

NEW VOICES IN CLASSICAL RECEPTION STUDIES

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'GO, TELL THE PRUSSIANS...':

**THE SPARTAN PARADIGM IN PRUSSIAN MILITARY THOUGHT DURING THE LONG
NINETEENTH CENTURY**

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ABSTRACT

This paper will aim to explore Sparta's significance as a paradigm in Prussian military thought – a subject which has thus far received little scholarly attention. Analysis and discussion of a variety of sources – ranging from speeches given in Officers' Clubs to stenographic reports of parliamentary sessions (or even turn-of-the-twentieth-century antimilitarist literature), will show that ancient Spartan history and *mores*, and in particular the Spartan art of war, were often portrayed as providing useful precedents for the Prussian military. Commentators frequently saw the Officer-Corps as embodying a type of 'new Sparta' in Prussia, recreating a similarly militaristic and socially exclusive society in contemporary terms.

I would suggest that we can see this idealisation of and identification with Sparta in such circles as constituting a specifically military application of that philhellenism which had already become so prevalent in Prusso-German culture since the age of Winckelmann. Here, far from its habitual preserves of salon and study, *Schwärmerei* for Greek ideals could usefully be applied to the practical problems of barracks and battlefield.