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**Stephanie Budin, *The Myth of Sacred Prostitution in Antiquity*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Pp. xi, 366. ISBN 9780521880909. \$90.00.**

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In a contribution to the Blackwell Companion to Greek Religion edited in 2007 by Daniel Ogden, I complained that the question of "sacred prostitution" was still hindering studies on "the religion of women" in ancient Greece, such as was the case in Matthew Dillon's book on the subject. I confess that my lament was rather self-centered, insofar as I had addressed this topic in my own PhD on "L'Aphrodite grecque", which was published in 1994.<sup>1</sup> In the chapter on Corinth, I refuted what I called then "the historiographic myth of sacred prostitution", building my argument on a close assessment of the literary and epigraphic evidence. In 2007, I took up the case again, summarizing the argument from 1994, which had been rarely addressed till then. I concluded that other controversial occurrences, such as the sanctuary attributed to Aphrodite at Gravisca in Etruria or the sanctuary of Eryx in Sicily should be seriously studied too. These preliminary reflections are intended to show how welcome a book entitled "The Myth of Sacred Prostitution in Antiquity" can be, extensively broadening the focus that I had limited to Corinth. Stephanie Lynn Budin has taken the opportunity to challenge this old problem in a synthesis that is not the first to consider "sacred prostitution" as a "mythe historiographique" (as D. Arnaud had already called Babylonian prostitution in 1973<sup>2</sup>), but she conveniently provides almost every piece of evidence and confronts this complex *dossier* as a whole.

The thesis supported by the author is clearly stated at the very beginning: "Sacred prostitution never existed in the ancient Near East or Mediterranean" (p. 1). The question of definition is addressed in the first chapter called "Introduction". However, there is some ambiguity in searching for the definition of a practice that is supposed to be nonexistent. Budin is conscious of this situation but it does not prevent her from pointing out that "three separate types of sacred prostitution are recorded in the Classical sources" (p. 3), that is once-in-a-lifetime prostitution and/or sale of virginity in honor of a goddess, professional prostitutes owned by a deity's sanctuary, and temporary prostitution, before marriage or during certain rituals. It would be more correct to state that these three situations have been interpreted as instances of "sacred prostitution" by modern scholars. Confronting different existing definitions of sacred prostitution, the author offers her own: "Sacred prostitution is the sale of a person's body for sexual purposes where some portion (if not all) of the money or goods received for this transaction belongs to a deity" (p. 3). Let us immediately remark that such a broad definition implies that many epigrams gathered in the *Greek Anthology* could have referred to "sacred prostitution" insofar as prostitutes and courtesans are often shown dedicating some part of their gains to Aphrodite. In this sense, the cultic

veneration by prostitutes of Aphrodite should be called "sacred prostitution", an extension which is not present in the scholarship discussed by Budin. As "sacred prostitution" is said to be a modern construct, why should it be necessary to give a definition which is broader than such a construction? On the other hand, she rightly underlines that several scholars confuse sacred prostitution, which implies an economic aspect, with "sacred sex", which would refer to more specific categories of intercourse in sacral contexts. She also rightly emphasizes the fact that the interdisciplinary shape of the issue makes it particularly difficult to grasp. Scholars in Classics are told by their familiar evidence that sacred prostitution existed in the Near East, although the specialists of Near Eastern areas do not perceive it so clearly in their own evidence. Budin's investigation particularly succeeds in pinpointing the discomfort of many scholars referring to "sacred prostitution" and the number of contradictory statements this subject entails. Budin's Introduction also refers to the most popular theory on this matter, by R.A. Oden Jr., who sees sacred prostitution as a literary motive used to denigrate an "Other". Even though the interpretation fits pretty well with Christian apology and its criticisms of paganism, Budin correctly calls this view into question as a general interpretive clue that would be appropriate in each case. The ten chapters following the Introduction, except for the last one, collect and analyze the ancient evidence on which the "myth" has been built, from the Near Eastern, Greco-Roman, as well as Christian corpus of texts.

Chapter Two addresses the Near Eastern evidence, consisting of a meager number of texts, which use terminology open to various interpretations. These texts are Sumerian, Akkadian, Ugaritic, and Hebrew, and have been extensively studied by S.M. Hooks in his unpublished dissertation on "Sacred Prostitution in Israel and the Ancient Near East" (1985). This text is nearly impossible to find and this situation would be a good reason to reassess the evidence and the negative conclusions that can be drawn regarding the existence of "sacred prostitutes". Classicists will find in Budin's study a convenient access to all these texts, but are invited to look at the studies of specialists (e.g. p. 20-21, note 36). The conclusion of Budin's Chapter Two rests in just one sentence: "There were no sacred prostitutes in the ancient Near East" (p. 47). A sharp statement, indeed!

