# The Annual Assembling of the Spartan *Hippeis* [1]

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## Introduction

The Hippeis ('Knights') of classical Sparta were an elite force of 300 hoplites.[2] As such, they played a pivotal role in the Spartan army as well as in the entire social and political make-up of the Spartan state. For we have to take the existence of this select band of young warriors very much into account in order to understand the organization of the classical Spartan army as well as much of the workings of classical Spartan society. Therefore, the question, how this band was recruited or selected from amongst the other Spartans is one of considerable importance. The force was assembled annually from the youngest age-groups, that is: from the ten year-classes of the 20- to 29-year-olds. In order to assess the significance of this elite group in its relations to the army and/or society at large we have to ascertain how this selection was made: was there a wholesale selection of all the threehunderd every year, or were only thirty young men aged twenty annually chosen, who then served for ten subsequent years, in which case the whole force was only partially recruited each year, the majority of its members staying on? I believe, the latter was the case. Since this seems to contradict the interpretation more commonly held of our main source on the subject, this requires some argumentation which I propose to present below. In addition, I shall briefly point out some of the wider implications of this reconstruction.

## The Selection of the Hippeis according to Xenophon

The *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia* (4) describes the selection of the Hippeis from amongst the *hēbōntes*, that is: the age-category following on the *meirakia* or *paidiskoi*, after which phase one became eligible for public office. Since the Hippeis served in the army and military service began at age twenty, while eligibility for office started at age thirty, this should mean that the Hippeis were recruited from the ten year-groups of 20 to 30, or up

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1 This is the heavily revised first half of a paper that I wrote some years ago but never published. That paper had been severely critized by an anonymous referee whom I wish to thank here for his very useful comments. A second edition of the whole paper was in 2008 distributed by me to some colleagues but again not published. At the conference in Tokyo I presented the first half of it (dealing with the Hippeis), the text of which I offer here in only slightly revised form.

2 For the Hippeis in general see Cartledge 1987, 204-5; Lazenby 1985, 12; Hodkinson 1983, 247-8; Nafissi 1991, 153-161; Kennell 1995, 129-130, 139-142; Kennell 2010, 156; the reconstruction in Cozzoli 1979, 84-97 (Hippeis not young men but a social class) has not found much favour and is in my view impossible.

until 29 inclusive.[3]

The formation of the Hippeis occurred annually, through the agency of three so-called Hippagretai, whom the ephors especially chose for that purpose (4,3). The term Hippagretai should mean 'those who assemble or gather together the Hippeis', not necessarily those commanding them as a force. The Hippagretai are said to be chosen from the *akmazontes* and are called *andres* (4,3). On the face of it, this suggests men of around thirty or even a little older, but we have to be careful, for in the same sentence the author calls the Hippeis themselves also *andres*. Moreover, *akmazontes* is not a very precise term either, and can easily be equated to *hebōntes*. This does not disprove, of course, that the Hippagretai were thirty or older but it certainly leaves open the possibility that they belonged to the same age-category as the Hippeis whom they had to 'assemble'. In my view that was indeed the case, for we are told that young Spartans turned away from this elite force by the Hippagretai could fight (*polemousi*: 4,4) them as well as their age-mates that had been admitted. It seems extremely implausible that a Spartan of age twenty would protest or even 'fight' against a full citizen of thirty or older. Moreover, we hear that precisely those fights could be suspended on the intervention of such a full citizen (*pas ho paragenomenos kyrios*: 4,6). We may reasonably conclude, then, that the Hippagretai belonged to the same age-category of the 20- to 29-year-olds as the Hippeis whom they 'gathered together'.

As to the selection itself of this elite force, we are informed that each of the three Hippagretai 'enlists' or 'sums up' (*katalegei*) hundred men, stating clearly (*diasaphēnizōn*) thereby why he preferred the ones enlisted and rejected others (4,3). As a result, the latter, as mentioned above, would 'fight' the Hippagretai and the young men 'chosen in their stead' (*tois hairetheisin anth' autōn*), and both groups would watch each other to see if they would do anything contrary to 'what was deemed good in society' (*ta kala nomizomena*). According to the author, this was 'a most god-pleasing and politically useful strife' (*theophilestatē te kai politikōtatē eris*: 4,4). It is tempting to assume that the three groups of hundred young men each were drawn from the three Dorian *phylai* that are indeed attested at Sparta (Tyrt. F. 19 West, 8; Plut. *Lyk.*, 16.1). Since the composition of the Hippeis, as we shall see, with its succession of groups of coevals is markedly different from the classical army organization in units made up of men of different ages, the three groups of hundred could well be a relic of an older organizing principle based on the *phylai*. After all, the very name of 'Knights' for these elite hoplites also points to a more distant past.

