

AKANTHINA



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**STUDIES
ON ANCIENT SPARTA**



edited by

Ryszard Kulesza and Nicholas Sekunda

Gdańsk University Press

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ON ANCIENT SPARTA**

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edited by
Ryszard Kulesza and Nicholas Sekunda

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INTRODUCTION

The following volume contains a part of the lectures delivered in Warsaw at the annual 'Syssitia' series of lectures beginning in 2013. These lectures were concerned with various aspects of the history of ancient Sparta. Their variety is reflected in the contents of this volume.

The contributions in the first part of this volume deal with social questions concerning ancient Sparta. First Maciej Kokoszko analyses the textual evidence for the famous Spartan 'black broth', which were a 'specialité de la maison' in ancient Sparta. He considers the evidence for it being based on black chickpeas, but he decides that it was prepared on the basis of meat, blood, salt and vinegar. Aleksander Wolicki deals with the sporting activity of Spartan women in the Classical period, and tries to unravel the difference between the reality for the Classical period, and the later accretions of mythical information to the legend. In the opinion of the author the preserved sources indicate that Spartan women carried out exercises of running and the *bibasis*, rather than athletic contests. This alone, however, was sufficient to distinguish them from women in other parts of the Greek world, and this is the reason for the Spartan 'mirage' in the case of women. Jacek Rzepka traces the history of the ritual in the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia from a fight for the cheese to a contest of endurance. He establishes the hypothesis that the whipping of boys at the altar of Orthia was introduced not as a replacement of the older fight for the cheese, but rather as a complementary event in the sanctuary. In the opinion of the author the change in ritual should not be understood as a religious, socio-political, or educational development, but rather as one of a number of changes of Spartan attitudes towards competition and sporting activities. According to Sebastian Rajewicz, who writes on the theme of Laconian hounds, the Spartan mirage extended not just towards people, but to some degree also to the animal world. Magdalena Myszkowska-Kaszuba deals with intergenerational interactions in Sparta, examining whether or not the legendary image of the harmonious functioning of the generations corresponds to reality. In her contribution Anna M. Kruszyńska reviews basic questions concerning the role of women and the family in Sparta.

The second part of the volume deals with historical questions. In the first of these Mait Kōiv analyses the cult of Apollo at Amyklai in the context of the chronology of the conquest of Laconia, and the beginnings of Spartan statehood,

comparing the reality with the historical texts. Ryszard Kulesza then tries to find an answer to the question of why Plutarch did not write a *Life of Leonidas*, which is the reason for our current scanty state of knowledge about the most famous of Spartan kings. Then Nicholas Sekunda discusses the date of the murder of the helots described in Thucydides 4.80.3–4. Alexander A. Sinitsyn presents a detailed history of the ‘Triple Alliance’ between Perdikkas II of Macedonia, the Chalcidian cities, and the Peloponnesian League represented by Brasidas (424/423 BC). Marek Jan Olbrycht deals with the cavalry forms carried out by King Agesilaos during his Asian campaign, giving the historical context of the reforms, and their effect on the development of warfare in Greece. The author sees in these reforms the influence of Persian warfare, which constituted an important in the development of Greek warfare. Wojciech Duszyński analyses the Battle of Naxos, as well as the Spartan sea campaign in the Aegean in 376 BC. Krzysztof Nawotka debates what possible historical source material lies behind the imaginary campaign of Alexander the Great against Sparta described in the Alexander Romance.

Many more lectures were delivered in the ‘*syssitia*’ series, which the authors will publish elsewhere, or already have done so. These include the attempt of Sławomir Sprawski, entitled ‘Why the Spartans lost the battle of Leuctra’, to reconstruct the course of that battle; Rafał Matuszewski, ‘*Ta kapeleia ta Attika phiditia*’ on the role of the inn in Athenian society in the late Classical period; Hans van Wees, ‘Spartan austerity: what, when, why?’; Michael Vickers, ‘Aristophanes’ *Birds*: a Spartan allegory’; Sebastian Rajewicz, ‘Horse-Raising in ancient Sparta’; Nicholas Sekunda, ‘Thibron on the Lakedaimonian constitution (Aristotle, Pol. 7.13.11 = 1333b)’; Małgorzata Pawlak, ‘Italian Spartans (*Iust. 23.1*)’; and Michał Podrazik, ‘Klearchos and Cyrus the Younger’.