Chapter Three ("The so-called 'evidence'") points out the main paradox related to sacred prostitution: there is no evidence for sacred prostitution within the Near Eastern evidence but the Classical corpus provides a lot of texts rooting such a practice there. Therefore, the chapter brings together, in the most popular translations available, "the more blatant examples, where there is at least a word or description that might summon images of sacred prostitution" (p. 48). These translations are interesting, since they are often saturated by preconceptions about what the translator believes to be "sacred prostitution". A typical circular problem well denounced by Budin.

Chapter Four ("Herodotos") addresses the core of the case for sacred prostitution, that is Herodotus' account of Babylonian customs. In 1.199, he describes "the most shameful" of these customs. Every local woman must sit in the sanctuary of Aphrodite once in her life to have intercourse with a foreign man outside the sanctuary. The silver given at this occasion becomes sacred.<sup>3</sup> Once discharged of this obligation, the women may go home, quickly for the prettiest of them, after several years for some others. This passage is correctly seen by Budin as the touchstone of the "myth of sacred prostitution". Therefore, it deserves close attention and the whole chapter tries to understand "how Herodotus' notion of the Babylonian women's

prostitution came about, what the story's origins are, and why it came into being" (p. 60). Budin extensively records the current debates about Herodotus' work and his way of working, with regard in particular to the veracity of his narratives and the accuracy of his sources. The "Liar's school" is knocking on the door... This patchwork of opinions remains unquestioned and ends both on a statement that "Herodotos is complicated" and that "chapter 1.199... is a unique passage in a unique text". Accordingly, this chapter is evaluated as "one of the very few instances where one might argue that Herodotos did in fact construct his data for the sake of effect" (p. 66). If Herodotus effectively created the "Babylonian custom", the next step is to explain how and why. The first question is resolved by the statement that it would be "an inversion of Greek sacred and sexual moeurs" (p. 71). As Greek married women enacted rituals such as Thesmophoria, Budin assumes that Herodotus used this Greek ritual as a contrastive model. This is all the more speculative as the other question ("why") is in no way related to this first answer. What was "the deeper, poetic meaning of sacred prostitution?" (p. 76). This would be a poetic description of the conquered state of Babylonia: bastardy and ethnic miscegenation ("intercourse with a foreigner"), religious impurity, effeminization and rape would highlight the defeat of Babylonia. Whereas Budin forcefully underlines that the respect of the *nomoi* of the others is a rule of Herodotus' work, she infers a "possible disdain for the Babylonians" from chapter 1.199, as they are portrayed accepting their "defeated, passive, penetrated (!) status..." (p. 84). I confess that I do not easily adhere to the conclusion that "the image of all local women penetrated by foreigners, desecrated, yet compliant, accepting money for their services as demanded by the gods, must ultimately have served as a harsh lesson on the vicissitudes of fortune and divinity and the wages of war and defeat for its Greek audience" (p. 89). Even though Herodotus' account of Babylonian customs (bride auction in 1.196 and prostitution in 1.199) is open to discussion, Budin's analysis does not end the debate.

Chapter Five ("In the footsteps of Herodotos: Lucian and 'Jeremiah'") is shorter and demonstrates with good arguments that both authors of the chapter's title have been influenced by Herodotus' statements about Babylonian "sacred prostitution". Lucian's description of the ritual in Byblos is seen as a homage to the father of history and the apocryphal Letter of Jeremiah that evokes Chaldean women, "consciously or subconsciously" (p. 111) included the Herodotean account of the subject. His text cannot be taken as evidence for actual sacred prostitution.

Chapter Six ("Pindar Fragment 122") addresses one of the main texts upon which the case for sacred prostitution in the Greek city of Corinth has been constructed. I completely agree with the conclusion of this chapter, which I had already proposed fourteen years ago: sacred prostitution never existed in Corinth. Beyond this minimal consensus, there are so many discrepancies between my own argument and Budin's analysis that a close discussion would be expected. This is also the case for Claude Calame's paper on the subject.<sup>4</sup> We are both cited, with others, in the chapter's introduction with the statement that we "do not offer satisfactory alternate interpretations of the poem" (p. 114) but our respective interpretations are never addressed. I shall return to this point below.