The question whether the whole force of threehundred Hippeis were selected anew each year or whether only thirty 20-year-olds were selected and admitted to the corps, while at the same time those turning thirty had to leave, as I believe was the case, cannot be answered in a straightforward fashion from the passage of the *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia* alone. Whereas many scholars believe that Xenophon meant to say that the three Hippagretai each 'chose' hundred young men, thus reconstituting the whole force, it is

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[3] See the literature in n. 2 above; also MacDowell 1986, 67-8; for the *paidiskoi* cf. Kukofka 1993; for the passage of the *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia* also Rebenich 1998, 106-7.

equally possible to limit the element of choice to the three Hippagretai themselves (the ephors are said to 'choose' them: *hairountai*: 4,3) and to those 'chosen' (*tois hairetheisin*: 4,4) by them, be they thirty or threehundred in number. Where the hundred of each Hippagretēs are mentioned, the author speaks of 'enlisting', 'listing' or 'summing up' (*katalegei:* 4,3). In my view we have to take that rather literally: the Hippagretai added three new lists of ten names of Hippeis each to the existing ones of the preceding years, taking away the lists of the oldest year-class and thus summing up or 're-editing' the *katalogoi* anew. Admittedly, by doing so they 'made it clear' why they had preferred some and rejected others, which looks like a commentary on *all* the names in those *katalogoi*. However, if we envisage the process as a publication, presumably on wooden *pinakes*, of three sets of two lists, one of the chosen Hippeis of age twenty and a much longer one of all their age-mates not chosen, and these three sets being published together with those of the nine preceding years, we can easily imagine that only regarding the new names of the youngest year-class the Hippagretai had 'to make it clear' – orally, one presumes – why some were enscribed among the Hippeis and a more numerous group was not, and that the author of the *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia* simply assumed (he might never have been present at such an occasion himself) that the names of *all* Hippeis and *all* their coevals were commented on by the Hippagretai. Most probaby, in my view, the Hippagretai published only six lists of the 20-year-olds, adding their comments as to why they had chosen these thirty young men and rejected the rest of their age-mates, while re-editing only the lists of Hippeis of the preceding nine years (twenty-seven in all), lists from which the names of the deceased presumably had been erased or at least especially marked, thus in a sense 're-constituting' the whole force anew. *All* the lists of *all* Hippeis and *all* non-Hippeis (to which the ex-Hippeis also belonged) together constituted the Spartan *katalogoi* or lists of *emphrouroi*, that is: of citizens liable for military service, in essence not that different from comparable lists in Athens and elsewhere. When the order for a mobilization was given by the ephors, they produced these lists (presumably kept in their office) up until the year they had set as the limit for the call-up, which might explain the expression 'displaying the levy' (*phrouran phainein*) as the Spartans called the procedure. It goes without saying that this does not *prove* that the task of the Hippagretai concerned only the 20-year-olds. But to my mind that assumption is not disproven by the text of the *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia* either. The number 'hundred', in fact, should be taken not as an exact number, for because of mortality over the years the actual number of ten year-classes of nominally 'thirty' men each would in reality have been about 270 to 280. Nevertheless, the whole force could be called the Three Hundred.

Thus, the text of the *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia* does not *force* the assumption that every year three hundred men were chosen for the Hippeis and that, consequently, that elite corps was totally reconstituted each year. Instead, it allows for the alternative interpreation that only thirty men aged twenty were chosen and added to an existing force. Besides, what Xenophon tells us about that wholesome strife in Spartan society mentioned above can be much more easily understood when only thirty men were chosen each year instead of threehunderd. We donot know, of course, how many Spartans there

were in, say, the fifth century BCE, aged twenty to thirty. But a rough number of 1200, at least around the middle of the century, cannot be too far off the mark.[4] Of these, a little over 10 % would be aged twenty, say 130 or a few more. If the Hippagretai, as many scholars believe, chose 300 men, then some 900 would have been left out of the force. The situation suggested by the *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia*, of constant brawls and fighting between the two groups, would have been daunting indeed, even if both groups would not be always engaged *en masse*; are we really to believe that a small community as, in numerical terms, Sparta was, had to cope with more or less continous infighting between large groups of its younger citizens on such a scale? And could the lone *kyrios* then really be expected to separate them or could the *paidonomos* pick the one recalcitrant out of these hundreds and hand him over to the ephors (4,6)? Surely, all this is only feasible if we assume that not hundreds of young men were engaged in this, but much smaller numbers: thirty chosen Hippeis over against hundred or a few more of their coevals. In actual fact, of course, these fights would mostly occur between even smaller groups, say one or two from the Hippeis encountering four or five of the opposing category, but larger engagements must at least have taken place now and then, even of *all* the young Hippeis against their more numerous coevals. As long as they did not surpass thirty and roughly hundred, respectively, the information of the *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia* is still plausible; with numbers running in the several hundreds it would be hard to swallow, to say the least.

