

BOOK REVIEW

Myth, Text, and History at Sparta. Edited by THOMAS FIGUEIRA. Gorgias Studies in Classical and Late Antiquity 18. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2016. Pp. 342. Hardback, \$95.00. ISBN 978-1-4632-0595-9.

This book originated, as the detailed introduction outlines, within the graduate program in Classics at Rutgers University. The editor, Figueira, contributes a chapter and the book's introduction, and two graduate students, Aaron J. Beck-Schachter and Aaron Hershkowitz, provide the other two chapters. If there is one theme uniting the three main contributions, it is *Quellenforschung*, the exhaustive and meticulous tracking down and analysis of the sources for stories about Sparta, and Sparta's stories about itself. Though the volume, with three very lengthy chapters only loosely related to each other, is rather unusual, it serves as an exceptional example of faculty and graduate students working together as scholars – something of which this scholar and former graduate student would like to see more. The book also offers many insights into Sparta's fraught sources and will be a useful resource for specialists.

In "Politeia and Lakōnika in Spartan Historiography," Figueira aims to penetrate the "Spartan Mirage," or, rather, to clarify what kind of mirage it really was. By carefully parsing various Late Classical and Hellenistic sources on Sparta, including Stoic writers and the Laconians Sosibius and Aristokrates, and situating their work in particular contexts, Figueira addresses the standard line that Hellenistic distortions are responsible for the image of Sparta we are given in later sources such as Plutarch. Figueira concludes that "the Spartan mirage was a true mirage, not a fantasy conceived out of thin air, but a manifestation of distant and distorted realities whose perception was conditioned and enhanced by auto-suggestion" (98). Hellenistic sources were based far more on earlier historiographical traditions than most scholars recognize, and seemingly idiosyncratic foci can be explained by reference to the contexts in which later sources were working. For example, the Spartan efforts to revitalize their ancient traditions during the period of Roman domination, as reflected in sources like Aristokrates, does not indicate that accounts of, say, the *agōgē* from this period are mere inven-

tion. This chapter will be essential reading for anyone interested in the sources on Spartan government and traditions.

In “The Lysandreia,” Beck-Schachter argues that the Lysandreia, the festival at Samos that replaced the Heraia in order to honor Lysander after the Peloponnesian War, was far more than “simple megalomania or pure power politics” (106), as most scholars have assumed. Instead, this festival tapped into long-standing Spartan traditions of their two kings as Heraklid *arkhēgetai*, or founders, a tradition that was by the 5th century challenged and weakened by the focus on Lykurgan *eunomia*. Lysander aimed not only at becoming a king, but also at strengthening the place of the kingship itself. The Samian Heraia provided a potential avenue for achieving both goals, especially since part of the myth involved an autochthonous goddess marrying a mortal, thus making him autochthonous himself and a divine/king figure worthy of the status of founder. To get to this point, Beck-Schachter first surveys the traditions and sources concerning Spartan kingship, the return of the Heraklids and related festivals such as the Karneia, which stood in sharp contrast to the Samian Heraia. Of necessity, since no source says that Lysander used the Heraia in such a deliberate way, Beck-Schachter’s reconstruction is highly speculative even if plausible. In any case, this chapter is a good resource for Spartan traditions concerning the kingship.

Hershkowitz, in “Getting Carried Away With Theseus,” posits a specific historical context for the relatively little-known myth of Theseus’ abduction of Helen, namely the conflicts between Sparta and Athens in the late 6th century BCE, particularly the invasions of Cleomenes. In order to show that a late 5th-century context – the generally accepted scholarly view – is less appropriate for this myth, Hershkowitz disputes the arguments of Jacoby and others concerning Hellanicus’ version of the myth and Plutarch’s use of Hellanicus as a source. Hershkowitz also outlines the many variations of the myth and why they are important for reconstructing its use in particular contexts. Finally, he provides a rather imaginative reconstruction of how Cleomenes could have used a version of the myth, particularly one in which the Dioscuri attacked Athens to right the wrong of Helen’s abduction, to rally support for his own invasion of Attica. While this reviewer might not be fully convinced of Hershkowitz’s hypothesis, I did come away with a deeper knowledge of a neglected yet fascinating myth, and was led to ponder anew the way myth can shape and be shaped by historical events.

Scholars will find this book easy to use. Each chapter is preceded by a helpful abstract, and the two longer chapters (those by Figueira and Hershkowitz) are supplemented by tables and appendices gathering references to and selections

from obscure sources that are otherwise difficult to find or even unknown to students of Sparta. In addition to a general index, there is also an index locorum.

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