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# LYSANDER

**LYSANDER**, Spartan commander and politician (b. ca. 454 BCE; d. 395 BCE). Since he acquired, and then lost, far greater power than any other Greek before the Hellenistic age and in the process sharply divided the Spartan citizen body, fiction (much of it denigratory) soon attached to his biography. At many points one can write about him only "with all due caution" (Cartledge).

Born of a highly aristocratic father (the family, like the Spartan kings, traced its ancestry to Heracles), a guest-friend of the rulers of Cyrene and probably of some eminent men in the Greek cities of Asia, he was said to have been the son of a helot mother (as early as Isocrates, 4.111, 380 BCE, he is called a helot). His mother's name is not recorded. By early adulthood he had established important connections. Spartan custom prescribed that young adults should choose adolescent boys as lovers, and Lysander chose Agesilaus, son and stepbrother of Spartan kings (Plutarch, 22.6; *Agesilaus* 2.1). We do not know when or whom he married, but he had at least one daughter (Plut., 2.7-8), and a descendant, probably in the male line (Pausanius, 3.6.7), is attested.

It is odd that nothing is known about his early career. He is not mentioned by Thucydides (whose *History* breaks off in 411/10 BCE) nor by Xenophon before he takes up his eastern command (1.5.1). Yet he was sent out as a "formidable" (*deinos*) commander (*nauarchos*) in 407 to form a Spartan fleet (Plut., 3.2). Collecting about 70 triremes, he took them to Ephesus, which he chose as the Spartan headquarters to replace Miletus, for it was in touch with Persian officers, and ships setting out from there would not have to sail past the Athenian base at Samos. He was fortunate in that his arrival more or less

coincided with the arrival of Cyrus the Younger as overlord (*karanos*) of the satrapies of Asia Minor, the result of a Spartan embassy to Darius II complaining of Tissaphernes' half-heartedness in supporting Sparta. The embassy had been successful in winning Darius's personal support and a large sum of money, as well as the mission of his son Cyrus to co-operate with Sparta. (Lewis, pp. 124-25 believes that the agreement included the recognition of the autonomy of the Greek cities of Asia Minor, which Sparta had formally ceded to the King in the treaty recorded by Thucydides, 8.58. This is highly implausible, as the Spartans had come to beg and had nothing to offer in return.)

Lysander at once led an embassy to Cyrus, where he proved an adept courtier (Plut., 4.3) and obtained a grant of 10,000 darics, enough to raise the pay of sailors from three obols (half a drachma) a day to four, settle the sailors' arrears of pay, and have in hand enough for a month's wages (Plut., 4.6; Xen., 1.5.6-7). Cyrus refused to receive an Athenian embassy or to let one that Pharnabazus had sponsored proceed to meet with Darius. Alcibiades, the Athenian commander, challenged Lysander to battle, but Lysander, knowing that far more preparation was needed, pulled up his triremes (now ninety) and made sure they were in good repair. Alcibiades had to attend to urgent troubles elsewhere and left his fleet at Notium, a few miles from Ephesus. He entrusted the command to his helmsman Antiochus, with instructions not to fight Lysander. Antiochus, however, ignored his orders and challenged Lysander to battle. Lysander attacked, Antiochus was killed, and the Athenian fleet, sailing to his aid without a commander, was defeated with the loss of several ships (15 or 22, in different sources). Alcibiades came back and again offered battle in the harbor of Ephesus, but Lysander refused, and the Athenians had to return to Samos. In Athens, Alcibiades was blamed for the defeat, and, with other charges against him developing, he preferred not to return to Athens, but went to stay in his private castle in Thrace (Xen., 1.2.10-17; Plut., *Alcibiades* 35.6-36.3; Diodorus, 13.71, 73-74). Cyrus sent Lysander a gold-and-ivory model of a trireme to celebrate the victory, and Lysander dedicated the unique work at Delphi, in the Treasury of Brasidas (Plut., 18.2).

In the meantime, Lysander had been busy in politics. Presumably building on some of his father's connections, he called eminent men from various cities, both allied and hostile to Sparta, to meet him and told them to organize and seize power as soon as Athens was defeated, giving them pledges of his

support (Plut., 5.5-6).