There is another consideration to be made regarding the supposed selection of three hundred Hippeis each year. If, as the *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia* put it, the young Spartans who had been turned away at the selection process, really fought with the Hippagretai and with their coevals who had been chosen, we would have to assume young men aged twenty and older fighting those of, say, age twenty-seven, twenty-eight or twenty-nine, for that would most probably be the ages of the Hippagretai if they had to select threehundred men from the whole group of 20- to 29-year-olds. And young Spartans in general, whether selected into the Hippeis or not, would often have had to fight with members of the opposing group older than they. The differences in physical strength, willpower, and other characteristics between young men of twenty (who had just left the phase of the *meirakia* or *paidiskoi* in which they had to be utterly submissive and shy, see 3, 4-5) and those of, say, twenty-eight or twenty-nine must often have been considerable. Perhaps, one might argue, it was so arranged that the Hippeis and their opponents only fought each other in pairs or groups that were more or less of the same age, give and take one or two years. But that would require an organization and oversight that is nowhere mentioned in any source and that, would it indeed have existed, would in fact have come rather close to a make-up of the elite force *and* their opponents of ten successive year-groups. For the corps of the Hippeis that was indeed the case, as I believe, but certainly not for the rest of the 20- to 29-year-olds.

Further, when the Hippagretai 'made it clear' every year why they had selected certain young men and rejected others, we have to suppose some level playing field on which the

[4] For an estimate of Spartan citizen numbers in the fifth century cf. Singor 2002, 266-73.

Spartans of the age-group concerned had at least in theory equal chances – even if no doubt here too some must have been 'more equal' than others. In my view, this points to equality of age. Now, if threehundred men were chosen at the same time from the whole age-category of 20-29, more often than not the oldest, being the most experienced, strongest and perhaps also best-connected, would be picked much more often than the younger and youngest men. If this was indeed the selection procedure, the composition of the Hippeis would tend towards the higher year-classes, whereas their opponents would be mainly found among the younger members of the age-category. This in its turn would strongly undermine the element of competition that is so stressed by the *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia*. For the younger men left out of the force could reasonably expect much better chances in a few years' time – and the whole 'god-pleasing' strife would be seriously diminished.

Theoretically, this effect could have been prevented by making the Hippagretai choose the new Hippeis evenly from all ten year-classes. Apart from the fact that, again, such a selection is nowhere mentioned in our sources and that it would have made the whole procedure rather more complicated, it would not have prevented another unwelcome consequence. For, however the selection of the threehundred new Hippeis was made each year, it would have been inevitable that some men would be chosen much more often than others and that some other, more unfortunate young men would never be chosen at all. On average, with such a procedure, we may suppose a small minority of men that would be chosen every year, a slightly larger group that would be picked nine, eight, seven or six times; a still larger group that would be selected perhaps five or four times; a perhaps equally large one that would be sought out three or two times or even one time; and finally a group that would never be chosen at all. As a result, there would always be some Spartans, and probably not just a few of them, that would be very resentful, whilst others would be far exalted above their age-mates for having been chosen ten or close to ten times. I doubt very much that such a situation would have been tolerated for long in a society that officially styled itself Equals and tried so hard to present a certain image of equality to the outside world. In other words, annual selection of all threehundred Hippeis would have a socially disruptive effect, for it would leave a minority of Spartans stained with the dishonour of having never beeen chosen and others of having been turned away just too often. An annual selection of only thirty from amongst the 20-year-olds, on the other hand, who would then stay on in the corps for ten years, would indeed create an honoured minority alongside a majority that would be left out but that would not have felt much 'inferior' precisely because they were in the majority.

To sum up, the text of the *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia* does not demand the interpretation of an annual selection of all three hundred Hippeis but allows for a reconstruction in which each year only thirty new recruits from amongst the 20-year-olds were chosen. Moreover, on closer examination the supposed selection of three hundred Hippeis every year would have such impications as to seriously undermine the practicality, fairness and official equality of the whole procedure. A reconstruction according to which annually only thirty men were selected from the 20-year-olds, on the other hand, would have none of

these problematic implications. And such a reconstruction is also supported by the other evidence we have on the selection of the Hippeis.