Chapter Seven ("Strabo, confused and misunderstood") addresses the different places in Strabo's *Geography* where he refers to sacred prostitution. Budin rightly underlines that 25% of our classical sources on this issue come from Strabo and that some words he used have been misunderstood by the modern audience. This is particularly true for the term *hierodoulos*, which only refers to a slave consecrated to a god, mostly

after a manumission procedure, and was too often translated as "sacred prostitute". The Babylonian issue is also dealt with by Strabo and Herodotus' influence is once more almost certain. As far as Corinth is concerned, Strabo speaks of the rich sanctuary of Aphrodite, possessing more than a thousand sacred slaves in the form of courtesans dedicated by men and women to the goddess. It was therefore easy for shipowners to ruin themselves there and this is the reason for the proverb that states "It is not given to every man to cross to Corinth" (8.6.20). Strabo returns to the subject when, in book 12 (3.36 = C559), he describes Comana in Pontus and the veneration for the goddess Ma. Comana is interpreted as a "mini-Corinth". His remarks on Corinth are on each occasion confined to the past, whilst the circumstances in Comana in Pontus--Strabo's home territory--belong to the present. Budin supports this analysis and extensively presents the three definitions of *hierodoulos*, two coming from ancient Egyptian and Anatolian traditions, the third referring to manumission. Strabo's misunderstanding of the Corinthian setting might be rooted in the practice of manumission, and in its conflation with ancient traditions about Corinth.

Strabo also provides a piece of evidence regarding the sanctuary Eryx and its "plethora of sacred bodies" who have left the sanctuary (6.2.6). Budin produces some elements of comparison from Cicero, who speaks of the "Venerii", that is the slaves of Erycine Venus. This could be the origin of Strabo's statement. Regarding the situation of Thebes in Egypt (17.1.46), where Strabo also mentions a female prostitute who was priestess of Zeus, the words used by the geographer are usually understood as belonging to the semantic field of *pallakê*, understood as "concubine". Budin argues that *palladas* is more correctly connected with *pallas* but other words in this passage clearly refer to *pallakê*. A good parallel is provided by some inscriptions from Tralles, already studied by Budin in a previous article, demonstrating that the inscriptions mentioning *pallakes* in this city had nothing to do with sacred prostitution. This could have been the case for the Egyptian setting of the term. One last occurrence of the alleged "sacred prostitution" is located in Armenia by Strabo (11.14.16), in the cult performed in honor of the goddess Anaitis. Another piece of evidence attests that girls became hierodules of the goddess, probably after a procedure of sacral manumission. But the apparent sacred prostitution of upper-class Armenian girls to which Strabo refers appears in no other evidence and Budin subscribes to Beard and Henderson's conclusion that it is "nothing like any form of prostitution" (p. 203).<sup>5</sup> And this is how a local custom, misunderstood by Strabo, came to be related to prostitution. We can subscribe to Budin's conclusion that Strabo was sometimes confused and misunderstood, especially by modern scholars. The close analysis of Eryx's case is particularly welcome.

Chapter Eight ("Klearkhos, Justinus, and Valerius Maximus") addresses these authors, with the preliminary assessment that, for them, "historical accuracy was not as important as usable exempla" (p. 211). Some fragments of Clearchus of Soli have been used to support the existence of sacred prostitution in Lydia, Cyprus, and Epizephyrian Locris. Valerius Maximus is generally connected with the idea of sacred prostitution practiced by Punic women in Sicca, and Justinus, whose text has been epitomized by Pompeius Trogus, provides evidence of this practice in Cyprus and Locri, once more. In fact, "sacred prostitution" is here essentially associated with "prenuptial intercourse with foreigners" or "intercourse with slaves", in the same way as the Lydian queen Omphale with Heracles. This is not exactly the same background as a prostitution related to a specific deity in his/her sanctuary, as discussed in the previous chapters. What remains, however, is the contrast between the girls' and

women's expected reserve and chastity, and the scandal of having sex outside the regulated context of marriage, even far away from religious settings or prostitution in its technical sense. A close analysis of all these texts leads Budin to support the thesis that "sacred prostitution" is a myth. She explains, in particular, how the vow of the Locrian maidens, well studied by Fritz Graf three decades ago, was in fact "a historiographical construction combining certain motifs of 'human dedication' in the Greek tradition with evidence from Klearchos and Pindar" (p. 228). Unfortunately, Graf's own argument is not addressed. In 2000, his paper was reprinted in translation by Richard Buxton in the *Oxford Readings in Greek Religion*. It deserves more than a slight footnote (p. 213, n. 9).<sup>6</sup> Whatever credit may be assigned to the alternative explanations provided by Budin regarding all these texts, she is right in concluding that they do not support the existence of any "sacred prostitution".

