

REVIEWS

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Luther, Andreas; Meier, Mischa; Thommen, Lukas (eds.) (2006) *Das Frühe Sparta*. Stuttgart: Steiner. 224 p. ISBN-10 3-515-08635-8, ISBN-13 978-3-515-08635-6.

Anybody writing on Early Sparta, defined in this volume as the period in the Spartan history from the Dark Age to the end of the Archaic era, must inevitably find some answer to the questions of the course and the date of the formation of Spartan social and political order. Resolving this crucial question is almost synonymous to understanding Spartan social development, and it seems scarcely possible to consider any point in the Spartan early history without assuming or suggesting an answer to it. The ancients indeed ascribed the foundation of Spartan order to the famous lawgiver Lykourgos and were unanimous in dating his legislation to a very early period, certainly before the conquest of Messenia in what we call the late 8th to late 7th century. The moderns, generally not believing either the reality of Lykourgos or the historicity of Spartan legislation as a single act, must find their own solutions, building on extremely tenuous evidence. The bulk of the tradition on early Sparta, as known from much later sources, is usually regarded as untrustworthy, which means that the scholars are left basically with only the Archaic poetry, the archaeological data, the evidence for the Classical, Hellenistic and Roman Sparta, and the ability to deduce from comparison with what is known or assumed about the general developments in Archaic Greece. Since this evidence is not likely to give definite solutions, the opinions of the moderns inevitably diverge. This is true also of the well-known, mostly German-speaking scholars contributing to this volume. All of them have indeed already left their trace in the study of Spartan history.¹

The importance of the question of dating the emergence of Spartan social and political order in the scholarly discussion is well pointed out by Lukas Thommen in his short introduction to this volume (*Einleitung: Überlegungen zum frühen Sparta*), where he gives a concise overview of the most important writings on the Early Sparta. He also lists the proposed solutions for the dating that range from the 8th to the 5th century B.C., the latter put forward in the recent years, not least by Thommen himself.

¹ Here is a selection of their writings on Sparta (given in the order of the authors' contributions in this volume): **Thommen, L.**, *Lakedaimonion politeia. Die Entstehung der spartanischen Verfassung* (*Historia Einzelschriften* 103), Stuttgart 1996; **idem**, *Sparta. Verfassungs- und Sozialgeschichte einer griechischen Polis*, Stuttgart/Weimar 2003; **Welwei, K. W.**, *Sparta. Aufstieg und Niederlage einer Antiken Grossmacht*, Stuttgart 2004; **Dreher, M.**, *Athen und Sparta*, München 2001; **Maffi, A.**, "Studi recenti sulla Grande Rhetra," *Dike* 5, 2002, 195–236; **Luther, A.**, *Könige und Ephoren. Untersuchungen zur spartanischen Verfassungsgeschichte*, Frankfurt a.M. 2004; **Meier, M.**, *Aristokraten und Damoden. Untersuchungen zur inneren Entwicklung Spartas in 7. Jahrhundert v. Chr. und zur politischen Funktion der Dichtung des Tyrtaios*, Stuttgart 1998; **Schmitz, W.**, "Die Geschorene Braut. Kommunitäre Lebensformen in Sparta," *Historische Zeitschrift* 274, 2002, 561–602; **Van Wees, H.**, "Tyrtaeus' Eunomia: nothing to do with the Great Rhetra," in: Hodkinson, S. / Powell, A. (Eds.), *Sparta. New Perspectives*, London 1999, 1–41; **Baltrusch, E.**, "Mythos oder Wirklichkeit? Die Helotengefahr und der Peloponnesische Bund," *Historische Zeitschrift* 272, 2001, 1–24; **idem**, *Sparta. Geschichte, Gesellschaft, Kultur*, München 2003; **Rebenich, S.**, "From Thermopylae to Stalingrad. The Myth of Leonidas in German Historiography," in: Powell, A. / Hodkinson, S. (Eds.), *Sparta. Beyond the mirage*, Swansea/London 2002, 323–349.