### Some Other Evidence on the Selection of the Hippeis

Herodotus (1, 67,5) tells us that 'the Agathoergoi belong to the citizens, leaving the Hippeis, always being the oldest, five each year.' What does this mean? Could it mean that annually three hundred Hippeis resigned and that from these the five oldest were sought out to be Agathoergoi? But Herodotus does *not* say that these Agathoergoi were the five oldest of the citizens who left the Hippeis each year. Were that the case, the passage would indeed imply that each year citizens of varying ages left the force of the Hippeis, suggesting that the whole force resigned to be replaced by a completely new group of three hundred. He simply says that these functionaries ('Well-doers' of whom we know very little) were citizens, leaving the Hippeis, always being the oldest, five each year. Perhaps the term *astoi* ('citizens') points to the age of thirty at which one became a full citizen in Sparta, but I donot want to stresss that. What is essential, though, is that the phrase 'leaving the Hippeis, always being the oldest, five each year' (*exiontes ek tōn hippeōn aiei hoi presbytatoi, pente eteos hekastou*) does not relate to the citizens but to the Agathoergoi and that it cannot mean that the oldest numbered five each year, but instead that from the oldest year-class that left the Hippeis each year five were made Agathoergoi. If we suppose an annual selection of all three hundred Hippeis the oldest could only be five in number if they were reckoned after individual birthdays, but in Sparta ages were collectively counted after year-classes; it would be next to impossible for the oldest year-class to be always five in number. In the reconstruction proposed here, the oldest year-class surely must have numbered on average around 25, those surviving from the 30 chosen at age twenty. Admittedly, Herodotus' formulation is not very clear.[5] Even so, the words 'leaving the Hippeis' (*exiontes ek tōn hippeōn*) pertain to the Agathoergoi as the oldest and *not* to the larger group of the citizens (*tōn astōn*; in which case the phrase would have been *exiontōn ek tōn hippeōn).* The implication is that others, those not 'the oldest', stayed on. This contradicts the picture of an elite force resigning and being replaced *in toto* each year. In my view, the oldest were the oldest year-class who had to leave the corps. Five of these oldest were then picked – we donot know on what criteria – by the authorities, probably the ephors, to serve Sparta on special duties, a number that was surely connected with other committees of five at Sparta, not least with the number of the ephors themselves.[6]

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[5] Herodotus was no Thucydides in matters of numbers and military organization. There is nothing in his work comparable to Thucydides' detailed and careful description of the Spartan army at Mantinea (Thuc. 5, 64-71) and he seriously believed, for instance, that in the campaign of Plataea 35000 helots accompanied the 5000 Spartan hoplites (Hdt. 9, 10,1; 29,2), which would have been a logistical nightmare (cf. also Thucydides correcting Herodotus on the *lochos Pitanatēs*: Thuc. 1, 20,3).

[6] Committees of five: five Spartan arbiters assigning Salamis to Athens (Plut. *Solon* 10,4); Dorieus

We also have an anecdote about a certain Pedaritos, who took the fact that he had *not* been chosen for the Hippeis with good humour (or irony), saying that he rejoiced in the fact that Sparta had apparently three hundred men better than himself (Plut. *Lyk.* 25,4; *Mor.* 231b). If annually the whole corps of the Hippeis would have been renewed, Pedaritos would have had ten (!) chances in so many years to be enrolled. Would he have said what he did after his first rejection? That would have been rather odd considering the nine more chances he would have; would he have said it after some more rejections? That would have been unduly spiteful, as long as there were still some more chances to come. Would he have said it after his final rejection? That would have shown a degree of self-abasement uncharacteristic of a Greek or a Spartan and certainly not something he would be remembered for. Surely, what Plutarch's anecdote implies is that Pedaritos – who was apparently someone of some standing who might have expected a place among the elite corps and whose name was therefore remembered – was passed over for whatever reason on one (!) occasion and that this meant that he had lost *all* chance of ever belonging to the Hippeis. Not to be chosen at age twenty must have meant not to be chosen ever.

Finally, there is a remark made by Plutarch that those Spartans who had won a victory in one of the great games (he goes on with an anecdote about an Olympic victor) automatically received a place of honour on the battlefield in front of the king (Plut. *Lyk.* 22,4). Could this mean that such a victor became one of the Hippeis (who were placed on the battlefield in the immediate vicinity of the king: Thuc. 5, 72,4) and that this implies that the whole force was renewed each year? Such a conclusion would be unwarranted. For it would not at all have been necessary to enroll him among the Hippeis if his reward was that honorary place on the battlefield. It must have been a rather exceptional occurrence anyway: not only were there not so many Spartan victors at the great games in the classical period, also the number of battles in which a Spartan king participated was fairly limited. Above all, since the Hippeis numbered three hundred men 'on paper' but in reality always a little less as a result of various losses over the years, there must always have been a place for an individual to fill as a personal distinction and only on the occasion of a royal campaign.[7]

## The Hippeis and the Classical Spartan Army

In classical Sparta the young men at age twenty entered into the *syssitia* or messes of

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and his four *synktistai* (Hdt. 5, 46,1); five Spartan judges at Plataea (Thuc. 3, 52,3); for the question of the five *ōbai* or villages of classical Sparta cr. Singor 2002, 264-5 with n. 32.