At the end of his year in office as *nauarch*, he received his successor Callicratidas ungraciously and boastfully and returned to Cyrus the surplus of the fund Cyrus had given him, so that Callicratidas was left without money to pay the crews. Callicratidas was an old-fashioned Spartan, not a diplomat, and contemptuous of barbarians. He was now forced to go to Cyrus and beg for money, which he did so awkwardly that he was sent away. Even so, he won some impressive victories with funds collected from Greek cities, and in the end Cyrus had to go along and give him some funds. But in August 406 he was decisively defeated by an Athenian fleet at Arginusae (little islands between Lesbos and the mainland) and died in battle. Thereupon Sparta's Aegean allies, supported by Cyrus, sent envoys to Sparta, asking that Lysander be restored to the command (Plut., 5.7-7.2; Xen. 1.6, 2.1.6-7).

Since it was unlawful for a man to hold the nauarchy twice, the ephors appointed another man nauarch, with Lysander his second-in-command (*epistoleus*), but with complete authority over the eastern theatre of war. Lysander organized a massacre at Miletus during a festival, putting his personal adherents in power, then went to visit Cyrus at Sardis and received all the money he wanted (Plut., 7.3-9.1; Xen., 2.1.7-12).

At this point Cyrus was summoned to meet his father in Media, to account for his high-handed execution of two cousins (Xen., 2.1.8, spring 405). He called Lysander to him, gave him all the money in his treasury as well as control over the Greek cities, with the right to collect the tribute due from them to Cyrus, then set out for Media, where he found Darius seriously ill (for the succession crisis, see CYRUS vi). Lysander's movements are variously reported (Plut., 9.3-4; similarly Diod., 13.104.7-8; but cf. Xen. 2.15, 17-18). He finally made for the Hellespont and captured Lampsacus, threatening to close the straits to the Athenian grain ships from the Black Sea. The Athenian fleet of 180 ships followed him and took up a position at Aegospotami, on a barren coast facing him. When he refused to sail out to meet them for four days, the men grew careless and scattered to gather supplies. On the fifth day, while they were thus engaged, Lysander attacked them and managed to capture most of their ships on the beach, killing many of the crews and capturing 3,000 men on land, including the commanders (September 405). Only a few ships (the figures vary in the accounts) escaped. The prisoners, all but one commander who had at one time opposed a vicious decree in the Athenian Assembly, were executed (Plut., 9.5-13.2; Xen., 2.1.18-32). Lysander sent a trireme to Sparta to report the

victory, then began to take over the cities held by the Athenians, sending the garrisons home in order to increase the pressure of the coming famine (Plut., 13.3). He set up governments of ten of his friends (decarchies), free to eliminate their opponents, under the protection of a Spartan harmost (military governor), and he imposed a tribute to be paid to Sparta.

After restoring the independence of various cities annexed by the Athenians and handing them back to their original inhabitants to resettle where they had been occupied by Athenian settlers, he sailed to Attica and met the two kings, Agis and Pausanias, who were by then besieging Athens. The Athenians offered a fierce resistance, but in the end had to accept the terms imposed by Sparta: to dismantle their walls, readmit their oligarchic exiles, and join the "Peloponnesian League" under Spartan hegemony. (See Plut., 13.3-14.10, claiming to quote the actual Spartan decree in the Spartan dialect; Xen. 2.2.) The peace was concluded in March or April 404. Lysander imposed an oligarchy of thirty to rule Athens, then restored Samos to its citizens, whom the Athenians had expelled. After thus ending the Peloponnesian War, he sailed in triumph to Sparta, bringing with him, among other spoils, 470 talents of silver, the surplus of the money assigned to him by Cyrus for the war (Xen., 2.3.1-3, 6-10). At the request of the Thirty, he persuaded the ephors to send a harmost and garrison to Athens to support them.

