

described as «the defender of the laws» (τῶν πρὸμαχὸν θεσμῶν), is related to Athena, «the defender of Athens» for his “judicial virtues” just as in the Spartan text, where the proconsul of Achaia is related to the god (hero) Lycurgus.⁸⁵ And just as the Athenian inscription – through its location and its words – aimed, as G. Deligiannakis writes, «to elevate Herculus to an immortalised and sublime level», so probably the Spartan dedication – through its comparison and its place of erection – intended to immortalise Optatianus (as well as Anatolius) to the same level as Lycurgus. In Sparta, after a kind of heroisation for “public services”, he was worshipped as a god and had a sanctuary, which according to Pausanias was located some distance from the theatre, near the Eurotas (Paus. 3, 16, 6; Hdt. 1, 66).⁸⁶

Lycurgus is the *archēgētēs* of Sparta, he is considered the founding deity of the city together with Heracles. He established the rules of civic life and was considered «the good genius of civic life» until late antiquity.⁸⁷ Many inscriptions, mostly dated back to the 2nd and 3rd cent. AD, mention Lycurgus as “*eponymous patronomos*”.⁸⁸ In summary, Lycurgus is both a god, the founder of the city and the magistrate *par excellence*. Therefore, it is not surprising that the two proconsuls of Achaia, the highest office in Roman Greece, were associated with Lycurgus. Furthermore, just as the latter was the founder of Sparta, so the two imperial governors could be considered the “re-founders” of the city: Optatianus is defined the city’s saviour (σωτήρ) and Anatolius had rebuild the destroyed city (Σπάρτην τ’ εὐάνδρον τεῦξεν ἐρειπομένην). In Roman period, «Several texts show how the names of elite individuals can refer to figures of Spartan myth or remote history»,⁸⁹ but Optatianus and Anatolius seem to be the only ones in Sparta who were even referred to the “founder” Lycurgus.

The importance of the honorary statues of Optatianus and Anatolius is due not only to their proximity to Lycurgus, but also to their location in the theatre. In Roman times, theatres in Greece

statue dedicated by the sophist Plutarchus (*IG II² 4224*; Robert 1948, p. 73; Sironen 1997, pp. 81-82, n. 22) and was similarly honoured by the city of Megara (*IG VII 93*; Robert 1948, p. 60). See also *PLRE II*, Herculus 2, p. 545.

⁸⁵ Robert 1948, p. 42, n. 2. See also Deligiannakis 2013, pp. 115-116.

⁸⁶ Parker 1989, p. 148; Lafond 2006, pp. 409-410; Flower 2009, p. 193.

⁸⁷ Cartledge, Spawforth 2002, p. 182.

⁸⁸ Nafissi 2018, p. 95; Lafond 2018, p. 409.

⁸⁹ Lafond 2018, p. 411.

were one of the places where the greatest number of honorific statues were set up, because as Vitruvius writes, the theatre was the second most important public place in the city after the forum (Vitr. 5, 3, 1). Furthermore, in the imperial era, theatres were not only the place for dramatic performances, but the place for political and legal assemblies.⁹⁰ In particular, imperial magistrates were honoured with portrait-statues in the theatre, mainly because it was the place where the community gathered to receive the proconsul of Achaia during his visit to Sparta and where public orations and festivities in his honour were held.⁹¹

Scaenae frons were usually decorated with statues of gods or of members of the imperial family. On the other hand, the aristocrats competed against each other for a position in the other areas of the theatre. Through their portrait statues – and especially the dedication inscriptions stating their virtues and deeds – they wished to gain the emperor's favour and consequently obtain high political offices from him.⁹²

Since the Hellenistic period, honorific statues were placed within the theatre at the «visual chokepoints» in order to attract the view of a gathered crowd. One of these «visual chokepoints» was *parodos*. The sculptural *ensemble* of Lycurgus, Optatianus and Anatolius was unsurprisingly located in the eastern *parodos*, which was also the main entrance to the theatre. In addition, it is worth stressing that lists of magistrates, and the *cursus honorum* of individual Spartan officials were inscribed on the wall of the eastern *parodos* from the first half of the 2nd cent. AD.⁹³

⁹⁰ Di Napoli 2010, pp. 259-261; Lafond 2018, p. 416.

⁹¹ Deligiannakis 2013, p. 113. For the honorary statues in the theatre of Corinth and Ephesus; Brown 2012; Auinger, Sokolicek 2016; Horster 2016.

⁹² Oikonomou 2014, p. 49.

⁹³ Woodward, Hobling 1923-1925, pp. 160-205 [Woodward]; Woodward 1925-1926, pp. 211-236; Woodward, Robert, Woodward 1927-1928, pp. 160-205 [Woodward]. Although Sparta in the 4th cent. AD «continued to enjoy a certain prominence in educated pagan circles as a “venerable metropolis of the past” and a minor centre of higher studies», the two inscriptions in honour of two proconsuls of Achaia - mentioning their direct interventions in the city life, especially in building activity - show that Sparta had lost part of its political autonomy; Cartledge, Spawforth 2002, p. 113. In addition, we should take into account the proconsul of Achaia Ampelius who financed building activity in the theatre.

In conclusion, the statue bases analysed here are peculiar because they are the only ones in the theatre of Sparta that make it possible to “recompose” the sculptural *ensemble* they belonged to and relocate them in their original place of display. The three statues were placed in the eastern *parodos*, probably along the wall of the staircase. As the eastern *parodos* was the main entrance to the theatre, the sculptural “group” was perhaps the first to be seen by the crowds of citizens and foreign visitors entering the theatre for performances or assemblies. Furthermore, they are one of the very rare examples of honorary monuments that suggest an equation between text and image: the comparison of the two proconsuls with Lycurgus is made explicit by the inscriptions as much as by the proximity of the three sculptures, a proximity that alone evoked a relationship between the two governors and Lycurgus. In this case, the comparison with a mythical lawgiver is not just a leitmotif, as in the Ephesus inscription, given the importance of Lycurgus in his city. In Sparta he was worshipped as a god and by placing the statues of Optatianus and Anatolius at his side, showed the city’s desire to raise them to an immortal level, at least in memory.

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