7 Earlier (Singor 2002, 247 n. 15) I had conjectured that this passage in Plutarch as well as some references to 'the noblest' or 'the most distinguished' of the Spartans fighting on the battlefield in front of the king (Xen. *Hell.* 7, 4,23-4; Isokr. *Ep.* 2,6) applied to the period when the Hippeis as an army corps had disappeared, somewhere in the early 4th century BCE, but I now believe that all these honoured and honorable men around the king on the battlefield are not incompatible with the existence of the Hippeis.

the adult citizens. In times of war the men of three *syssitia* were grouped together into an *enōmotia*, the basic unit of the hoplite army. Most young Spartans of that age thus became members of the regular army through the *enōmotiai* into which their *sysssitia* would be merged when on campaign. A minority amongst them, however, the thirty who had been picked for the Hippeis, although they had been admitted into the *syssitia* along with their age-mates, were nevertheless kept apart from the *enōmotiai* and served instead in the *corps d' élite*. In my view, these thirty selected annually may be identified with the otherwise enigmatic *triakades* (literally: 'thirties') mentioned by Herodotus where he says that the Spartan lawgiver organized, for the purpose of war, the *enōmotiai*, the *triakades*, and the *syssitia* (Hdt. 1, 65, 5). We should understand this as a reference to the three military institutions that presented themselves to the young Spartan adults: on coming of age *all* 20-year-olds became members of the *syssitia*, *most* of them were further enrolled into the *enōmotiai*, but select groups of 'thirties' each year, the *triakades*, went into the Hippeis.[8]

We donot have to assume that the number of three hundred for the Hippeis was scrupulously maintained and that each vacancy was immediately filled by a new member. The custom of giving victorious athletes a place of honour on the batttlefield in front of the king, and the anecdote about Pedaritos both suggest that vacancies were *not* regularly filled. Since those Spartans – the majority – who had not been selected for the Hippeis were enrolled into the *enōmotiai*, it is unlikely in my view that every now and then someone from their midst would leave in order to fill a vacant place in the elite force. Instead, we have to assume that every year just thirty new recruits for the Hippeis were chosen and that the total strength of the Three Hundred was only a nominal strength, the real number, as pointed out above, being rather 270 to 280 on average. [9]

On the battlefield, the whole force of the Hippeis must have operated in units of a strength comparable to that of the *enōmotiai* of the regular army. In my opinion, it is highly plausible that the year-groups of thirty men or *triakakes* functioned as the basic units of the Hippeis when they were drawn up in the phalanx. For it would have complicated the organization of this force considerably if there had been other sub-units cutting across the *triakades*. I presume, then, that the Hippeis were lined up in ten *triakades* next to each other, from the 20-year-olds to the 29-year-olds. Such a line-up was markedly different from the battle-order of the regular army. In the latter, men of varying ages (from twenty to over fifty) and of three different *syssitia* and three different *phylai* were assembled into one unit, the *enōmotia* under the command of an *enōmotarchos*. At Mantinea in 418, the *enōmotiai* numbered 32 men at most and were drawn up in four files of up to eight men each (Thuc. 5, 68,3). Such an arrangement implied a thorough mixing of the men of different *syssitia* and different ages. The *triakades* of the Hippeis, on the other hand, consisted of men of the same age. Moreover, it is perfectly possible and indeed probable that each *triakas* consisted of three lines of Hylleis, Dymanes and Pamfyloi, who were thus lined up separately and not mixed together as they were in the

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8 Singor 1999, 89 n.10; 2002, 275.