Chapter Nine ("Archaeological 'Evidence' from Italy") opens with the statement that few scholars still consider Etruscan Pyrgi and Italic Rapino as places where sacred prostitution was practiced. However, this myth is still present in some publications, on the one hand, and on the other hand, its application to the archeological material is interesting in seeing how the vicious circle of reasoning functions. This little chapter is welcome, but Budin does not mention Mario Torelli's archeological work and his interpretation in terms of "sacred prostitution" of some of the buildings recovered in his excavations. Since this professor of Perugia has been one of the main influential archeologists in Italy for the last thirty years, a close study of his work would have been expected and useful. The main place he alleged to be related to "sacred prostitution" is the sanctuary of the emporion of Gravisca in Etruria,<sup>7</sup> where some items have been interpreted as testimonies of this practice allegedly coming from Cyprus (a nude crowded woman, a graffito that would seem to attest the name of a prostitute, a bathing scene) and associated to Aphrodite, considered as the main deity of this sanctuary. These testimonies are too ambiguous to support the thesis, on the one hand, and, on the other, it has been recently suggested that Hera was the main deity of the place.<sup>8</sup> A look at Gravisca would have supported Budin's point of view.

Chapter Ten ("The Early Christian Rhetoric") brings together Christian evidence related to "sacred prostitution", which is clearly, in this case, an accusation of lustful paganism. But was it really pertinent to wonder whether the Christians believed the accusation? To address such an insoluble problem, Budin must draw a distinction between the authors (from the time of Herodotus), who did not really believe what they wrote, and their readers who were ready to accept everything. In conclusion, she writes "the myth of sacred prostitution probably dates back to the fifth century BCE, when some fellow went home to tell his family what he heard from Herodotos today ("You won't believe what they do in Babylon...!")" (p. 286).

Chapter Eleven ("Last Myths") is an anthology of modern texts, extensively quoted, which contributed to giving substance to the myth of sacred prostitution and which were produced by historians as well as novelists. Finally, under the title of *Antithesis* Budin briefly addresses the different studies which, since the 1960s, have called into question this "myth". In this respect, writing as she does that "Pirenne-Delforge... accepts its [of sacred prostitution] existence in the east, using Herodotos' silence on the matter of Corinthian sacred prostitution in contrast with his frank discussion of it regards (sic) to Babylon as evidence for its absence in the civilized west" (p. 334) is dishonest. The "civilized west" is a very curious interpretive tool and I never induced such a concept myself. It belongs exclusively to Budin.

Before concluding, let us return to Pindar to illustrate the discrepancies mentioned above. Pindar's fragment is quoted by Athenaeus writing on Corinth and its courtesans. This fragment concerns the vow that Xenophon of Corinth made to the local Aphrodite to bring her a hundred girls if he won the victory at Olympia. Pindar composed the *skolion* sung during the *sumposion* held after the thanksgiving prayer. Just before this quotation, Athenaeus mentions the supplication that Corinthian prostitutes had addressed to the Aphrodite of the Acrocorinth just before the battle of Salamis in 480 and that was immortalized in an epigram. The treatise *On Pindar* by Chameleon of Heraclea is one of his sources. This event is also mentioned by Plutarch and a scholion to Pindar. The last two texts, deriving from Theopompus, associate the supplication with Corinthian women and the scholiast attributes the epigram to Simonides. Each author has adapted his quotation to his own aims. Plutarch and the scholiast have constructed a tight parallel between the warriors and their wives, whilst passing over the courtesans in silence. Athenaeus made no mention of the Corinthian wives because the parallel he constructed was of another sort: the 480 supplication constitutes the counterpart at the public level to the vow made by Xenophon of Corinth at the private level, which is the subject of Pindar's fragment.

This fragment is extensively discussed by Budin, who correctly states that it does not prove anything as far as sacred prostitution is concerned. Therefore, she looks for another way of explaining what she considers, in fact, to be an outrageous attitude subtly denounced by Pindar. There are a lot of misunderstandings in Budin's argument about Pindar's text: she confuses the distinction between prostitutes and courtesans, a point well-argued by Calame's study, she associates symposium and orgy (p. 130: "the orgy has not yet begun") and, finally, she imposes, what in my opinion, is an incorrect interpretation of the text. For example, the mention of *poluxenai neanides* at the beginning of the *scolion* would bring to mind Polyxena, the Trojan princess, introducing therefore the themes of sacrifice, sex, and orientalism into the poem (p. 120-121). These three themes supposedly introduced by Pindar are therefore extensively pursued *ad absurdum*. Even the word *alsos*, which only refers to the sacred place in the open air, is seen as contributing to "the bestialization of the prostitutes while contributing to the overall sacral imagery within the poem" (p. 125). Furthermore, Pindar supposedly suggested in his poem that an improper sacrifice was being made, the victims (i.e. the girls) having not offered their assent!

