

By the late 1720s the primary threat to British shipping in the Caribbean came from Spanish *guarda costas*, self-funded privateers employed to impose nebulous imperial economic regulations. *Guarda costa* predation, evidently supported at a high level in Madrid, hampered British trade in the Caribbean until the War of Jenkins' Ear began in 1739. This subject has long needed scholarly attention.

The British response to this upsurge of piracy reflected the deep maritime roots of national power.⁷ The state provided some assets, and changed the legal basis of the response, but Colonial, and private enterprise organisations carried a major share of the burden. Risks were spread through large companies, and marine insurance. This period of piracy became a cultural phenomenon, generating a wide range of outputs, which have remained their potency to this day. Wilson's book undermines the romance of larceny at sea, and interpretations centred on the ubiquity of the early Georgian state.

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Paul A. Rahe. *Sparta's First Attic War: The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta 478-446 B.C.* New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2019. ISBN: 978-0-300-24261-4. Pp. ix, 314; maps, illustrations. Hardcover: £25.00/ \$38.00.

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Paul A. Rahe. *Sparta's Second Attic War: The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta 446-418 B.C.* New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2020. ISBN: 978-0-300-24262-1. Pp. xvii, 384; maps, illustrations. Hardcover: £30.00/ \$40.00.

Paul Rahe's two books on Spartan grand strategy are part of a broader

⁷ For a useful comparison with later responses to similar challenges, see Andrew Lambert: 'British Responses to Piracy in the Nineteenth Century', in Edward R. Lucas, Samuel Rivera-Paez, Thomas Crosbie & Felix Falck Jensen (eds.), *Maritime Security: Counter-Terrorism Lessons from Maritime Piracy to Narcotics Interdiction* (Amsterdam: IOS Press, 2020; NATO Science for Peace and Security Programme, 2020), pp. 77-96.

collection of works by the author, focused on the renowned ancient Greek city-state.⁸ The two books are in fact two volumes of the same work that has been spaced out by the author due to its sheer size. They are the latest additions to the existing canon of books on classical Sparta, mirroring the author's dedicated interest over the course of the years. Thus, the books are best understood as part of a broader writing effort aimed at putting Sparta in the forefront compared to most publications about Ancient Greece, focusing on Athens.

Thematically, both works belong to the field of strategic studies, and are written for strategists. Rahe's understanding of strategy as a bridge between policy and the use of force highlights the continuities of the concept and its relevance to us in the modern world. The field of strategic studies uses history as its core discipline and often sees a practical element to it, beyond theoretical understating. This causes problems both with more conventional historians as well as strategy practitioners.

When Edward Luttwak wrote his *Grand Strategy of the Roman* and then *Byzantine Empires*, he received a storm of angry reviews by Roman historians for his anachronist outlook and liberties regarding his approach to the primary texts. Indeed, anachronistic approaches are an anathema as any historian will argue. Rahe, apart from possessing an understanding of the Ancient Greek world, is a trained classicist with an in-depth knowledge of Ancient Greek and Latin, who can engage with the ancient text first-hand, an ability he has demonstrated as a student of Donald Kagan, the renowned classicist who has provided arguably the most popular translation of Thucydides. This separates him from many strategists, including Luttwak. By developing this detailed study on Ancient Sparta, Rahe has done two things: first he demonstrated that you don't need to have a formulated definition to grasp a concept (strategy); and secondly, that the continuity of strategic conduct gives the whole discipline of strategic studies credibility. Indeed, Rahe's work is a testament to the way strategic studies *ought to be* studied, that is by trained experts in different areas who have the ability to bring those particular events within the broader framework of strategy, rather than generalists who shoehorn events in order to build theories.

In essence, this work rests on a fulcrum between history and political science, much like the field of strategic studies itself. What the author attempts to do is to enrich the field of strategic studies with an in-depth historical study of Spartan policymaking in the fifth century B.C. His message is a simple one: the character of war might change but its nature does not. If one can go beyond the particular challenges that the ancient Spartans had to face with their policymaking, one realises that at their core, these are the same

⁸ These include *The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta: The Persian Challenge* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2015), and *The Spartan Regime: Its Character, Origins and Grand Strategy* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2016)

challenges that any statesman, civil or military leader goes up against even in our own times.

