

Vassiliki Pothou, Anton Powell (eds.), *Das antike Sparta*, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 2017, pp. 320, ISBN 978-3-515-11371-7

Ancient Sparta and its society is undoubtedly a very important field of research in ancient Greek history. Sparta fascinates us as a certain symbol of lifestyle, courage, discipline, and sacrifice. The secrecy around its affairs is crucial here. As Thucydides (V. 68. 2.) remarked, the Spartans tried to keep information about the functioning of their *polis* from getting outside of its borders. Owing to this tendency, combined with their limited literary activity, modern scholars are almost completely deprived of the Lacedaemonian voice in historical sources. The vast majority of our knowledge about this state over the Eurotas River comes from external authors, often from much later than the times of Spartan greatness. Inevitably, modern discussion must focus on the reception of Sparta's image, to a degree comparable with its real outlook. The book *Das antike Sparta*, edited by V. Pothou and A. Powell, is dedicated to these issues. It is a collection of texts written on the basis of lectures presented at the University of Regensburg in 2009, during the cyclical International Sparta Seminar. The book, consisting of an introduction, 12 articles, indices, and a table of authors, is mostly in German, with a few articles in English or French.

The variety of topics analysed or interpreted by the individual authors is very large. A section of the texts concerns the shape and history of Sparta in antiquity, while another is dedicated to the more modern reception in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century AD. G. Rechenauer's article (*Körper und Macht: Zur Konzeption der Körperlichkeit im antiken Sparta*, pp. 19–36) deals with the shaping of a view on the condition of the human body. The author initially develops the issue of identification of health and male physical prowess as fundamentals of the polis's political power, before moving on to consideration of the perception of the female body in Sparta. The preserved fragments of Tyrtaeus and Alcman are the source of most of his reflections.

A. Powell (*Die Könige Spartas im Licht einer Krise und einer außergewöhnlichen Quelle*, pp. 37–56) deals with the functioning of the royal authority in Sparta in the light of Thucydides' testimony about the political crisis at the end of the 420s BC. Spartan domination on Peloponnesus was endangered at this time, mainly due to the actions of Argos and Athens. The author focuses on King Agis II and his military command during the campaign of the Battle of Mantinea (418) and on Spartan attitudes towards their ruler. He emphasises Thucydides' good knowledge of the course of events, which he must have owed to Lacedaemonian informants. However, the scholar also draws attention to the risk of Thucydides being subjected to suggestive propaganda.

S. Hodkinson (*Die Episode von Sphodrias als Quelle für die Sozialgeschichte von Sparta*, pp. 57–86) analyses the relationship of sources, especially Xenophon and the so-called raid of Sphodrias; this quite well-known incident took place in 378, when the

Spartan commander of the garrison in Thespieae tried to mount a surprise attack on the Athenian Piraeus after a night march. The plan failed completely, because Sphodrias was not able to travel the whole road under cover of darkness and daylight found him in the area of Eleusis. Sphodrias supposedly acted on his own initiative, and for this reason was tried by domestic authorities. His acquittal led to the outbreak of war with Athens, supporters of Thebes, who were already in open conflict with Sparta. In the article, the whole case (especially Sphodrias' court trial) is treated as a starting point for considerations of the problems of interstate personal contacts, slave labour, upbringing and family relations, and homosexuality, providing clarification for the described behaviour of the heroes in the context of their existence in a specific social and cultural environment.

N. Richer (*Rumeur, acclamations et musique (Phèmè, boè et mousikè) à Sparte*, pp. 87–110) describes the problem of Spartan citizens expressing opinions through rumours (as an element of assessment of individuals by this society), acclamations (understood as public expression of political will), and music (its role in education and propaganda). The author focuses on the consistency and efficiency of these elements in the keeping of an official value system.

Another article, with a somewhat mysterious title, referring to the Biblical parable by S. Rebenich (*Alter Wein in neuen Schläuchen?* pp. 111–132), discusses the history of classical scholarships in Germany during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. A.D. The image of Sparta in publications from this period is analysed against the background of political and ideological changes, especially in the time of National Socialism. The presentation of the evolution (or lack of it) in the views on Sparta held by the same scholars before and after the Second World War (especially the famous historian H. Berve) is particularly interesting.