The main problem with this chapter is the fundamental misunderstanding of the religious background of these various events related to the Corinthian cult of Aphrodite. For Budin, "Pindar's *skolion* celebrated the 'bringing' of prostitutes to a bunch of drunken Corinthians, misinterpreted by Khamaleon as a Corinthian custom (and so implicating Simonides), misread by Athenaios probably as sacral manumission" (p. 284). The *alsos* mentioned by Pindar was therefore an *andron*, the recipients were mortals, and the overall tone festive and tongue-in-cheek" (p. 140). Budin does not understand the context, that is the vow made by Xenophon of Corinth, before competing at Olympia, 'to bring courtesans to the goddess should he be victorious'. The *skolion* that Pindar composed to celebrate the victor was actually sung at the time of the symposium offered alongside the courtesans. But Xenophon's vow concerned both a sacrifice in thanks to Aphrodite, who was the chief deity of these girls and enjoyed their offerings, and an aristocratic feast under the protection of the same goddess. The point that makes Budin uncomfortable is the idea that courtesans, who are here confused with prostitutes, took part in the private and official feasts of Aphrodite at Corinth. This problem clearly arises from the analysis of the supplication of 480. In Budin's book, this complex affair becomes even more

complicated as she does not admit two facts: firstly, that a supplication before a battle might have been addressed to a goddess involved in sex and love affairs; secondly, that the city courtesans (who are systematically called prostitutes) might have been associated to private or civic rituals as intensifiers of prayers directed to Aphrodite. Therefore, Theopompus and Chameleon of Heraclea are assumed to have invented the whole story. The "Liar's school" takes up an incredible proportion in this book. But one piece of evidence has been forgotten. Still discussing Corinth, Athenaeus mentions a passage of Alexis (F255 K-A = Athenaeus 13.574b-c), who stipulates that the free women and the courtesans each celebrated their own feast of Aphrodite organized by the city. Therefore, we must accept the fact that, when facing the risk of Persian invasion, these two groups of female worshippers addressed to the poliadic goddess of Corinth the supplication on behalf of the city, which made a thanksgiving consecration in her honor after victory. Why would this scenario be a lie, unless it does not fit with some received conceptions about Aphrodite and entails the association of Greek citizen women and courtesans in the same kind of worship?

To conclude, this book usefully provides the evidence leading to the conclusion that sacred prostitution did not exist in the ancient Mediterranean area and reconsiders the various data that contributed to building this "myth". However, when some new interpretation of the "actual" meaning of various texts and documents is offered, it deserves caution.

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#### Notes:

1. Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge, "Something to do with Aphrodite: ta aphrodisia and the sacred," in D. Ogden (ed.), *Blackwell Companion to Greek Religion*, London, 2007, p. 311-323; Matthew Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion*, London, 2002, p. 199-202; Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge, *L'Aphrodite grecque*, Kernos supplément 4 (1994).
2. Daniel Arnaud, "La prostitution sacrée en Mésopotamie, un mythe historiographique ?", in *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, 183 (1973), p. 111-115.
3. The Greek term used by Herodotus to define such a sacredness is not *themis* but *hieros* (p. 60). The translation of this passage (p. 59) is not correct. Cf. p. 82 where *themis* is translated as "sacred".
4. Claude Calame, "Entre rapports de parenté et relations civiques : Aphrodite l'Hétaire au banquet politique des hetaïroi", in *Aux sources de la puissance. Sociabilité et parenté*, Rouen, p. 101-111.
5. Mary Beard, J. Henderson, "With This Body I Thee Worship: Sacred Prostitution in Antiquity", in M. Wyke (ed.), *Gender and the Body in the Ancient Mediterranean*, Oxford, 1998, p. 56-79.
6. Fritz Graf, "The Locrian Maidens", in Richard Buxton (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Greek Religion*, Oxford, 2000, p. 250-270 [German original in 1978].
7. Archaeological reports were published by Mario Torelli in the Italian journal *Parola del Passato* between 1971 and 1982. On "sacred prostitution", see *PP* 1977, p. 428, and 1981, p. 182.
8. Marie Laurence Haack, "Phocéens et Samiens à Gravisca", *Bulletin van de antieke beschaving*, 82 (2007), p. 29-40.

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