Thommen thereafter inaugurates the discussion of particular topics by considering the evidence for the territorial scope of the Archaic Spartan state (*Das Territorium des frühen Sparta in Mythos, Epos und Forschung*). He takes into account the vision of the Spartan conquests in Laconia and Messenia given by the later authors, especially the perieget Pausanias, but gives more space to the information that could be extracted from the myth, Spartan mythological genealogy and the heroic epic. Following the influential opinions of Friedrich Prinze and Claude Calame,² Thommen dates the emergence of the tradition about the Dorian migration to the late 7th century, rejecting it thus as a reliable evidence for reconstructing Spartan earlier history, and views the development of the mythic and heroic genealogy, which supposedly took shape by the end of the Archaic era, as an ideological tool by which the Spartans integrated their past into a pan-Hellenic context and justified their dominant position of their present time by forging connections with the heroic legend. Perhaps the greatest weight is placed by Thommen on the evidence of the Homeric epics, particularly the Catalogue of Ships and the seven cities promised by Agamemnon to Achilles for reconciliation (*Il.* 9.150–153). Thommen takes this as a faithful description of the 8th century circumstances, glossing over the controversial problems of the dating and the interpretation of the evidence of the poems in general and the Catalogue in particular (the other writers in this volume follow the same assumption), seeing here a contemporary testimony for the Spartans' claim for territories in Messenia in the 8th century. Somewhat surprisingly, he leaves almost out of attention the well-known verses of Tyrtaios about the Messenian wars. He concludes by stating that the later accounts basically only embellish the evidence of the epics, which allows the description of Spartan expansion in Peloponnese and state formation in Laconia in only very general lines.

In the following chapter (*Überlegungen zur frühen Helotie in Lakonien*) Karl-Wilhelm Welwei defends the traditional concept (both ancient and modern) of the emergence of the Laconian helotry in result of the conquest of the district by the Spartans, arguing against the recent proposals of Nino Luraghi and Nikos Birgalias to view the helots in Laconia partly as the impoverished Spartans comparable to the Athenian dependants before Solon, and partly as chattel slaves settled by their masters on the south Laconian soil for toiling it.³ Welwei dismisses the adequacy of comparison to the Athenian *hektemoroi*, pointing out that the latter were, differently from the Laconian helots, members of the political community. He assumes the evidence of Homeric epics as a guide for the social relations of early Sparta and suggests that stimulus for the conquest of the sparsely populated southern Laconia was given by the need for providing the (Homeric) elite warriors with land parcels. He also points out that Tyrtaios' verses (*fr.* 5 Gentili/Prato) reveal a clear idea of the relations between masters and serfs, which is likely to have been derived from the private dependencies already built up in

² Prinze, F., *Gründungsmüthen und Sagenchronologie* (Zetemata 72), München 1979; Calame, C., "Spartan genealogies: The mythological representation of a spatial organisation," in: Bremmer, J. (Ed.), *Interpretations of Greek Mythology*, London/Sidney 1987, 153–186.

³ Luraghi, N., "Helotic slavery reconsidered," in: Powell, A. / Hodkinson, S. (Eds.), *Sparta. Beyond the mirage*, Swansea/London 2002, 227–248; *idem*, "The imaginary conquest of the helots," in: Luraghi, N. / Alcock, S. E. (Eds.), *Helots and their masters in Laconia and Messenia: histories, ideologies, structures*, Cambridge (Mass.)/London 2003, 109–141; Birgalias, N., "Helotage and Spartan social organization," in: Powell, A. / Hodkinson, S. (Eds.), *Sparta. Beyond the mirage*, Swansea/London 2002, 249–266.

Laconia. The helot status, based on the conquest, was consequently already well established in Laconia by the time of Tyrtaios in the late 7th century when the Messenians were subjected as helots by a common effort of the Spartans in the course of the second Messenian war.

Martin Dreher (*Die Primitivität der frühen Spartanischen Verfassung*) states as his purpose emphasising the traditional nature of the Spartan political institutions, the formation of which he dates to the period from 750 to 650 B.C. He discusses in length Tyrtaios' *Eunomia* and the text of the Great Rhetra, viewing them as reflections of the same oracle. Dreher's main thesis is that line 9 of *Eunomia* (*demou de plethei niken kai kartos hepesthai*) and Rhetra's last clause (*gamodangorianemen kai kratos*) render the same message, which is not the statement of the powers of the popular assembly, as often (in the case of the Rhetra almost invariably) thought, but a pronouncement of the might of the community as a whole, which will be achieved in the case of ordering the community in the way prescribed in the preceding parts of Rhetra and *Eunomia*. Dreher views the Rhetra in the light of the evidence of the Homeric epics and interprets it as a 'manifest of state formation' (*Staatsgründungsmanifest*) which confirmed the aristocratic order functioning approximately as depicted by Homer. Rhetra is for Dreher an enactment of *gerousia*, which was definitely not intending to establish the popular assembly's right of making political decisions, something considered by Dreher as inconceivable in a 'Homeric' society, but prescribed the main political institutions of the community and established the number of *gerontes*, but left the exact duties of the governmental bodies unspecified, thus presumably preserving the accepted practices, and therefore left the state functioning in a traditionally 'Homeric' way. The so-called rider of the Rhetra, which allowed the elders to dismiss the assembly, is viewed as a complementary safeguard of the aristocratic system: it was formulated against people's turbulent acclamations, such as depicted in the Iliad's Thersites-episode.