9 Singor 1999, 70; 2002, 268-70.

*enōmotiai*. With a nominal strength of thirty men for a *triakas*, that would have yielded three files of ten at most. In that way, the Hippeis would in the classical period still have represented an older organizing principle: grouping men of the same age together and forming units based on the *phylai*. Who the commanders of the *triakades* on the battlefield were, we donot know. At Mantinea in 418 BCE there is no mention of the commanders of the Hippeis, although Thucydides admiringly sums up all Spartan officer ranks (Thuc. 5, 66,3). We may presume, though, that the acting Hippagretai as well as the former Hippagretai still in the force would have been involved, leading *triakades* or perhaps just files, their sub-divisions. But in fact it must have been the king who personally commanded this force stationed at his side; and the king should also have appointed whomsoever he wished as leaders of the files or the *triakades*. The occasions, however, when a king participated in battle with all the three hundred Hippeis at his side, would have been rare, perhaps only in the late 5th and early 4th centuries BCE.[10]

The corps of the Hippeis had an unmistakably elitist or aristocratic air about it. Numerically, however, any aristocracy by birth is out of the question for a group as large as a quarter of the citizen population (counting Hippeis and former Hippeis together). It was their selection and the way they were set apart from the rest of the citizens that provided them with that aristocratic aura. Not only are they called *logades* or a select band (Hdt. 8, 124,3), their very name of 'Knights' evokes that aura. Comparisons with the Theban *Hēniochoi kai Parabatai*, also a band of 300 hundred hoplites (Diod. 12, 70,1; cf. Hdt. 9, 67; Thuc. 3, 22,7; 23,3), and more generally with aristocratic groups like the Hippeis or Hippobotai in Eretria and Chalkis (Hdt. 5, 77,2; Arist. *Pol.* 1289b) spring to mind. No doubt, once the Hippeis in Sparta must have been real horsemen too, riding out to the battlefield and dismounting in the manner of the 'mounted hoplites' that we can see depicted on so many vases of the 7th and 6th centuries BCE, or even using their horses for skirmishing. Another and more archaic name for the Spartan Hippeis was *Koroi*, which also had a 'knightly' or even epic connotation, and which is attested in a Laconian inscription of the mid-sixth century BCE on a funerary stele in honour of a certain Theokles, that was dedicated by the *Koroi* (IG V 1,457).[11] A much later writer calls the

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[10] If this reconstruction is correct it implies that the Hippeis were drawn up on the battlefield at a front of 30 and a depth of at most 10 but often 9 men; further, that in the front ranks there were different ages represented, from 20 up to 29 inclusive. To put the youngest men in the front ran contrary to Spartan and generally Greek practice. However, only three men of the very youngest were in the first rank, and these men were after all the 'Knights', who by definition had to hold an honorable place. I presume that the normal position of the king on the battlefield was with the youngest of the Hippeis (but in practice often behind some Olympic victor or otherwise honoured warrior) and therefore at the right end of the line, but this cannot be proven.

[11] Cf. Nafissi 1991, 158-62; Kennell 1995, 139-42, points out that Theokles wears a cap or a helmet that seems to mark him out as a horseman resembling the Dioskouroi. This need not mean that Theokles really fought on horseback, rather it points to a certain level of identification of the heroized young man with these demi-gods. On the other hand, it is not impossible that in the sixth century BCE the Hippeis could still be mounted but certainly before 511 (the year of

Hippeis 'the noblest of the young men' *hoi gennaiotatoi tōn neōn*: Dion. Hal. 2, 13,4) and opines, incidentally, that they fought both on horseback and on foot, which might very well have been true for the early 6th century BCE but certainly not for the classical period. When at some time the all-hoplite Spartan army was created, this elitist force surely was in existence already. The principles at work in their battlefield line-up, as we have seen, also seem to point to a relatively high age for this elite force. Indeed, it may very well have been the presence of the 'Knights', perhaps already bound to a yearly recruitment of thirty men, that enabled the authorities to regroup all the other men of the *syssitia* into units consisting of men from practically all the year-classes from 20 up to and including 59, drawing on those who had to leave the Hippeis at a certain moment – and perhaps the exact age-limit at thirty was only then introduced – to help fill in the vacancies or at least most of these that would inevitably open up in the older year-classes of the *enōmotiai*. The whole structure of the classical hoplite army with units of ascending order – four *enōmotiai* into one *pentēkostys*, four *pentēkostyes* into one *lochos* – was such as to suggest a deliberate and well considered organization at some time in the sixth century BCE.

