Antonis Antoniadis

The Wolf of Sparta [Ο λύκος της Σπάρτης (O lýkos tīs Spártīs)]

Greece (2009)

TAGS: Aphrodite Apollo Asclepius Cronus / Kronos Delphi Demeter Erinyes Graeco-Persian Wars Greek History Greek Philosophy Hades Heracles Hercules Morpheus Oracles Persephone Pythia Sparta Zeus





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General information	
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Creators



Antonis Antoniadis (Author)

Antonis Antoniadis [Αντώνης Αντωνιάδης] was born in Altena, Germany, but grew up in Drama, Greece. He finished a school of physiotherapy in Belgrade but never worked in this profession having decided to pursue a literary career. He worked for various journals and periodicals, as a columnist, then an editor, editor-in-chief and director. Between 2000–2004, he was the editor-in-chief of *Avaton* (Άβατον) [Off Limits], and then he was the director of the magazine *Secret Greece* [Mistikí Eláda, Μυστική Ελλάδα]. In 2003, he organized the production of the television documentary series *Unknown Gates* (Ágnostes Pýles, Άγνωστες Πύλες), which was broadcast by the ERT3 channel. He also consulted the production of numerous series about history, transmitted by the national Greek television. He co-authored and edited multiple composite works and studies on history, religion, ethnology and anthropology. He currently lives and works in Thessaloniki.

He published the following books:

- *Δελφοί, οι πολιτικοί σχεδιασμοί του ιερατείου* (Delfí, i politikí schediasmí tou ieratíou) [Delphoi, political patterns of the priesthood], 2006 .
- *Παράξενες διηγήσεις αρχαίων Ελλήνων* (Paráxenes diigísis archéon Elínon) [Strange stories of ancient Greeks], 2006.
- *Ο λύκος της Σπάρτης* (O líkos tis Spártis) [The Wolf of Sparta], 2009.
- *Εκστρατεία στην έρημο* (Ekstratía stin érimo) [(Military) campaign in the desert], 2010.
- *Δαιμόνιος Βάκχος* (Demónios Vákchos) [Deity of Bacchus], 2015 with Angeliki Radou.
- *Necronomicon: The Manuscript of The Dead*, 2015; [Νεκρονομικόν: Το χειρόγραφο των νεκρών (Nekronomikón: Το chirógrapho ton nekrón)], 2018.

Sources:

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Additional information

Translation

Italian: *Il lupo di Sparta*, trans. Marcella Uberti-Bona, Milano, Longanesi, 2013; Milano, TEA (Tascabili degli Editori Associati), 2016.

Summary

The novel is set during the Greek-Persian wars, from the battle of Thermopylae to the Battle of Plataea as seen by the only survivor of the 300 Spartan warriors of King Leonidas I, who set out to guard the Helladic world against the Persians. Aristodemos – a descendant of the royal line of the Herakleides – and his companion Eurytos lose their sight upon being sprayed in their faces with viper poison on the battlefield. They are sent to consult Aesculapius' priests in the military infirmary. Having heard the news of the Greek forces in Thermopylae being surrounded by the Persians, Eurytos, despite his blindness, decides to join his king and die with honour. Aristodemos, however, rather than dying meaninglessly, prefers to defend his city-state and strive to save Sparta despite the potential damage to his reputation. Although he would rather stay with Leonidas on the Spartan and Thespian side, he retreats and returns to Sparta.

There, he is considered a coward and a deserter, insulted, slandered, even cursed and pelted with stones. His wife disavows him and slams the door in his face, his mother smacks him with a stick and kicks him out of his family home. Nobody invites him in or offers him a meal, only at Aesculapius' temple he receives food and is treated in secret. Having regained his vision, he leaves Sparta to prove that the Spartan values like loyalty or allegiance to the king and the *polis* are still a vital part of his life. From this moment on, he struggles to restore his honour and good name.

Concealed on Mount Kithairon (Cithaeron), he resists the assailant by conducting a series of guerilla raids. The Persians who hunt in the surrounding areas become the hunted. They begin to be afraid and pass on tales of a mysterious assassin. A hundred men are sent to capture him; they plunge into the river from the bridge previously damaged in one of Aristodemos' sabotage missions.