The contribution of Alberto Maffi (*Recht und Rechtsprechung in Sparta*) examines the sparse evidence for litigation in the Classical Sparta, assuming that this did not undergo essential changes during this period, and asks how the Spartan institutions could function without the written law. Basing on Aristotle *Pol.* 1275b9ff he states that different cases in Sparta were judged by different officials, and argues that Spartan judges had, differently from what was normal in Athens, the right and duty to act also as prosecutors. Comparing the evidence of Platon's *Nomoi* 855 and the Vatican palimpsest (Vat. Gr. 2306) containing a somewhat cryptic comment on a court case concerning Spartan Pausanias, Maffi suggests that in the Spartan courts the process of examination/interrogation (*anakrasis*) was conducted by the judges as a part of the main trial and did not constitute a separate preliminary procedural stage as was the case in Athens. In Sparta the judges had, consequently, more initiative and rights than in Athens. Maffi also discusses the evidence of Spartan trials involving the citizens of other states and finds here, particularly in the judgement of the Plataians after the surrender of their city during the Peloponnesian war described by Thucydides (3.52), the confirmation for the importance of *anakrasis* and the active role of judges in the Spartan courts.

In the next chapter (*Der Name der Volksversammlung in Sparta*), Andreas Luther questions the opinion according to which the Spartan assemblies were officially known as *apellai* – a word denoting above all the festivities in honour of Apollon. Against this widely held assumption,

based above all on the term *apellazein* used for marking the periodical gatherings of the people in the Great Rhetra, Luther lists all the relevant evidence, making clear that the sources of the Classical period, especially Thucydides and Xenophon, mostly called Spartan assembly *ekklesia* (or labelled the holding of assemblies *ekklesiazein*). He concludes that *ekklesia* must have been the official term for the assemblies in Sparta. This conclusion has, for Luther, important implications for the interpretation of the Great Rhetra. He views its prescription *horas ex horas appellazein* (from time to time to hold *appellai*) as indicative for the yearly, not monthly, occurrence of *apellai*, as was natural for a religious festival. Following Hesychios' statement about *apellai* as *archairesiai* (the occasions for electing the magistrates), Luther suggests that what the Rhetra really prescribed when stating, in a political context, the regularity of *apellai*, was the annual election of the ephors by the people taking part in the gatherings during these festivities. This is an undoubtedly original reading of the evidence, which, if accepted, will confirm that ephorate was an original part of the 'Lukourgan' *kosmos*, not a later addition as suggested by the dominant tradition. The thesis is also well in line with Luther's scepticism about the traditional view of Rhetra's establishment, expressed in his *Königen und Ephoren*. In this light Luther's silent rejection of the evidence of Aristotle's commentary on Rhetra evokes no surprise.

Winfried Schmitz (*Die Macht über die Sprache. Kommunikation, Politik und die soziale Ordnung in Sparta*) starts with the recognition that the forms of communication in a society are likely to be informative about the social order, and states as his purpose to explore the way the characteristically short-cut 'Laconic speech' can inform us about the Spartan state and society. He connects the Spartans' well-known preference for brevity of discourse and distaste for long speeches and open discussion with the emphasis the Spartans laid on the obedience and discipline, as well as with the state control of the citizens' education and way of life, and considered all this as resulting from the radical reorganisation of society after the conquest of Messenia in the 7th century. For resolving the question of the reliability of our often late sources, including Plutarch's collection of sayings (*apophthegmata*) which provide the best evidence for the 'Laconian' brevity, Schmitz turns to the data of Herodotos and Thucydides. He demonstrates that for these writers the 'Laconian' characteristics of the Spartans were well known, and must have been therefore familiar for the Greeks in the 5th century. The Spartan brevity was therefore, according to Schmitz, a historical reality from early on, not only a part of the later 'Myth of Sparta.' Schmitz considers this evidence of Herodotos and Thucydides as a demonstration of the fact that by the 5th century the radical reorganisation of Spartan society was already complete.