As a *corps d' élite*, the Hippeis are not to be identified with other forces of the same number which we meet sometimes in our sources. The famous three hundred champions who fought an equal number of Argives for the possession of the Thyreatis (Hdt. 1, 82), the equally famous three hundred Spartans selected by Leonidas for his stand at Thermopylae (Hdt. 7, 205,1-2), or the three hundred who under Arimnestos fought to their deaths against the Messenians (Hdt. 9, 64,2), must all have been special troops selected *ad hoc*.[12] The Hippeis, on the other hand, were a standing force. From Herodotus we know that a Spartan king on campaign had a bodyguard of hundred *logades* or selected men (Hdt. 6, 56) These could have been Hippeis belonging to only one *phylē*, ten at most in every year-group. We cannot be sure, though, for these hundred men could have been others, not Hippeis. But in my view that is not very plausible, since Herodotus clearly suggests a standing institution, not an incidental measure, and it is hard to see what other honorary force could have performed this duty except the Hippeis. They at least escorted Themistokles once, and even at their full strength of three hundred (Hdt. 8, 124,3), which was probably a mark of exceptional honour. Perhaps, in Herodotus' time (mid-fifth century BCE) a Spartan king on campaign would be accompanied by one *phylē* of the Hippeis. But in the campaign of Mantinea in 418 BCE, when the Spartan army had been called up hastily and in an unusual manner (Thuc. 5, 64,2), king Agis had the full force of three hundred Hippeis with him. Since then, that may have become the norm, however seldom it may have actually occurred.

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Anchimolios' failed expedition to Attica), if not earlier, I believe they must have become full hoplites.

12 *Contra*: Nafissi 1991, 157-8, identifying the three hundred Champions of the Thyreatis with the Hippeis. To my mind, such special *logades* were selected on other principles, cf. Hdt. 7, 205,1-2 on the men of Thermopylae, and Thuc. 4, 8,9 on the 420 men selected for Sphakteria. For elite troops (*logades, epilektoi*) in general, see Alonso-Freitag 2001

### The Hippagretai and Their Duties

The Hippagretai remain rather enigmatic.[13] Apart from what we learn about them from the *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia*, another scrap of evidence is presented by Xenophon elsewhere. In relating the failure of the conspiracy led by Kinadon he tells us that the ephors instructed 'the eldest of the Hippagretai' to arrest the ringleader secretly and with the help of six or seven *neoi* (Xen. *Hell.* 3, 3,9). So we have to infer that the Hippagretai were not of the same age. In theory, only one could always have been older than the other two, but I take it that they belonged – and had to belong – to three successive year-groups. Since, as we have seen, it is much more likely that these Hippagretai belonged to the younger than to the older year-classes of the category of 20- to 29-year-olds, we may think of them as 20, 21 and 22 years old rather than, say, 27, 28 or 29. We must remember that they had to scrutinize the young men of age twenty – thus, of their own age or approximately so – and select their groups of new Hippeis from them, and not to select three hundred men from the whole group between the ages of twenty and thirty that must have numbered about twelve hundred.[14]

Still, we are left with a little puzzle as to how three Hippagretai of three successive year-classes were chosen and supposed to have gone about their business. Did the ephors every year choose one Hippagretēs from, say, the Hylleis of the 20-year-olds, another from the Dymanes of the 21-year-olds, and the third from the Pamfyloi of the 22-year-olds? It may have been so, for all we know. Another possibility might be more plausible, however, if only because it is simpler: that just one Hippagretēs aged twenty was appointed annually for the duration of three years; one year he was chosen from the Hylleis, the next year from the Dymanes, and the third year from the Pamfyloi. Thus, in any given year there would be three Hippagretai aged 20, 21, and 22, and representing the three Dorian *phylai.* Or, perhaps, in each year two of the 'chosen' Hippagretai were in fact re-appointments of those who had been Hippagretai in the previous two years. However, the

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13 Some later sources call the Hippagretai the 'leaders' of the Hippeis: Aristophanes of Byzantium, *Lakōnikai Glōssai* s.v. *neaniai*: *tous prohestēkotas hippagretas*; Hesychius s.v. *hippagretas*: *archē epi tōn epilektōn hoplitān,* but these testimonies have little or no independent value, as they are most probaby derived from a reading of Xenophon, *Lak. Pol.* 4 and Thuc. 5, 72,4. In Roman Sparta there was an *hipparchēs* as leader of the *neoi* (the age-group of 20-29-year-olds), possibly assisted by five *lochagoi* (Kennell 1995, 47-8), but such archaising titles, harking back to the classical Spartan army with its five *lochoi* and corps of Hippeis, mean nothing when it comes to the function of the classical Hippagretai.

