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Sarah B. Pomeroy. *Spartan Women.* Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. xvii + 198 pp. $24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-19-513067-6; $72.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-513066-9.

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Spartan Women in the Spotlight

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Sparta has been the subject of a number of books published in the second half of the twentieth century, including K. T. Chrimes's *Ancient Sparta* (1949) and Paul Cartledge's *Sparta and Lakonia: A Regional History, 1300-362 B.C.* (1979), a second edition of which has recently appeared (2002). Generally, books and articles about Sparta and Spartans have tended to concentrate on the history of the city-state, its rivalry with Athens, its unique constitution, and the military organization of Spartan society. Such is certainly true of Cartledge's newest book, *The Spartans: The World of the Warrior-Heroes of Ancient Greece, from Utopia to Crisis and Collapse* (2003).

Pomeroy herself has been in the vanguard of scholars who have reoriented the focus of Spartan studies away from the masculine-dominated world of war and government to the private lives of individual Spartans, and especially of Spartan women. Indeed, her landmark *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (1975), which included significant and detailed information on Spartan women as well as women from other parts of Greece, has generated a long bibliography of books and articles on topics like the wealth of Spartan women, their education, marriages, and role in politics. As Pomeroy notes at the beginning of her preface, however, *Spartan Women* is the "first full-length historical study of Spartan women to be published." For this reason alone, the book promises to become an influential text for ancient historians, especially those interested in women's studies.

Pomeroy follows the lives of Spartan women, in individual chapters, from their childhood and education (chapter 1), to marriage (chapter 2), and roles as mothers (chapter 3). She also examines the lives of elite women (chapter 4) and women of the lower classes (chapter 5). In chapter 6 she deals with the role of Spartan women in religious matters. While the general organization is topical, discussions within individual chapters tend to be chronological, as Pomeroy traces the changes in the lives of Spartan women through the traditional timeline of Greek history from the Archaic period (c.750-490), through the Classical (490-323) and Hellenistic periods (323-30), and into the Roman period (30 B.C.E.-395 C.E.).

This study will, unfortunately, be more accessible to ancient historians than to the general reader because Pomeroy assumes some familiarity with Spartan history and with general features of Spartan society. Yet, in some ways, Spartan material needs to be examined in its own context, for which even the traditional timeline of Greek history noted above is less meaningful than the following five major events in Spartan history: the Second Messenian War (c.735-c.715) resulted in Sparta's conquest of its neighbor Messenia, the subjugation of its inhabitants as helots, and the establishment of the Lycurgan constitution and the communal, militaristic society for which Sparta is best known. The battle of Leuctra (371 B.C.E.) marked the first major military defeat of Sparta and gave the Messenian helots their freedom. The reign of the Spartan king Agis IV (c. 244–241) witnessed an attempt to revitalize the old Spartan way of life, but led to a period of political upheaval and eventual conquest by the Romans in 195. A final period of revival took place in Roman Sparta during the second century C.E. History of the ancient city ends with its capture by the Goths in 395.

Pomeroy herself acknowledges the difficulties of following a purely chronological approach to her subject. The Spartans themselves tended to practice revisionist history. References to the revival of the Lycurgan constitution in the third century B.C.E. and the second century C.E., for example, may not accurately describe the original constitution but rather its later reinterpretations. For these reasonS, Pomeroy's history of Spartan women can be considered chronological in only the broadest sense of that term.

The topical organization of this book is useful for

those interested in tracing the evolution of various aspects of the lives of Spartan women. It is less helpful to the reader eager to place women into the more familiar history of Sparta. A timeline of important Spartan women and significant events in the history of Spartan women, for example, can only by culled from this book by collating information from individual chapters. This reader, at least, would have liked an additional chapter offering such a coherent historical overview.