Aristodemos then heads over to Delphi, where he undergoes spiritual and mental training under the eyes of the priests of Apollo, he participates in cleansing rituals and assimilates the ten sacred

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philosophical commandments. His demons of humiliation vanish, he regains the peace of his childhood. The priests reshape the protagonist's spirit through their mythical tales and unravel the truth of political history. To restore the balance in his country ruined by the inner taint and political games between families, the Spartan, according to the priests, has to take responsibility and, like Lycurgus, act fairly in defiance of the citizens who would be against his actions. They suggest he becomes the ruler.

On his way back from Delphi he meets a group of war refugees being mugged by a band of thugs. He rescues them and takes them into his retreat. For a few months, he leads a normal life with them, falls in love with one of the rescued women and becomes friends with the rescued men. They hold many conversations about the beauty of life and love, and they drink wine and live as if there was no war happening around.

A Greek spy, who was in the Persians' pocket, discovers their hiding place. Aristodemos decides to raise his sword again - he takes down a troop of Persians and defeats the general of the nearby Persian camp. This makes him aware of the continuing danger, so he organizes training to improve the stamina and military skills of his companions.

Meanwhile, another enemy, a Spartan sent from the regent Pausanias, arrives to put Aristodemos to death. After a fierce duel, which Aristodemos eventually wins, he sends the defeated man back to Sparta to tell Pausanias that he will never return to reclaim the throne because he does not want bloodshed to come upon his homeland. He resigns from fighting and chooses to live in peace which, he deserves having killed more Persians than anyone else, and in this way, clearing his debt.

Then, an Ionian troop under the orders of Aristides, an Athenian, arrives at the retreat. The Delphic Oracle instructed them to look there for a hero who will bring victory to Greece. Aristodemos reveals his true identity and Aristides tells him the story of his own ostracism and convinces him to fight against the Persians.

Near Plataea, the united Greek army led by Pausanias impatiently awaits the beginning of the battle with the countless Persians. Once the battle begins, a lone, unknown warrior appears on the battlefield, bearing the shield with the letter lambda for Lacedaemon and a wolf's head attached to it. He fights on his own, only with a new friend

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shielding him from enemies. The Spartans watch the warrior with appreciation and eventually recognize him. After the victorious battle, Aristodemos heads out to the enemies' camp in order to reclaim the shields of the soldiers killed at Thermopylae. He gives them to the soldier who defeated general Mardonius with an order to deliver them to the queen dowager Gorgo. Aristodemos puts his shield on top as a symbol of fraternity with the king and walks away.

A year later the representatives of the Greek city-states celebrate the anniversary of the victory. A legation from Sparta also arrives to inform them about Pausanias' wrongdoings and his death. The heroes of the war also celebrate, now living a prosperous and happy life.

Analysis

The Wolf of Sparta is a historical novel based on an episode about the Persian wars described by Herodotus in his *Histories*. The protagonist is a historical figure just as the other multiple characters making their appearances in the book are authentic heroes of their times. On the Spartan side, the author introduces king Leonidas, Queen Gorgo and their relatives, Pausanias, the chief of the united Greek forces, and other members of the royal Laconian families. On the Athenian side - Aristides, also called *The Just*, and on the Persian – general Mardonius. The priests of the Delphic Oracle also cite the history of the Heracles' lineage and its politics in the times preceding the current story arc. Historical events at the foundation of the tale are not presented chronologically but are rather intertwined in the accounts of the characters and into the flashbacks of the protagonist.

The historical background is, however, not limited to introducing factual characters. What makes the featured situations and events credible and authentic are the intricately polished groundwork for building the ancient diegetic world. The author uses detailed and accurate geography, Ancient Greek proper names and terms (left in their original forms in translations) to pinpoint multiple political processes and phenomena in politics or culture. He delves into the complexity of the world of antagonizing poleis consisting of multiple state systems and entities. He elegantly introduces a nuanced sense of Greek philosophy and myths, as well as descriptions of beliefs, cults, rites and ceremonies, customs, Spartan educational structures, war strategies and military equipment, hunting, contemporary garments and even dishes (like, for example, *melas zomos – μέλας ζωμός* – a sort of black broth with blood and game). This causes the reader to

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believe in the reality of the historical message, but also, quite effortlessly, learn about Antiquity. The depiction of the deadly encounter with the Persian force is an opportunity to showcase something more than just historical and cultural events – they are made familiar by the flesh and blood figures from ancient epitaphs and monuments.

