

Preface

The surrender of Athens in 404 at the conclusion of the Peloponnesian War marked the end of an epoch. Gone were the tension and polarity between Athens and Sparta which had characterized the second half of the fifth century. Now Sparta dominated the affairs of Greece and exercised hegemony for over thirty years. Interest in the general problems of Greek history in the period after 404 led me to an earlier investigation and analysis (*Sparta's Bitter Victories*, Cornell University Press, 1979), which was not intended to be a full study of the Spartan Hegemony. The research for that book, however, sparked my interest in the further question of developments in Sparta in the early fourth century; hence the present book. It is written in the hope that it may be of interest not only to specialists in Greek history but also to students and an interested public. Thus, I have not included quotations in Greek, but I have cited the ancient sources quite fully, discussed them at length, and provided references to modern scholarship to aid those who would read further on their own. All translations of the ancient sources are my own, unless otherwise noted, and all dates are B.C.

This book makes three primary contributions. First, it argues that the policies of King Agesilaus II, in domestic politics and foreign affairs, shaped the position of Sparta in the Greek world and contributed substantially to the failure of its hegemony. Second, it devotes considerable attention to the sources, analyzing and evaluating their information on the questions under discussion. Third, it sets Agesilaus' reign in the context of a psychohistorical study. In these three respects, it differs from other recent studies of the topic.

In attempting to assess the question of why Sparta failed to maintain hegemony in the Greek world, other scholars have emphasized military or socioeconomic causes, but I believe that a political and diplomatic explanation is more convincing. I realized that the single most important individual in the period was King Agesilaus, who dominated his state, and that his policies led to Sparta's failure. The first aim of the book is to tell his story as fully as possible. Chapter 1 is an analysis of Agesilaus as a man; that is, a study of his character and personality, as far as they can be understood. The sources are very limited, to be sure, but we have more contemporary material than is available for the study of, say, Themistocles or Pericles, largely in the works of Xenophon, a friend and admirer of Agesilaus. Xenophon wrote an encomium of the king in addition to his general treatment of Greek history from ca. 410 to 362, known as the *Hellenica*. Then there is Plutarch, who also wrote a life of Agesilaus and collected many of his sayings, and whose interest in character led him to preserve important information about Agesilaus from lost writers and to make many significant observations about the king's personality. In addition to these two important sources, there are numerous references in other late writers, some of whom, like Diodorus, derive from fourth-century sources, such as Ephorus of Cumae. But this evidence must be treated with care; it is often contradictory and frequently biased. I have analyzed the sources, therefore, and tried to indicate the reasons for preferring one to another on particular occasions. The evidence is as good as that for almost any figure from ancient Greece—in some sense, better than that for Alexander the Great. If historians can write about Alexander's personality, why not about Agesilaus'?

The topic is twofold: Agesilaus and Sparta. I have asked what sort of king Agesilaus was and what sort of state he ruled over. In chapter 2, I analyze the evidence on the two most important aspects of kingship in Sparta: the political and military roles of the king. I offer a general assessment of his reign, which spanned forty-one years, in order to suggest an overall judgment of his kingship. Chapter 3 is devoted to an examination of Spartan society in the early fourth century, to set the stage for a consideration of the ability of Sparta to meet the challenges it faced in the ensuing period. This portrait of the king, abstracted from the entire history of his reign, and taken together with a picture of Spartan society, can then be used as background to study the events of Spartan history in the years during which Agesilaus clearly played the

preponderant role. The remaining chapters of the book treat, in narrative fashion, the years from 397, just after Agesilaus' accession to the throne, to the Second Battle of Mantinea, in 362. It was in this period that the Spartan Hegemony failed.

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