⁹⁰ but undoubtedly there was no practice of killing sons by mothers. Women were not as liberated as the sources suggest and surely they did not rule the men. It must be remembered that the whole discussion is concerning elite and royal

82 Plut. *Cleom.* 29.1; (cf. 31.1).

83 Plut. *Cleom.* 29.1.

84 Plut. *Cleom.* 22.3.

85 Plut. *Ages.* 29.4.

86 Cf. Figueira (2010: 277–179).

87 Plut. *Cleom.* 38.1. (cf. *Agis.* 19.7).

88 Plut. *Cleom.* 38.1. (cf. *Agis.* 17.1).

89 About different model behaviour concerning Spartan women see the forthcoming article of KULESZA (2014) about women of Sparta.

90 Plut. *Ages.* 30.2–3.

women, which performed active roles in public life.⁹¹ For example they had property rights⁹² and it seems that especially widowed mothers could hold high positions in society.

In conclusion, Plutarch presents model Spartan mothers as paragons of social and moral values. This timeless model is a product of the literary tradition based mostly on ancient mythological and philosophical ideals mixed with authentic Spartan habits and institutions. Plutarch employs it in his works as an example of a required behavior in the war and political domain. In my view, he would like to have the reader believe in Spartan motherhood being a service to the state, part of his motivation being a wish to reveal – or forge – putative similarities between the textual models of perfect Spartan mother and perfect Roman mother.⁹³ If Duff is right in assuming that “Morality – virtue and vice – is central to the *Lives*, and must be central to a reading of them”⁹⁴ (and I believe he is), an interpretative strategy for these sayings may be developed. Plutarch creates the image of Spartan mothers with a particular purpose in mind – to set them up as a model to be imitated in their ethico-political values.⁹⁵ What he aims for is the self-improvement of his readers.⁹⁶ Therefore, the text appears to imply that the Spartan *oikos* is entirely subsumed by and subject to the interests of the *polis*. Indeed, in this description the boundary between the private and the public are completely blurred.⁹⁷ The mother’s contribution to the *polis* is enhanced, which can create the misleading impression that the *oikos* is marginal in Spartan society. However, juxtaposing the *Sayings* with Plutarch’s other writings, we can infer, mostly from indirect mentions, a better view of the realities of everyday life in Sparta.⁹⁸ Therefore, I absolutely agree with Romero González, who claims that the image of Spartan mother

91 About real power of Spartan women e.g. BRADFORD (1986); MOSSE (1991); CARLEIDGE (2001); MILLENDER (2009).

92 Plut. *Cleom.* 1.1. About the property rights of women in Sparta see more in HODKINSON (2010: 94–103).

93 An idea I will develop in detail in my next paper.

94 DUFF (1999: 65).

95 See DUFF (1999: 1–69; 72–98); ZADOROJNYI (2012: 176).

96 STADTER (2008: 60); WARDMAN (1974: 20–26). As we known Roman readers were interested in *examples* from the past, and admired the Spartans’ law and way of life as well.

97 This is characteristically of Spartan social ideology according to FIGUEIRA (2010: 270).

98 About Spartan family, see KULESZA (2013).

from *Moralia* is a ‘prototypical’ one⁹⁹ and I support the belief in the vision presented in the *Lives* being more realistic.¹⁰⁰

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⁹⁹ ROMERO GONZÁLEZ (2008).

¹⁰⁰ Such a view supports KULESZA (2013: 686f).

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This article is realised as a part of the Project *The Eastern Mediterranean from the 4th century BC until Late Antiquity*, is realized within International Ph.D. Projects Programme of Foundation for Polish Science co-financed from European Union, Regional Development Fund within the frameworks of Measure 1.2 *Strengthening the Human Potential within the Science Sector* of the Operational Program Innovative Economy.

I am indebted to Christopher Tuplin, Ryszard Kulesza, Alexei Zadorojnyi and anonymous reviewer for their helpful comments and suggestions on earlier version of this article.