The ‘*Syssitia*’ series of lectures also included a large number of contributions dealing with the reception of the Spartan legend. These will be published in a further volume in this series.

The whole of the ‘*Syssitia*’ series of lectures, as well as the present publication, would not have been possible without a generous grant from the Polish. This publication has been financed by the Polish Ministry of Higher Education and Science as part of a project (Number 11H 12 0121 81) completed on behalf of the National Programme for the Development of the Humanities. I would like to thank the appropriate authorities for the award of this grant. It gives me great pleasure also to thank Nicholas Sekunda for including this publication in the ‘*Akanthina*’ series, as well as for his painstaking work in carrying it through the various stages of edition, as well, as his enthusiastic support for the ‘*Syssitia*’ lecture series. I also take this opportunity to thank Sebastian Rajewicz for his help in compiling the index.

Ryszard Kulesza

Maciej Kokoszko

**MÉLAS ZOMÓS (ΜΕΛΑΣ ΖΩΜΟΣ),
OR ON A CERTAIN SPARTAN DISH.
A SOURCE STUDY**

Keywords: History of food, Sparta, Spartan diet, black broth (μέλας ζωμός), chickpea

Abstract. The present study tries to shed new light on an element of Spartan diet, namely a dish called *mélas zomós* (μέλας ζωμός). It discusses a cornucopia of literary sources, historical (first and foremost Plutarch and Dicaearchus), as well as medical (first of all *De materia medica* by Dioscorides, and Galen) and lexicographic (the most important are Julius Pollux and *Liber Suda*), in order to retrieve data on the recipe for the delicacy, concluding that it was a sort of soup prepared from meat and blood with the addition of vinegar and salt. Subsequently, the article discusses a hypothesis proposed by William Geoffrey Arnott which suggests that the dish was prepared on the basis of a black variety of chickpeas. The author of the study, however, refutes Arnott's suggestion and argues in favour of the opinion that *mélas zomós* was a meat dish. He maintains that there is no unequivocal evidence that the black chickpea was a staple in Sparta. Medical texts exclusively suggest it was particularly popular in Bithynia, a region located far from Laconia and Messenia and also from the Doric Greeks living in Asia Minor. On the other hand, it has to be noted that the texts left by Dicaearchus and Plutarch give information which is directly relevant to the Spartan milieu. Additionally, the evidence provided by both authors is intrinsically and logically coherent, in particular with regard to the details concerning the culinary technologies employed. The Greek language had a specific term used for dishes made of leguminous plants: it was not *zomós* (ζωμός), but *étnos* (ἔτνος). The former referred, as a rule, to a variety of cooked meat-based dishes, while meat was not used for preparing *étnos*.



Sparta was by far one of the most powerful states of ancient Greece (see for example Atkinson 1972; Clauss 1983; Kulesza 2003a; Kulesza 2003b). Its political system was very much admired, while its formidable military potential was perceived as threatening by both the other Greeks and the barbarians. The topic

of the present study, however, is not concerned with either of these observations; instead I shall concentrate solely on one constituent element of Spartan identity, namely a dish called *mélas zomós* (μέλας ζωμός). Plutarch of Chaeronea (first/second century AD) mentions this dish in his *Life of Lycurgus*, a text referring to the great reformer of the Lacedaemonian political system (tenth/ninth century BC), in a passage describing the customs maintained in the Spartan *polis*, and particularly at the Lacedaemonian banquets, the *syssítia* (συσσίτια) (cf. Bólte 1929; David 1978; Murray 1991; Paul 1991). Plutarch (*Lyc.*12.4) maintains that it was deemed to be a great honour to take part in these banquets as a regular guest. In order to attain this status, it was necessary to gain acceptance from their more experienced participants. The *syssítia* were supposed to have a didactic value and to teach the youngest participants modesty and humility, as they offered them an opportunity to listen to accounts on the rules of governing the state and to meet in person the knowledgeable men who were capable of demonstrating the correct understanding of the most important Spartan ideas. The new participants were carefully selected by means of a special voting procedure (Plut. *Lyc.*12.5). All assembled members would take a piece of bread and, without saying a word, throw it into a vessel which an attendant carried on his head. If the piece was pressed flat, it meant that the aspiring member should be rejected. If it was left intact, it signified a vote in favour of admitting him (Plut. *Lyc.* 12.5–6).