The books cover a period of roughly sixty years, from the end of the Persian Wars to the Battle of Mantinea in 418 BC. These were turbulent years for the Hellenic world since the Persian retreat led to a power shuffle that changed the entire region. In this new world, Greek city-states, primarily Athens and Sparta, found themselves engaged in esoteric discourses regarding their roles as leading actors, and contemplating their future prospects. In essence, this was a period of introspection for most of the Greek states, which in a post-war context found themselves asking the question – *what now?* Rahe is writing from a Spartan perspective, a refreshing change from the traditional Athenian outlook of the Thucydidian narrative. This does not mean that the author only engages with the Spartan example, however. Indeed, his narrative is one of strategic interaction between Sparta and its perceived allies and adversaries, as he invites us to look at the conflict from a Spartan perspective and examine some of the unique issues faced by the Spartan policymakers, such as the challenges of alliance warfare, domestic partisanship stemming from a conservative and cautious regime, and, finally, the ever-present possibility of revolt. If some of these issues seem broadly similar to those faced by Athens, they had a manifestly increased importance for Sparta.

The author utilises a chronologically linear narrative, devoting time to provide analysis and commentary when the ancient text is incomplete or needs further elaboration. When the text is insufficient in providing adequate answers, the author synthesises possible explanations based on available evidence. Although this is not common practice for classical experts who prefer to stick to the details in the text, Rahe's interpretation of events never seems excessive or out of proportion. His work is focused more on the perceived challenges that Sparta faced rather than on a strict presentation of fact. This is a conscious choice by the author who himself admits as much, pointing to the lack of extensive primary evidence from the period. The overwhelming majority of evidence we possess about the Peloponnesian War comes from Thucydides' *History*. Some piecemeal details can be found in the works of Roman authors such as Plutarch in his *Parallel Lives (Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans)*. Thus, our ability to access the ancient world, let alone the halls of Spartan policymaking is rather limited.

The books are more concerned with presenting the audience with a viable picture of the strategic thinking of the ancients, and what that might look like, rather than debating semantics. This raises some issues with historians who might criticize Rahe's choice of approach. The main problem with an approach like that is that it might sacrifice data and shape interpretation accordingly for the purposes of constructing a timeless argument about the nature of strategy. The entire scope of the books is to make us understand Spartan strategy through a contemporary prism. The title

itself (*Grand Strategy*) infers modern understandings of policy in an American-centric and neoliberal sense. Moreover, the author's own involvement as thought leader for American foreign policy justifies as much. This is important since it exposes the author's intended audience. The two books are not meant for the general reader, nor the seasoned philologist. Rather, they can best be read as military histories or international relations' cases studies of a particular polity with a clear understanding that leads to action. Although the books are more interested in describing conduct, they inadvertently lead to prescribing conduct, which is clearly one of the aims of the author. The main reason behind the presentation of the concept of a Spartan grand strategy in such a way is precisely to show how this case study can be used to produce 'lessons learnt' and actionable advice for policymakers.

In terms of historiography, the books provide two main contributions. The first is the change of scope from Athens to Sparta when looking at ancient Greek politics and war in the 5th century B.C. The instantly striking example of this is the title itself, and the reference to the *Attic Wars*, as opposed to the 'Peloponnesian War'. This is significant because it adds an important element to the existing literature which is severally lacking when it comes to the Spartan perspective. This change of scope also allows the author to explore areas which researchers did not have to spend too much time on when pondering about the war from an Athenian point of view i.e., the issue of alliances and domestic politics and their relative importance when it came to Sparta. Unlike Athens, Sparta had to keep its allies pleased and on the same page in order to maintain the unity of its alliance. So, unlike the Athenians who ruled their own coalition with an iron fist, Sparta had adopted a *primus inter pares* approach to her allies, adding an extra layer of nuance to their strategy making.

This leads to the second important historiographic contribution of the books, namely that unlike the traditional canon of understanding of the Peloponnesian War as a result of external factors and classical *realpolitik* thinking, Rahe argues that the domestic political environment of each city state was in fact the reason behind the hostilities. In simple terms, what Rahe proposes is that the micropolitics and characteristics of the small cities were equally, if not more important than foreign factors. Overall, the books do not deny agency to the foreign policies these city states had, rather, they enrich the existing literature by providing a fresh and convincing argument about the importance of domestic politics in international conflict.

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