F.-G. Herrmann (*Hat Kritias nach Spartas Pfeife getanzt*, pp. 133–156) deals with the problem of the attitude towards Sparta of Critias, famous philosopher and Athenian oligarchic politic, leading member of the so-called Thirty Tyrants. The author tries to determine whether Critias can be considered a philolacon, who tried to copy Spartan solutions on Attic soil. He concludes that Critias, despite his Laconian fascination, did not attempt to make Athens into simply a copy of Sparta; rather, he wanted to reconstruct Athens in the spirit of a mythical aristocratic past, one that he perceived as similar to the Lacedaemonian present.

H. Roche (*'Spartanische Pädagogik deutscher Art': The Influence of Sparta on the Royal Prussian Cadet-Schools (1818–1920)*, pp. 157–180) deals with the presence of Spartan ideals in the Prussian system of cadet education (that is, of course, secondary schools dedicated to preparing the future officer corps). The author demonstrates how the myth about Spartan upbringing shaped both the official training programme and the attitudes of pupils (who freely undertook different challenges involving enduring pain, labour, and inconveniences).

T. Blank's article (*Archidamos Rhetor: Spartas Bruch mit der Tradition in Isokrates' Archidamos* (pp. 181–206) refers to the history of Athens in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. The main object of the research is the speech by Archidamus and her place in Isocrates' corpus. The author compares the hero, stylised on the person of Archidamus III, son of Agesilaus II, with those ascribed by Thucydides to Archidamus II. He underlines a break in the speech with the Spartan tradition of cautious policy, concentrated on maintaining

dominance over Peloponnesus. Archidamus of Isocrates advocates for active, warlike external policy in the whole Greek world. Moreover, the style of his language (the speech is allegedly taking place before a Spartan audience) is rather similar to Athenian demagogues of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. In such a situation, Blank views the whole meaning of the speech as being quite ironic.

N. Buidghagen (*'Ceux dont j'ai appris le nom': Hérodote et les Thermopyles*, pp. 207–220) analyses Herodotus' narrative regarding the battle of Thermopylae in 480. Her results lead her to the conclusion that the famous tradition of Spartan courage and uncompromising attitude, "return with your shield or on it" according to the rule "victory or death", was established only after this battle.

P. Davies's article (*The Cinadon Conspiracy as Literary Narrative and Historical Source*, pp. 221–244) examines the story of the Cinadon Conspiracy, and the author is particularly interested in the literary aspects of Xenophon's narration of these events. The problem of the situation of lower social strata (helots and *perioikoi*) is also analysed, and the author underlines a certain inconsistency in Xenophon's texts that allows us to suppose that the position of the dependent population in Sparta was not as bad as standard reading of his work might suggest.

D. Rhode (*Weder haben wir in der gemeinsamen Kasse Geld, noch zahlen wir mit Leichtigkeit aus unseren eigenen Mitteln – Die öffentlichen Finanzen Spartas in klassischer Zeit*, pp. 245–270) deals with the problem of Sparta's finances in classical times, especially in the context of maintaining the fleet. The author recognises the Peloponnesian War as a catalyst of important changes in their functioning, and the examining of the finances in the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century in her opinion refers to much earlier times. She therefore sees a number of parallels between the development of Lacedaemonian and Athenian treasuries that are helpful in reconstruction of the Spartan financial system. This is very important because we have only scant resources in the case of Sparta (such as the inscription IG V.1.1 – a singular list of incomes into the military budget). The author also emphasises the role of *perioikoi* in the Lacedaemonian economic system.

The author of the last article (V. Pothou, *Sparta, Qumran und Alexandria: so nah, so fern*, pp. 271–296) is interested in the problem of Spartan references in the tradition of certain Jewish groups: the Essenians and the Therapeuts. Their lifestyle is compared by some sources, especially Josephus Flavius and Philo of Alexandria, to that of a Lacedaemonian. She analyses the similarities mentioned by these ancient authors (like attitude to death, private property, common dining, suspicion toward aliens etc.) and compares them with our knowledge about the Spartans. This results in the observation that, despite noted parallels, there are also distinct differences. Pothou shows that indirect Lacedaemonian influences were possible, but Jewish references to Sparta were often instrumental in character.

