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**History as a Weapon: Kritias' *Politeiai Emmetroi***

While Kritias is infamous for his role as a leader of the Thirty in 404/3 Athens, the nature and purpose of his historical writing has been little discussed. Among the many works in prose and verse that Kritias composed, the surviving fragments of an elegaic poem on Sparta and *politeiai* or "constitutions" of Thessaly, Athens, and Sparta raise several questions. When were they composed? What was their purpose and who was their audience? I argue here that Kritias wrote these works as part of a larger debate concerning *politeiai* during the last decade of the Peloponnesian War. Using historical exempla, Kritias was eager to illustrate that the Spartan constitution was the best, because he both wished to influence his fellow Athenian aristocrats and he probably wanted to flatter the victorious Spartans for political gain.

Previous scholarship has almost completely overlooked this aspect of Kritias' career. For example, F. Jacoby only lists the titles of the Athenian, Lakedaimonian, and Thessalian *politeiai*, but adds no fragments or comment. In her unpublished dissertation, D. Stephans (*Critias: Life and Literary Remains* [diss. Cincinnati 1939] 58) argues that the *politeiai* are "not political works but 'travel books' without the practical aim such books have in modern times." A close examination of the fragments themselves, however, suggests just the opposite. Kritias' consistent pro-Spartan moralizing combined with a display of historical and ethnographic erudition suggests far more the intention of a Goebbels than *Let's Go*.

For whom did Kritias write these verses? Their content suggests that they were meant to be sung in the oligarchic, often laconophilic, *hetaireiai* of Athens. A love for Sparta and things Spartan was not uncommon among the aristocratic elite of Athens — something in the brutal, stark quality of Sparta's traditions seemed to attract many aristocrats of free, often luxury-minded Athens. Had Kritias learned well from the experience of the coup of the Four Hundred that political power could be mobilized in the aristocratic clubs of Athens? Kritias also wrote a series of constitutions or *politeiai* of Sparta, Athens, and Thessaly in prose. Some of the same ground is covered and the message is the same, but often the tone is blunter. It has generally been assumed that these *politeiai* were composed as separate works, but John Philoponos records a work authored by Kritias called the *Politeiai Emmetroi* (DK 88A22) which may be translated either as *Constitutions in Verse* or as *Well-balanced Constitutions*. Because the poetic fragments are always cited as from Kritias' *Elegies*, it is more reasonable to assume that the prose constitutions are meant and that these *politeiai* were published together as a group.

At every turn, the prose *politeiai* serve either to praise Sparta or its supporters or to chastise others as corrupt or in some way deficient. The tone is polemical and bombastic. Who was Kritias trying to impress with praise for Sparta both in verse and in prose anyway? The piling on of superlatives and the excessive admiration of such mundane things as cups, furniture, clothes, and footwear makes one wonder if any Athenian might be persuaded by such over-the-top praise. I suggest that Kritias here is less concerned with persuading his fellow countrymen and more concerned with flattery of the Spartans.

Plutarch tells us that Kritias directly warned Lysander that as long as Athens remained a democracy, Spartan rule in Greece would not be safe (*Alc.* 38). Perhaps this is an oblique reference to Kritias' *Politeiai Emmetroi*, written in the summer of 404, in part to flatter the Spartans, to ingratiate himself with Lysander, and in part to serve as a warning of the corrupt and dissolute nature of Athenian democracy. This was clearly just what Lysander wanted to hear. By the Fall of 404, Kritias was increasingly the paramount leader of the newly installed Thirty. Kritias' rapid rise to power makes sense in the context of support by Lysander as a reward for his consistent pro-Spartan stance.