Food was served during these banquets (see below; see also Bruit 1990; Runding 1996), and the meeting ended with wine (Plut. *Lyc.* 12.2. See Fisher 1989).¹ The best-known dish the guests could treat themselves to at these banquets was a particular *ópson* (ὄψον), described by Plutarch as *mélas zomós* (μέλας ζωμός). The recipe for this delicacy is not included in his account, but Plutarch (*Lyc.* 12.6) noted that the menu for the *syssítia* was prepared on the assumption that the elders should leave the meat for the young men, and the older participants should content themselves with liquid rather than solid food. We may thus infer that this particular dish was a form of soup and not solid meat.² From what follows in Plutarch's account we may conclude that the recipe was not at all a secret, since one of the most powerful rulers of the ancient Mediterranean,³ decided to buy a Lacedaemonian cook with the express purpose of tasting the dish. He did not find it particularly palatable, even though the cook was permitted to procure all the necessary ingredients regardless of their price. Summoned to appear before the ruler (and, we may assume, having heard of his complaints), the cook is reported to have said that the *ópson* could be fully appreciated only after taking a dip in the

¹ Wine was also believed to have medicinal properties (Kokoszko 2016).

² The account is markedly general, but it does not exclude the possibility that the dish was based on meat and contained meat chunks.

³ Plut. *Lyc.* 12.7: 'one of the kings of Pontus': in the *Institutia Laconica* 2–3 (Plut. *Mor.* 236 F – 237 A) the ruler in question was Dionysius of Syracuse in Sicily.

Eurotas river, which meant that only a person disciplined in the tough Spartan manner and fully compliant with the Lacedaemonian way of life could have been able to fully appreciate its quality. Thus, however sparing in detail, Plutarch's account seems to suggest that the dish was highly idiosyncratic in taste, because, although acceptable to the Spartans accustomed to a simple lifestyle,⁴ it was hardly comestible to people of a more refined Mediterranean palate. We may also conclude that the recipe could not have been very sophisticated.

The simplicity of Spartan cuisine and customs is confirmed also in the *Life of Cleomenes*, set in the third century BC. The account has it that the king would dine with the characteristic Lacedaemonian lack of sophistication, even though the main daily meal was served in the *triclinium*. No exquisite side dishes (*karkykeíai*; καρυκείαι) were served (see Kokoszko 2006; 2008a; 2008b), nor was there any sophisticated bakery: the only thing deemed important was to provide a sufficient supply of food and wine (Plut. *Cleom.* 34.4). We learn from the same *Life* that the king rebuked one of his friends for having served *mélas zomós* and *máza* (for more on *máza*, see Kokoszko, Jagusiak, Rzeźnicka 2014, 366, 375–377, 382–383, 396–397; Kokoszko, Jagusiak, Rzeźnicka 2014b, part I, 369–370, 378–380, 401) to foreign visitors, as he believed that Lacedaemonian customs should not be observed ostentatiously before foreigners (Plut. *Cleom.* 34.5; cf. Węcowski 2014, 111–117) who, in his view, were entitled to finding these customs difficult to accept. Although the *Life of Cleomenes* is even less informative than the *Life of Lycurgus*, it should be noted that *máza*, which was mentioned as being served as the main part of that meal, was a staple of the poor rather than a delicacy for the well-off; we may thus also assume that *mélas zomós* belonged to the same category of dishes. The lack of sophistication in Spartan cuisine is also implied in an anecdote quoted in the *Life of Pelopidas* (fourth century BC). A certain citizen of Sybaris is reported to have stated that the Spartans were not afraid of death, because they viewed it as a way to escape the life of toil, which term also included the necessity of eating food characteristic of that *polis*.⁵

Also noteworthy is some interesting and highly informative material contained in another treatise by Plutarch, namely in *De tuenda sanitate praecepta* (*Mor.* 128 C), where we find an indication of the way food was prepared for these banquets at Sparta. Plutarch maintains that the Lacedaemonians provided only vinegar and salt for the cooks hired to prepare the communal meals, and expected them to get all the other ingredients from the carcass of the sacrificed animal. They did so in

⁴ These were represented by the ruler who had enormous riches at his disposal and was accustomed to satisfying his whims by extravagant spending.