Out of the booty taken from the Athenians, Lysander set up a monument of unprecedented size at Delphi, consisting of two groups of bronze statues. The first group, whose statues were each about six feet tall, showed six deities, with Lysander among them being crowned by Poseidon; it also included his seer and his steersman. The second, set up in the shape of a trireme, with each statue about five feet tall, depicted the Spartan and allied commanders. (For a good brief description, see the Commentary on Plutarch's *Lysander*, pp. 160-61.) Seventy-five years earlier, the Spartan commander who won the battle of Plataea had set up a monument with a couplet recording him as commander of the Greeks. The Spartans destroyed it as too boastful and considered it a crime (*adikema*: Thuc., 1.132.2-3). We note that there was no mention of Cyrus, who had magnificently celebrated Lysander's lesser success at Notium and whose aid had been indispensable in making Aegospotami possible.

After Cyrus's return from Media to resume his command after Darius's death, there is no mention of contact between him and Lysander. Whether or not he heard of the Delphic monument, he must have been shocked when this time

the surplus of his property was not given back to him, but taken to Sparta as booty. Lysander had exploited his friendship and had betrayed it. When Cyrus appealed to Sparta for aid in his proposed march against his brother, there was no request that Lysander be sent, and indeed the Spartans did not send him (Xen., 3.1.1; Diod., 14.19.2-5).

In the East Lysander received extravagant honors from the regimes he had installed. At Samos, according to a local historian, he received divine honors—certainly not in his lifetime, since there is no trace of it on the inscribed statue of him that the Samians dedicated at Olympia (see Plut., 18.4-5; Paus., 6.3.14; games in his honor are attested in his lifetime, Plut., 18.6-8). He was now practically ruler of the Greek East. At Sparta his power and his arrogance led to sharp divisions between those who admired him and those who suspected him. At various times (the dates are variously transmitted) the ephors recalled the harmosts he had installed and withdrew their support from the decarchies, which seem to have been gradually overthrown.

The divisions at Sparta appear sharply in the case of Athens. When a revolt against the Thirty broke out, Lysander procured a grant of money for them, and he and his brother were sent out to take control. King Pausanias was also sent with an army and won an initial success against the rebels but, superseding Lysander, he then negotiated a compromise, which after some further bloodshed led to the restoration of Athenian democracy. For this he was prosecuted at Sparta, but narrowly acquitted. (See Xen., 2.4.28-38; Plut. 21; Paus. 3.5.1-2.)

Complaints about Lysander's cruelty and treachery, including one from Pharnabazus, led to his recall to Sparta and to the execution of one of his trusted harmosts (Plut., 19.7, 20.1-5, embroidered). It was probably at this time that he formed a plan to change the long-established "constitution of Lycurgus" so as to enable him to become king or perhaps even open the door to a tyranny. The details are variously reported, and some are obviously untrustworthy, for example, a speech written for him by an orator that Agesilaus claimed to have ftound among his papers after his death, but did not publish (Plut. 25.1; *Agesilaus* 20.3). He is said to have tried to bribe three important oracles, at Delphi, at Dodona, and in the temple of Ammon in Cyrenaica, where he had personal connections; but the priests of Ammon are said to have revealed his plot at Sparta (Plut., 24-25, embroidered and dated 396; Diod., 14.13, dated 403; cf. Plut., 26, clearly fictitious). The most that can be

believed is that he tried, but failed, to initiate a constitutional change that would enable him to become one of the kings. The only suitable time for this was when the death of Agis II could be foreseen but had not yet occurred (402-400). At no other time would Lysander be able to initiate a debate about the kingship. The indecisive manner in which Agis had conducted the war against Elis (see Xen., 3.2.27, 29-30) suggests that he was ailing even then, "being by now an old man" (Xen., 3.3.1), before his death in 400 (ibid.).

His death initiated a succession crisis, with many doubting the legitimacy of his son Leotychidas (see Xen., 3.3.1-2, leaving the question open). Lysander now took advantage of this to support Agis' brother Agesilaus for the succession, even though an oracle seemed to disqualify him because he was lame. Lysander no doubt hoped to rule through his old lover, since he had been unable to secure his own candidacy. He succeeded in securing the succession for Agesilaus (Xen., 3.3.3-4; Plut., 22, with exhaustive discussion in the Commentary).