The closest Pomeroy comes in this book to such a coherent overview, but without an historical context, is in her conclusion, "Gender and Ethnicity," where she summarizes the preceding chapters and draws some conclusions about Spartan women, in terms of their differences from other Greek women and their contributions to the Spartan way of life. Here Pomeroy shows how the image of Helen of Sparta as a beautiful, wealthy, man-dominating woman served as a norm and model for historical Spartan women but not for women in other parts of Greece. Unlike Athenian women who lived in seclusion, Spartan women lived very public lives, trained openly and with men, and were known for their beauty. Spartan women were definitely better fed and educated than women in other parts of Greece. For much of Sparta's history women controlled much of the city's wealth. They also seem to have maintained a remarkable control over their own fertility compared to other Greek women. In particular, Pomeroy emphasizes the active role that Spartan women played in all aspects of Spartan life, especially in choosing their sexual partners, rearing their children, influencing their adult sons, and, above all, maintaining the norms on which Spartan life was based (in such tales as the Spartan mother telling her son to come home "with his shield or on it").

A particularly valuable part of Pomeroy's book is the appendix on "Sources for the History of Spartan Women," which offers a comprehensive survey and evaluation of all the evidence on this topic, both literary and material. Pomeroy begins with two cautions about the literary evidence. First of all, the few extant ancient written sources on Spartan women tend to be influenced by foreign, especially Athenian, stereotypes of Sparta. Indeed, much of the literary evidence about Sparta comes from non-Spartans like Euripides, Plato, Xenophon, and Plutarch. While some of these authors reveal great admiration for the Spartan way of life, they remain, nevertheless, outsiders. Pomeroy's second caution is that the female voice in these sources is only indirectly heard in literature produced by males. Pomeroy suggests that the Spartan woman can perhaps be heard in the voices of the girls speaking in the poetry of Alcman, in epigrams about women like the one celebrating the chariot victories of Cynisca, and in Plutarch's collection of *Sayings of Spartan Women*. Even the names of Spartan women are not well documented, partly, Pomeroy suggests, because so much of the literature was written by non-Spartans, especially Athenians for whom it was inappropriate to mention the name of a respectable woman in public.

Pomeroy's survey of sources is arranged first by type and then by chronology. Beginning with literary sources, she moves from the poetry of Alcman in the Archaic period, to references to Spartan women in Athenian drama and philosophical texts like those of Plato and Xenophon in the Classical period, to authors like Plutarch in the Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine periods. Pomeroy's overview of the treatment of Spartan women in various ancient authors and periods is an important feature of this appendix. Also of note is her section on secondary sources in which she observes that most studies of Sparta have either lacked an interest in women's topics or misinterpreted the evidence. She cites Cartledge's *Sparta and Lakonia* (1979), noted above, as an example of the former, and his important study "Spartan Wives: Liberation or Licence?" as an example of the latter.[1] Pomeroy suggests that Cartledge's description of Spartan women as passive victims of their husbands is based upon modern rather than ancient views of sexuality and gender relationships. A very different view of these women emerges when their lives are compared to those of their contemporaries in other parts of Greece.

In her survey of sources Pomeroy also examines the material evidence for the lives of Spartan women. Archaeological finds include thousands of lead female figures excavated at the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia as well as significant pottery, bronzes, and inscriptions from Laconia. Photographs of several of these artifacts are included among the illustrations in this book. Compared to other parts of Greece, however, the amount of material representing women in Sparta is sparse. Since much of the artwork in the rest of Greece was devoted to the theme of male domination and suppression of women, Pomeroy suggests, the general lack of such artwork in Sparta may have resulted from and reinforced the more active role Spartan women played in their society.

Finally, it should be noted that Pomeroy's bibliography, while extensive, is actually a list of works cited and therefore not comprehensive. It does not, for example, include references to major studies of Sparta like H. Michell's *Sparta* (1964) and A. H. M. Jones's *Sparta* (1967).

Note

[1]. "Spartan Wives: Liberation or Licence?" *Classical Quarterly* 31 (1981): pp. 84-105.

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