⁵ Plutarch (*Pelop.* 1.3–4) commented that the inhabitants of Sybaris, being accustomed to their life of luxury, were unable to understand how one could possibly be free from fear of death without loathing life. On the other hand, Plutarch was positive that the Spartan philosophy of life made it possible for the Lacedaemonians to cultivate their virtue, *areté* (ἀρετή).

the belief that all their compatriots who were morally upright, and in good health, would appreciate this sort of simplicity.

This remark is particularly telling when read in conjunction with the stories told in the *Vitae parallelae*. First of all, it may be inferred from *De tuenda sanitate praecepta* that meat and other parts of the carcass were typical fare at the communal Lacedaemonian banquets. Secondly, the cooks had few ingredients at their disposal while preparing the meal. It is also crucially important that vinegar was mentioned in tandem with salt. The latter was a basic condiment employed in nearly all dishes. Vinegar, on the other hand, was not used in seasoning meat, especially if the meat was to be roasted. Accordingly, this culinary ingredient was not employed in the preparation of the butchered animals. We should rather infer that the vinegar served a different purpose: that it was not used to season the meat but was mixed with the blood, which was also obtained from the same animals. The aim of this practice is clear to anyone familiar with culinary matters. Vinegar prevented blood from spoiling, because, when vinegar is added to blood it slows down the process of clotting and, as a result, made it an appropriate condiment for a liquid dish.⁶ Accordingly, on the basis of the information derived from the *Vitae parallelae* and the *De tuenda sanitate praecepta*, it is justifiable to claim that *mélas zomós* was a *sui generis* soup prepared from meat, which, in turn, was the fundamental ingredient for the Spartan delicacy. The Lacedaemonian chefs cooked meat in water with an admixture of blood and vinegar, so as not to waste any edible part of the butchered animal. It may also be concluded that the cuts of meat which were reserved for the young men (as mentioned in the *Life of Lycurgus*) were boiled together with *zomós* and then taken out later, in order to be distributed among the younger banqueters. The remaining broth, thick with blood,⁷ and small pieces of meat, had an unsophisticated flavour that was composed of the natural aromas of meat, blood, vinegar and salt. This was the reason why the gourmets found it so unpalatable.

The above hypothesis may be confirmed by a passage in the *Tripoliticus* by Dicaearchus, active in the fourth and third centuries BC, who gave an almost contemporary account of the customs of Classical Sparta, which are described by Plutarch at a much greater remove of time. When writing about communal banquets in Sparta, Dicaearchus explicitly stated that after the main meal, which was served on an individual basis, *máza* would be served to the banqueters, who would also receive a vessel from which to drink wine. To accompany the *máza* (barley bread or gruel), the following dishes and products were served as relishes: boiled pork

⁶ Plutarch (*Lyc.* 12.6) writes explicitly that it was poured out (presumably into a bowl).

⁷ Blood, when warmed, is a natural thickener (Kaufman 2006, 25–26).

meat (in modest quantities), the meat-based *zomós* broth, and olives, cheese, figs, and some additional foods such as fish, hare or pigeon to be followed by a dessert.⁸

This account is very informative, as it not only agrees with that of Plutarch, but also supplements the body of data already retrieved from his works. Accordingly, we may conclude that the meat referred to in the *Life of Lycurgus* was pork, a detail which is absent from Plutarch's text. Dicaearchus also was precise enough to note that it was prepared by boiling. The *melas zomós* mentioned by Plutarch in Dicaearchus account appears as *zomós*, i.e. without an attribute. All in all, Dicaearchus text leaves no doubt that the dish described dish was prepared by boiling, and that the meat was taken out afterwards and cut into portions to be served to the younger banqueters. Last but not least, he also noted, as did Plutarch, that the *ópson* in question was an addition to *máza*, which makes it all the more likely that both authors referred to the same customary menu.