In Asia Tissaphernes had succeeded to Cyrus's command, and the Greek cities asked Sparta for protection against him. The treaty of 411 had probably lapsed with the death of Darius, and the Spartans felt free to send a force to Asia. This started a war that went on without a decisive outcome under two Spartan commanders (Xen., 3.1.3-2.20). In 397/6 Lysander secured the command in Asia for Agesilaus, hoping to exercise the *de facto* command. But Agesilaus, finding Lysander's fame threatening his own status, sowed public contempt for him and gave him no position of command, even after Lysander had persuaded Spithridates to defect from Pharnabazus and join Agesilaus, with two hundred cavalry and useful information about Pharnabazus (Plut., 23.5-24.1; Xen., 3.4.2, 4.7-10). Lysander now returned to Sparta (395), and it is at this point that Plutarch places his plan to make himself king (see above: there would hardly have been time for the embassies to the oracles supposedly involved). In fact, he was soon sent out on an urgent mission in Greece itself.

In 395 the simmering discontent over the arrogance of Spartan rule led to rebellion in Central Greece, supported by fifty talents sent from Asia by a Persian satrap. The Spartans had to meet a challenge from Thebes, if they were to retain their dominance, and Lysander was sent out with an advance force to invade Boeotia, while Pausanias was to join him as soon as he had collected the Peloponnesian forces. Lysander was only moderately successful and decided to move to Haliartus, a key site, on the south shore of Lake Copais on the road west from Thebes. This time he failed to show the patience that

had secured his victories at Notium and Aegospotami. Instead of waiting for the main force under the king to join him, he launched an attack upon the walls, but was caught by a force coming up from Thebes and was killed. Pausanias arrived to find a hopeless situation and had to agree to retrieve Lysander's body under truce and withdraw. The accounts are contradictory as to who was to blame: see Xen., 3.5.1-25, interrupted by a long Theban speech (5.8-5.15) securing the alliance of Athens. Xenophon reports that Pausanias failed to meet Lysander on a specified day (5.6 and 25) but also charges Lysander with not waiting for him (5.18). Plutarch (28.3-6, 10-12) has a totally different account. Pausanias was tried and went into exile (Plut., 30.1; with more detail in Xen., 3.5.25; see also Paus., 3.5.5-6).

*Sources*. The main sources are Xenophon, *Greek History* (contemporary, but not always accurate) and Plutarch, *Life of Lysander* (early 2nd century CE, based, as usual, on massive reading of earlier sources). Diodorus Siculus's *Library of History*, Books 13 and 14, preserves some material, chiefly from the moralizing 4th-century BCE historian Ephorus. These works are cited in the text without titles. Pausanias, writer of the guidebook to Greece (mid-2nd century CE), offers useful material on monuments and their historical background. Plutarch's *Lysander* can be read in an edition with Italian translation and exhaustive commentary (cited as Commentary) in *Le Vite di Lisandro e di Silla*, ed. Maria Gabriella Angeli Bertinelli, M. Manfredini, L. Piccirilli, and G. Pisani (Milan, 1997), together with the parallel *Life of Sulla* (Bertinelli did not actually work on the *Lysander*), with an excellent bibliography (pp. xliii-xlviii). There is no comparable work on Xenophon's *Greek History*.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

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*Sparta's Bitter Victories* (Ithaca, 1979), is too much given to positing "parties" in Spartan politics. P. Cartledge, *Agesilaos and the Crisis of Sparta* (London, 1987), has much useful background on Lysander and indeed on Spartan society, but is daunting in the length and breadth of its treatment (508 pages), perhaps to be dipped into rather than read. For detailed and careful discussion of policies, strategies, and social and political background, the best work is D. Kagan, *The Fall of the Athenian Empire* (Ithaca, 1987: only to the fall of Athens).

Other references. Paul Poralla's *Prosopographie der Lakedaimonier bis auf die Zeit Alexanders des Großen* (Breslau, 1913; repr., Rome, 1966) was reprinted and updated by Alfred S. Bradford, *A Prosopography of Lacedaemonians from the Earliest Times to the Death of Alexander the Great (X-323 B.C.)* (Chicago, 1985), with valuable additions and corrections; for Lysander, see pp. 89-91 and 185. For relations between Sparta (and other Greeek cities) and Persia, David M. Lewis, *Sparta and Persia* (Leiden, 1977) is indispensable.

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