14 MacDowell 1986, 67 concludes from the term *akmazontes* that the Hippagretai themselves 'probably were in the final year of that period' (i.e. the age-group twenty to thirty). To my mind, this conclusion is unnecessary. Kennell 1995, 118 and 2010, 156 sees in the *akmazontes* citizens of over thirty, referring to Pollux 2,1; there, however, the *akmazōn* is identified as a man of militay age (*ek katalogōn*), thus anyone from the age of twenty upwards. Ducat 1999, 64 n. 50 also remarks that it is 'difficult to imagine any *hēbōn* systematically contesting the decisions of citizens over the age of thirty'.

text of the *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia* clearly states that the ephors chose *three* Hippagretai each year and not one. But just as the three hundred Hippeis were annually listed or rather re-listed in their *katalogoi*, while only the thirty youngest were in fact newly chosen, the author could have been led a little astray here as well by saying that three Hippagretai were chosen and charged with the task of 'assembling' the Hippeis, whereas in fact only one new Hippagretēs was annually chosen and all *three* Hippagretai were then charged with the work of recruiting the new Hippeis of the year and then 'listing' or 'reconstituting' the whole force. Naturally, this must remain hypothetical. Perhaps we should just accept that 'somehow' the three Hippagretai were chosen or appointed in such a way that they represented the three *phylai* as well as the three youngest year-classes, and leave it at that.

The age of 20, 21 or 22 for the three Hippagretai is not, as it might seem, unduly young. When the oldest of them was charged, together with some *neoi* of perhaps the same age but probably not older than he, to arrest the conspirator Kinadon, that cannot have been a task beyond their capabilities. We may think of the Kryptoi of comparable young age acting as assassins of helots sometimes. Indeed, the fact that the ephors charged the oldest of the Hippagretai and his *neoi* to arrest Kinadon, might have had something to do with the absence of the two younger Hippagretai and their respective year-classes from Sparta, engaged as they may have been in their duties as Kryptoi, roaming the countryside in winter.[15]

We are not told at what point in the year the Hippagretai had to perform their task of selecting the young Hippeis and publishing their names as well as the names of all the others who had been turned down by them. Since the Hippeis were also an army corps, we may assume, in my view, that the whole process must have been accomplished before the great Apella in spring, which, at least in origin, must have been the occasion on which the young warriors aged twenty were admitted into the army. Thus, mainly in winter and early spring the Hippagretai would have picked their men from all those who by that time had left their status of *paidiskoi* behind and now counted as *hēbōntes*. It was then that the Hippagretēs aged twenty assembled nine of his coevals of his *phylē*, while his colleagues aged twenty-one and twenty-two each chose ten young men of their *phylai* from the same year-class of the 20-year-olds. Among the criteria applied in that choice were certainly factors like bodily strength and character, but personal relations and connections must have been equally important. In his choice an Hippagretēs might be tutored by his lover, or by older relatives, by members of the *syssition* to which he himself belonged or to which the young man of his choice was to belong. In all this, the private sphere in Sparta was thoroughly mixed with the public one to a degree that we cannot possibly unravel in its details.

After the choices had been made and the *katalogoi* published there was fighting

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15 In my view the Kryptoi were 30 young men (those chosen for the Hippeis) of age twenty and another 30 of age twenty-one (in their second year in the Hippeis), who had to spend two winters in the Laconian and Messenian countryside; but on this Krypteia of 60 Kryptoi in all I hope to come back elsewhere.

between the new Hippeis and their age-mates whenever they came across each other. If *all* the young men of the ten year-classes from twenty to thirty had been involved the fighting would have been more or less constant all over Sparta, extending even into the *syssitia*, for both the Hippeis and their age-mates were now adopted into these messes. But in my view, there was only fighting among the 20-year-olds, of whom never more than one was adopted in any *syssition*.[16] Of these young men, the thirty Hippeis formed a relatively small minority confronted by at least ninety of their coevals in most of the fifth century BCE. The fighting between these groups was not a means to select future new Hippeis, for the choice had already been made. It was in a way ritualistic, because the fighting was expected from the two sides as part of the famous Spartan Upbringing, but therefore no less serious, sometimes no doubt bloody, and also spiteful on the part of those not chosen for the 'Knights'. In fact, the fighting had to make clear that the choice of the new Hippeis had been the right one. Being in a clear minority, the young Hippeis ran a much greater risk of being beaten up by their more numerous rivals than their opponents. Precisely in such circumstances they had to prove themselves. It is very tempting to see here one of those *karterēseis* ('hardships' or tests of endurance) enumerated by the Spartan Megillos in Plato's *Laws*, that are said to have been purposely introduced in order to harden the Spartan youth: fist fights or *hai pros allēlous tais chersi machai* (Plato, *Laws* 633b). On the other hand, considering the circumstances and the much smaller numbers of the young Hippeis, there had to be some limit to all this, which was why every adult citizen had the right to separate the combatants.

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[16] In fifth-century BCE Sparta there must have been some 240 *syssitia* and on average 120 to 130 or a little more twenty-year-olds, although the number of the latter would have come down gradually over the century, cf. Singor 2002.

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