The question of when did the Spartan social order arise, touched already in the previous contributions, finds the most direct treatment in the chapter by Mischa Meier (*Wann entstand das Homoioides-Ideal in Sparta?*). Meier contests Lukas Thommen's opinion that the ideal of the equality of the Spartans was developed in the 5th century in response to the integration of the Laconian perioics into the Spartan army, which had made necessary to distinguish the Spartans as a group of *homoioi* (equals/similar) from the rest of the Lacedaimonians as not equals to them.⁴ Meier argues that the assumption of the Spartans as *homoioi* is implicit

⁴ Thommen, *Lakedaimonion politeia* (see n. 1), 135–137.

already in some passages of Herodotos, and follows Stephan Link in pointing out that the term *homoioi*, emphasising equality, is not likely to have been conceived for distinguishing the ruling group from the perioics as outsiders.⁵ Nor was the term used for stating a social or an economic equality. Instead, it emphasised the equality in military bravery, which is well in line with Tyrtaios' call for everybody's excellence in the common fighting for homeland. It is therefore likely, according to Meier, that the decisive impact for the formation of the *homoios*-ideal was given by the second Messenian war: the reduction of the Messenians into the status of helots created a danger which demanded the mobilisation of all physical, material and ideological resources for the control of Messenia and led to the reorganisation of Sparta into a community of militarily equal leisure-class warriors.

Hans van Wees (*The Oath of the Sworn Bands. The Acharnae Stela, the Oath of Plataea and Archaic Spartan Warfare*) discusses the so-called Oath of Plataia, as presented on the 4th-century Attic inscription from Acharnae, and its implications for reconstructing the early 5th-century Spartan military organisation. Van Wees considers the inscription's mentioning of *taxiarchoi* and *enomotarchoi*, its emphasise on freedom, and the pledge to bury the fallen on the spot as particularly Spartan features, which allow us to regard the lines 23–31 as representing an old Spartan oath imposed by the Spartans to their allies as a part of the common oath at the time of the Persian invasion (the pledge to follow the *hegemones* – i.e. the Spartans – and to obey the *strategoi* in lines 27–29 are interpreted as added to the original Spartan oath specifically for the allies). Thus, according to Van Wees the Acharnai-inscription records the very oath sworn by the allied Greek forces, either in 480/1 when the alliance was formed, or in 479 immediately before the battle of Plataia. Van Wees makes a clear distinction between the authentic text of this oath transmitted by the inscription, and the secondary Athenian propagandistic elaboration adding the pledge not to rebuild the sanctuaries burnt or demolished by the barbarians, given in some literary sources (Lykurgos and Diodoros) and rightly dismissed as a forgery by Theopompos. This conclusion allows Van Wees to use the lines 23–31 of the inscription as an authentic source for the early Spartan warfare: they show that the Spartan army of the Persian wars had only two level of units, the sworn band (*enomotia*) and the larger unit commanded by the taxiarch, which implies a change of the military organisation after the Persian wars, when the so-called 'fiftieth' (*pentekontys*) was inserted. It also testifies about the formal equality in the life-style of the Spartans, insofar as burial of fallen on the battlefield ensured equal glory in death. It also shows that at this time the fighting to the death was a sworn commitment of the Spartans, differently from what appeared in Tyrtaios who recommended it simply as better than a shameful life. In a comparatively extensive appendix Van Wees explains the 'Pitanate lochos' in Herodotos (9.3.2) as a too straightforward understanding of the metaphoric use of 'Pitana' to mean 'Sparta' or even 'Greece,' and proposes an explanation for the names of the five Spartan *lochoi* given in Schol. Aristoph. *Lys.* 453.

The paper by Ernst Baltrusch (*Polis und Gastfreundschaft: die Grundlagen der spartanischen Aussenpolitik*) explores the development of the Spartan foreign policy in the light of Gabriel

⁵ Link, S., *Das frühe Sparta, Untersuchungen zur spartanischen Staatsbildung im 7. und 6. Jahrhundert v. Chr.*, St. Katherinen 2000, 113.