As has been already noted, even though *mélas zomós* was especially appreciated in Sparta, it was also known outside the city. The extant sources confirm the information contained in Plutarch. The writers of ancient comedy, in whose plays food frequently appears as a major topic, also made references to *zomós* (see Wilkins 2000; Hunter and Koukouzika 2015, 19–29). To begin with Pherecrates, writing in the fifth century BC, mentions that it was served alongside *máza*.⁹ This is an interesting remark, especially because it confirms the much later account of Plutarch, although it adds little to our discussion, only confirming that the dish was a liquid, without giving any more detail about the basic ingredients used in its preparation. Alexis, who wrote in the fourth to third century BC, also mentioned *máza* being eaten with *zómos*, noting that the latter was prepared in such a way as to make it look as black as possible. There is, however, no indication of the substance used to obtain this effect. Moreover, it may be inferred from Alexis remarks that both *mélas zomós* and *máza* were a daily staple, and as such belonged to the category of unsophisticated foods eaten to satisfy the needs of hunger, rather than to titillate the palate.¹⁰ Nicostratus, writing in the fourth century BC, in turn, ridiculed an incompetent cook who did not know how to prepare black broth; nor was he able to make the *thríon* (θρίων, i.e. stuffed leaves),¹¹ or the *kándaulos* (κάνδαυλος), an exquisite dish of Lydian origin (for more on *kándaulos* see Kokoszko 2009; Kokoszko and Gibel 2011; Kokoszko and Gibel-Buszewska 2011), to say nothing of his ignorance regarding the ingredients of the dessert called *mattýe* (ματτύη) (Nicostratus, Μαγείρος [frg. 1, 1–3, ed. Kock 1884 = Athen. 12.517 A]). Black

⁸ Athen. 4.141 A-C = Dicaearchus frg. 72 (Wehrli 1967) mentions both cooked pork and *zomós*.

⁹ Pherecrates mentions *mélas zomós* in both his Πέρσαι (frg. 1, 1–5, ed. Meineke 1839, vol. II.1 = Athen. 6.269 C–E) and his Μεταλλεῖς (frg. 1, 1–7 = Athen. 6.268 E–F).

¹⁰ Alexis mentions *mélas zomós* in his Μανδραγοριζομένη (frg. 1–9, ed. Kock 1884 = Athen. 3.123 F – 124 B).

¹¹ See below.

broth appears also in a poem by Matro of Pitane, active at the turn of the fourth and third centuries BC,¹² who mentions the dish together with *máza* and boiled *akrokólia* (ἀκροκόλια), i.e. the commonly available and frequently discarded off-cuts from the butchery process, such as the skin, ears or snouts (Dalby 2003, 269), which were inexpensive and thus readily accessible culinary ingredients used by the poor. Euphron (third century BC) in one of his plays introduced a cook who reeled off a list of his mentors, chefs who had taught him the art of cooking, mentioning that a certain Lamprias had been famous for his black broth, a dish which he supposedly invented (Euphron, Ἀδελφοί for Lamprias and *mélas zomós* [frg. 1, 1–35, ed. Kock 1888 = Athen. 9. 379 C – 380 C]). This claim is impossible to verify, but it at least suggests that in the mid-third century BC *mélaszomós* was so familiar that a comedy writer found it appropriate to speculate about the inventor of the dish.

Because neither the remarks of Plutarch nor those of Dicaearchus, nor even the relevant passages from the comedies are precise enough to prove beyond any doubt that *mélas zomós* was a meat dish prepared with blood as the ingredient used to give it its characteristic colour, it is necessary to compare these remarks with other literary sources. As the available material is more than abundant, I will limit myself to quote only those examples which I have found to be particularly relevant. For example, the *scholia* to Aristophanes, writing at the turn of the fifth and fourth centuries BC, which comment on contemporary culinary reality, make numerous references to the term in question. A scholiast commenting on the comedy *Equites* commented that *thría* were cooked in a meat stock called *zomós* (see Jones and Wilson [1969] ad *Equites* 954 b, 4 [*zomós*]). Another remark explains that *zomós* was a soup prepared from the leftovers after cooking the sacrificial meat for the Panathenaea celebrations. It was served to the poor, while the better-off could gorge themselves on the meat (Koster 1974, ad *Equites* 954 b, 4). It is worth noting that even though the text does not give any specific indication of how the blood was used in the preparation of this dish, the way of dealing with the meat is analogous to what we read in the *Life of Lycurgus* and in the passage by Dicaearchus. Broth, or a dish of the same name prepared as a side-product of cooking the beef, is also referred to in the *scholia* to the *Pax* (Holwerda 1982, ad *Pax* 885 a, 1). The same term is mentioned by both Plato (fifth/fourth century BC), who undoubtedly referred to a dish based on cooked meat (Plato, *Lysis* 209 D, 5 – E, 3 [*zomós* at 209 E, 3]), and Aristotle (fourth century BC), who makes mention of the same term in several instances with an analogous meaning. The latter philosopher in his *De partibus animalium* introduced the term in his discussion of the differences between two varieties of animal fat: *pimelé* (πιμελή) and