The scope of topics discussed in the book is very wide and a little proverbial: *cicerum caule*, although it remains consistent with the main idea expressed. The overall goal of the publication is to show the reception of Sparta during practically all historical periods from antiquity to modern times, but with an uneven distribution of accents. It would be hard to expect all aspects of such a broad problem to be discussed fully in one book. The interest of the authors is mainly concentrated on the functioning of Lacedaemonian *polis*, and one might address some criticism toward the composition of the material,

which appears to be a little chaotic, forcing the reader into reading texts scattered between different times and issues and not necessarily connected with each other. It would probably have been a better solution to group the articles in chronological order.

The texts partly concern problems that have previously been discussed at length (like Sphodrias' raid) and also bring quite fresh, if not completely new issues (like the Prusian cadets). The substantive quality of the book as a whole is quite high but, of course, certain opinions may, or even must, cause some objections. In the case of the first article, the author seems to be somewhat uncritical towards the source tradition about Spartan upbringing. In this context, he uses the term *agoge* (pp. 25, 29) several times, though this appears only in much later sources. There is no reference to N. Kennel's thesis, which convincingly shows that we are dealing mostly with an image of Spartan education which was developed in the Hellenistic and Roman era.<sup>1</sup> Also, the second text reveals some shortfalls in the literature used; it is focused on analysis of the Battle of Mantinea and previous military campaigns, but has no reference to W. Woodhouse's book, which, though old, remains an important study of the topic.<sup>2</sup> In the text recounting Sphodrias' raid, there was acceptance of the theory about defensive Athenian policy before this incident; however, this is a rather large simplification, bearing in mind the fact that there are arguments suggesting quite the opposite view.<sup>3</sup> The author refers to the problem of the Thebans' alleged bribing of Sphodrias, but he does not mention Plutarch's testimony, which shows the whole situation as a Boeotian intrigue (Plut., *Pel.* 14. 1). Certain doubt may also be raised by the title, which refers to the Sphodrias episode (and not the sources describing it) as evidence for Spartan social history. In the text about the Cinadon Conspiracy, Jason of Pherae is called a tyrant of Pherae, although no source actually uses this term towards him.<sup>4</sup>

All critical remarks expressed above do not diminish the positive evaluation of the book as a whole, which certainly deserves recommendation for researchers of Spartan history. The enquiry on Sparta has been around for two hundred years, yet it is still possible to find new problems, or to interpret old ones in a new light. This is due to perception – successive generations are able to interpret Sparta and all classical antiquity in their own, original way. Human nature, as Thucydides remarked (I.22.4), appears to be unchangeable, and it is perhaps for this reason that, despite the passage of time, Sparta continues to fascinate.

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<sup>1</sup> N.M. Kennel, *The Gymnasium of Virtue: Education and Culture in Ancient Sparta*, Chapel Hill 1995.

<sup>2</sup> W. Woodhouse, *The King Agis of Sparta and his Campaign in Arkadia in 418 B.C.*, Oxford 1933.

<sup>3</sup> See: G.L. Cawkwell, *The Foundation of the Second Athenian Confederacy*, *CQ* 67 (1973); R. Kallet-Marx, *Athens, Thebes, and the Foundation of the Second Athenian League*, *Classical Antiquity* 4 (1985); M. Munn, *The Defence of Attica: The Dema Wall and the Boiotian War of 378-375 BC*, Berkeley 1993; Parker, *Sphodrias' Raid and the Liberation of Thebes: A Study of Ephorus and Xenophon*, *Hermes* 135 (2007).

<sup>4</sup> See S. Sprawski, *Were Lycophron and Jason Tyrants of Pherae? Xenophon on History of Thessaly*, *Proceedings of the international conference 'Xenophon and his world'*, Liverpool 7–10 July 1999, Stuttgart 2004, 437–452.