Herman's concept of city framework superimposing itself on pre-existing network of ties of guest-friendship in the Greek *poleis*. Baltrusch accepts Andreas Luther's position that the formation of the Spartan inner order was completed by ca 550, and observes a corresponding change towards 'isolationism' in the external affairs. This new policy of refusal to intervene outside Europe (for example, to support the Ionian revolt), complemented by a strict observation of Spartan interests in the Peloponnese and its outskirts (intervention in Athens and Aigina), was, according to Baltrusch, brought about by King Kleomenes (Baltrusch speaks of 'Kleomenes-doctrine') in the turn of the 6th and 5th centuries. At the same time the Spartans assumed the policy of *xenelasia* (keeping foreigners out), and submitted the old ties of guest-friendship to a strict state control by appointing themselves their *proxenoi* in the other *poleis*, differently of the common Greek practice according to which the *proxenoi* were named by the *polis* of their residence. This doctrine of isolationism, which asserted itself despite internal discussion and opposition (exemplified by the deviant actions of Dorieus, Demaratos and Pausanias), was, according to Baltrusch, followed almost throughout the whole of the 5th century and abandoned only under the pressure of the Peloponnesian war.

The last chapter by Stefan Berenich (*Leonidas und die Thermopylen. Zum Sparta-Bild in der deutschen Altertumswissenschaft*) takes the Thermopylan heroism of Leonidas and his 300 Spartiates as a paradigmatic case for following the changes in the vision of Sparta in the German history-writing from 18th to 20th century. Berenich focuses especially on the idealisation of the Spartan common education, birth-selection, self-restriction in behalf of the state, military spirit, heroism, etc. as a paradigm for the totalitarianism and militarism of the Nazi state, discussing in some length Helmut Berve's part in this process. At the same time, he points out that this idealised vision of Sparta was by no means the creation of the 1930es, but composed as a complex amalgam of the ideas and ideologies which were shared by many, if not most, of the prominent German intellectuals and historians of two previous centuries.

Thus, the contributions in this book cover a wide range of subjects, including its external and internal affairs, its society and customs, politics, law and military organisation, ending up with Sparta's impact for the modern ideology. However, the editors have not stated the aim of exhaustiveness, and a comprehensive view of the early Sparta is indeed not expected from a volume by the writers who have predictably different opinions about some crucial questions of the Spartan history. Nor is explicit criticism of each other's views avoided (note Dreher's comments on Luther's views, p. 45; Meier's argument against Thommen). There are obvious gaps: nothing about Spartan archaeology or choral poetry, which is somewhat regrettable given that these are, besides Tyrtaios and the Rhetra, the only contemporary sources for the Archaic Sparta. Maffi's contribution, on the other hand, has apparently little to do with the 'Early Sparta' if this term is understood as indicating the period before the Persian wars (the reason of Maffi's focusing in the Classical period is obvious: we have no evidence about the Spartan court practice before this time). But all this is not to be considered as serious shortcoming. The papers make valuable contribution to many points of ongoing discussion, either restating the traditional positions or offering fresh solutions for old problems, which makes the book a useful reading for both the specialists and the students (presumably above all on the postgraduate level).

However, through different ways the writers in this volume tend to come to the conclusion that the essential characteristics of the Spartan order must have been well established by the time of the Persian invasion at the latest. Thommen traces Spartan pretensions for Messenia in Homer, and dates the formation of the 'national' mythology to the 6th century, Welwei points out the importance of the Messenian conquest for the emergence of Spartan communal ethos, Dreher assumes the dating of the formation of Spartan political institutions to the period from 750 to 650 BC, Schmitz connects the formation of the social order leading to the development of the 'Laconic' brevity in the Spartans' speech with the 7th century conquest of Messenia, Meier views the same event as the reason of the emergence of the Spartans concern for their military equality, Van Wees finds traces of characteristically 'Spartan' military ethos in the oath dating from the time of the Persian wars, and Baltrusch observes a change in the Spartan foreign policy during the late 6th and early 5th century, connected to the formation of the internal order. Consequently, the volume as a whole suggests that it was the Archaic, not Classical, era that was crucial for the formation of the 'Lykourgan Sparta', and thus turns out as a statement against the recent 5th century dating of the formation of the 'Lykourgan' order. Three of the contributors (Welwei, Schmitz and Meier) explicitly point out the importance of the definite subjugation of Messenia in the 7th century as the decisive moment in the Spartan history, what would place the subsequent formation of what may be called Lykourgan Sparta into the 6th century. All this converges to a great extent with the opinions which have been widely accepted during the recent decades.⁶ Thus, despite Luther's novel interpretation of the significance of Great Rhetra, the volume confirms, reasonably I think, what has become a rather traditional reading of the history of Archaic Sparta.

⁶ Compare, for example, with **Cartledge, P.**, *Sparta and Laconia. A regional history 1300–362 BC*, London/Boston/Henley 1979, Chapter 9, 131–159.