

THE SPARTAN FAMILY¹

by

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ABSTRACT: According to many scholars in Sparta the family was marginalized, “minimized as a unit of either affection or authority, and replaced by overlapping male groups”, and “model Spartans” loved their State, not their families. The evidence does not support these opinions. They originate from the general vision of relationships in (fabulous) Sparta, not from the analysis of source material. In fact family ties played an absolutely vital role in (historical) Sparta. This is confirmed by adoptions, property-related calculations prior to marriages, diligence in furthering the careers of family members, marital manoeuvres such as “wife-sharing”, which protected the interests of the family, and even by solutions in the treatment of the *tresantes*. The author believes that a “model Spartan” did not suffer from a conflict of loyalties; he loved the Family as much as the State.

“It is well known that the family was not considered as important in Sparta as in the other Greek states, a fact which is usually explained by the special education given to young people and the military way of life of the Spartan men”². The majority of scholars, Pavel OLIVA among them, is convinced that the family was of little consequence in Sparta, even if their grounds for this theory are different than OLIVA’S³. Anton POWELL even refers to the sphere of emotions: “It seems that model Spartans did not love their families; they loved the State”⁴.

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² OLIVA 1971: 28.

³ FINLEY 1981: 28; POWELL 1988; BLUNDELL 1995: 150; CANTARELLA 2011: 339–341. Incidentally, it is interesting that the topic of family is virtually absent from texts on Spartan women, e.g. THOMMEN 1999; PIPER 1979; REDFIELD 1978 (although here the last two pages contain interesting observations regarding the family). It is significant (just *exempli gratia*), that in ROUSSEL 1960, in the chapter *Le Spartiate – l’éducation et la famille* (pp. 45–52), the family is not mentioned at all. In the monumental work by HODKINSON (2000) even the index does not contain the entry “family”.

⁴ POWELL 1988: 228.