What adds to the value of the book as a historical novel and simultaneously makes the story riveting, is the portrayal of Aristodemos, his trials and tribulations. The young reader, while seeing the cover and reading the flyleaf, might expect a pseudo-historical account in the style of the film adaptation *300* – definitely a story that is not historically accurate, but promises an entertaining experience. Meanwhile, the story of Aristodemos is also marked by a deep elaboration on the psychology of the character. The Spartan is not only an aristocratic warrior striving to re-establish his lost honour but also a human overwhelmed by the law, injustice, unfavourable fate – a human with a tormented soul, desperate and ruthless to his enemies. Looking for his own value, which he knows he has not lost, he undertakes a mental journey leading to an internal transformation. Eventually, during a cruel war that annihilates noble values and turns people to traitors, spies and cutthroats, he learns the warmth of true closeness with other people, the value of love, of male friendship, fatherly care – a real life he never knew in the immaculately organized Spartan *polis*.

Another asset of the novel is the introduction of children characters. Having rescued the war refugees, Aristodemos helps with their upbringing, showing them care and affection, even though his own children are being raised by the Spartan state. He teaches the boys hunting and military skills while he himself learns to be an empathetic and understanding ordinary man. The rescued boys are trained, but not in a dehumanized Spartan fashion which would require separation from their families. They realise its purpose and, since they practice and hunt together, they bond in conversations and alliance with the adult men. Having faced the dangers of war, the young boys understand its consequences. The new safety given to them allows them to forget gradually about the terrors of war. Aristodemos becomes their new role model, and they grow to be a proud part of the Spartan's foster family, in which their needs as children are fulfilled through their grandmother's tales and their grown-up needs as men – by the participation in the adult training.

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As the characters live in hard times and conditions, they are not portrayed as faultless specimens, but rather as real humans, believable to the young reader. One of the women rescued by Aristodemos attempts to murder him on the first night because she comes from Argos – a *polis* hostile to Sparta. She eventually grows to love him and, as he decides to cease his fight, she hands him a weapon and sends him to the battlefield like a true Spartan woman would, telling him to fight on the Greek side, for her and their friends who are indeed equally Greek, regardless of their home *polis*. This becomes a device to show the internal divisions between the Greeks, but also that such divisions can be overcome for the greater, mutual good.

Aristodemos himself is also not perfect – he sacrilegiously enters armed into the sanctuary of Apollo in Delphi, slays multiple opponents during battle – not only Persians but also Thebans at an inn or thugs who attack the refugees. He even commits a burglary by stealing from the livestock of nearby allied armies and the offerings in the temple of Hera. He is courageous and loves his country – he wishes it prosperity and peace and does not dare to start civil fights amongst the Agiad dynasty, however, he is visibly torn between justice and loyalty. The author uses this as an opportunity to showcase values such as patriotism as essential and indispensable, but at the same time, difficult and controversial.

Antoniadis paints the portrait not only of a heroic soldier in an epic battle but also of a man who needs to redeem himself. He presents the dilemma of a man torn between honour, loyalty, justice, duty, and political schemes, a man who strives to be a warrior, a citizen, a patriot and an everyman.

With an amazing plot and a great sense of Greek philosophy, set against an actual historical background, the author uses the myth of Sparta as a tool to convey the message that the values and problems of an ancient hero can still be relevant today and that we should try to learn from what Antiquity has to teach us.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Aphrodite Apollo Asclepius Cronus / Kronos Delphi Demeter Erinyes Graeco-Persian Wars Greek History Greek Philosophy Hades Heracles Hercules Morpheus Oracles Persephone Pythia Sparta Zeus

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Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Death Family Heroism Identity Justice Morality Nation Respect Social class Values War
Further Reading	*Ο συγγραφέας Αντώνης Αντωνιάδης μιλάει για το βιβλίο του "NEKPONOMIKON"*, now24.gr (accessed: October 26, 2020). *Αντώνης Αντωνιάδης: «Η συγγραφή είναι σαν ένας αθεράπευτος ιός»*, radioalchemy.net (accessed: October 26, 2020). *"Δαιμόνιος Βάκχος" - παρουσίαση του βιβλίου*, goodreads.com (accessed: October 26, 2020). *Αντώνης Αντωνιάδης - "NEKPONOMIKON" στην εκπομπή "notebook"*, youtube.com (accessed: October 26, 2020).
Addenda	Based on Herodotus' *The Histories*, 7.229–232: Herodotus, with an English translation by A. D. Godley, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920, perseus.tufts.edu (accessed: October 26. 2020).

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