¹² Matron of Pitane mentions *mélas zomós* in his Ἄρτικον δεῖπνον (lines 91–97, ed. Brandt 1888 = Athen. 4.134 D – 137 C) at line 94 (Athen. 4.136 E).

stéar (στέαρ). We may conclude from his account that *zomós* prepared with the former variety remained liquid: if the meat was rich in *stéar* (Aristotle, *Part. An.* 651 A, 29), then the broth had a tendency to set. A similar but more detailed remark can be found in Aristotle's *Historia animalium*, where the author wrote that *zomós* cooked from horse or pig fat would remain liquid, but if it was prepared from mutton or goat meat, it would likely turn solid when cooled (Aristotle, *HA* 520 A, 8). In addition, the compiler of the *Suda* lexicon (tenth century AD), while discussing the same subject as Aristotle, noted that *zomós* was the stock obtained from cooking pig, cow, goat, sheep or bear meat (s.v. Πιμελή [Adler 1933]).

Medical writers, who as a rule were competent in alimentary issues, also testify to the same meaning of the term. For example, Dioscurides (first century AD) used the term *zomós* to denote the stock obtained as a result of cooking frog or crayfish meat seasoned with salt and olive oil.¹³ Moreover, he recommended the administering of a broth cooked from an 'old' rooster to bring down a high fever (*Euporista...*, II, 22, 1, 1–3 [*zomós* based on a rooster at II, 22, 1, 2]). Other varieties of *zomós* were prepared on the basis of beef (*Euporista...*, II, 141, 2, 1), or of young deer fat boiled in water (*Euporista...*, II, 156, 1, 5–6). Dioscurides noted that fish were also cooked in a similar way, i.e. they were prepared in water with salt, olive oil, and dill (*Euporista...*, II, 156, 1, 5–6).¹⁴ Moreover, at least one of the medical writers used the term *zomós* with reference to a soup served with meat or a stew prepared on the basis of pork, as can be proved to be the case by a blood-curdling story recorded by Galen (second/third century AD), who claimed to have heard it from trustworthy witnesses (which suggests that he knew them personally, and that the event had taken place in his lifetime). The story has it that these acquaintances of Galen's were staying at an inn where they were served a delicious dish (*zomós*, as the author noted) filled with very tasty meat. Having eaten their fill, they were horrified to find a piece of a human finger, with the fingernail still attached, which presumably must have appeared at the bottom of the bowl in which the meal had been served. Stricken with fear that, having discovered the horrifying truth, they may be murdered by the innkeepers, they hurriedly left the house, and, having vomited to get rid of the meal, continued on their journey. Sometime after this, the innkeepers were arrested and during the investigation revealed the reason for which they used human flesh for cooking. Galen does not quote the words of the detainees, but it can be inferred from the passage that the reason was that human meat had a similar taste to pork. Consequently, it was nearly impossible to notice the difference and guess the true nature of the ingredients. Galen asserts that such cases were fairly common and

¹³ *Euporista vel de simplicibus medicinis*, I, 222, 1–4 (in Wellmann 1914) mentions *zomós* on the basis of frogs with salt and olive oil at I, 222, 2–4, and *zomós* based on crayfish at I, 222, 3–4.

¹⁴ It was the so-called *leukós zomós* (λευκός ζωμός), which will be discussed below in the context of stock without meat.

The following volume contains the majority of the 'sysstia' series of lectures delivered in Warsaw beginning in 2013. These lectures were concerned with various aspects of the history of ancient Sparta. Their variety is reflected in the contents of this volume. The lecture series and this publication has been financed by the Polish Ministry of Higher Education and Science as part of project number 11H 12 0121 81, completed on behalf of the National Programme for the Development of the Humanities. The contributions in the first part of this volume deal with social questions concerning ancient Sparta, while the second part of the volume deals with historical questions.



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