Spartan Society to the Battle of Leuctra 371 BC

Sparta was a unique and mysterious society within the Greek world. It mystified those outside its borders and was variously praised and criticised for some of its unusual features. However, due to its own lack of literary narrative, its relative geographic isolation, the Spartans’ suspicious nature, and the myth they created about themselves, the Greek contemporaries tended to have a view of their society as rigid and static. Despite knowing today that their society underwent many dramatic changes, still, little can be said about them with certainty.
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1) The Geographical and Historical Context.
1.1) The Geographical Setting, Natural Features, and Resources.

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING
- Sparta well situated 200m above sea level at the northern end of the alluvial plain of Lakonia.
- Settlements isolated, overland travel was difficult.
- About 20% of the land was used for agriculture.
- Located in the southern part of the Peloponnesian Peninsula in the Eurotas River plain.
- “Sparta not only monopolised the best land, but stood at the meeting of the main routes that linked Lakonia to the rest of the world.” – FITZHARDINGE

NATURAL FEATURES
- Mountain ranges surrounded Sparta’s west, east, and north. They formed a natural barrier to Sparta and limited communication.
- As a result, Sparta remained relatively isolated.
- “…It was the distance of her enemies, not the valour of her soldiers, that allowed Sparta to remain unwalled.” – FITZHARDINGE
- Eurotas valley is fertile with the Eurotas river giving adequate water supply.

RESOURCES
- Eurotas river was water supply. Mountains provided hunting grounds (hare and boar) and timber.
- Wool, dairy, and meat from sheep and goats.
- Soils in valleys suitable for growing crops – barley, wheat, oats, grapes, olives.
- Quarried marble from Mt. Taygetus.
- Gytheum (their port) provided murex mollusc which was used as purple dye for soldier’s cloaks.
- “Hunting…consisted of wild goats, deer and hares.” – CARTLEDGE
- “Sparta had simple but plentiful supplies of food.” – XENOPHON
1.2) Significant sites: Sparta

- ~ 8th century BC Sparta began as an amalgamation of 4 villages. Mid 700s Amyclae was added.
- However, more recent archaeological evidence suggests that there may have been a collection of 9 villages around the Eurotas River that make up Sparta.
- Not architecturally grand like Athens. Lack of architectural splendour.
- “…Neither built with magnificent temples, public edifices, but composed of villages.” – THUCYDIDES
- Sparta was more like a network of rural townships than a city.
- “…To the ordinary Greek, the town looked more like a cluster of rural townships than a city.” – FITZHARDINGE
- Thucydides stated that if only the temples and buildings of Sparta remained, it would be difficult for future generations to believe the true extent of Sparta’s power.

2) Social Structure and Political Organisation

2.1) The Great Rhetra: The Issue of Lykurgus

**LYKURGUS**

- He supposedly lived between the 9th and 7th century BC. There is no fixed time for him.
- Herodotus & Aristotle stated the new social and political organisation that emerged after the Messenian Wars was the work of Lykurgus – a law giver.
- Modern scholars generally produce a degree of scepticism and doubt over a reform by a single lawgiver.
- “Whether he was a god or a man, Lykurgus was a mythical figure.” – A JONES
- “Concerning Lycurgus…nothing can be said which is not disputed.” – PLUTARCH
- Lykurgus’ name may have been linked to the constitution to give it prestige & standing.
- Tyrtaeus, a Spartan poet in the 7th century, praises Sparta’s Eunomia, but never mentions Lykurgus. He omits Lykurgus, yet reflects the spirit of the Lykurgan system.
- Did Lykurgus’ prominence begin later? It is likely. If so, he was clearly an invention as ‘his’ reforms were already in place.
- Lykurgus was a “Spartan invention.” – K.J. BELOCH.
- Lykurgus is attributed with the reorganisation of the army, introduction of the Gerousia, the agoge, the social dominance of the masses and the ephorate. Too much for one man’s lifetime
- In Sparta, Lykurgus is highly esteemed and totally revered. Is god-like. Had a temple in his honour, with festivals and worship.
- It was not Lykurgus who was important, but the idea of him – what he represents.
- “Sparta believed in him whether he existed or not.” – BETTANY HUGHES
- Those who wanted to be part of society placed themselves under the authority of the Lykurgan code.

**THE GREAT RHETRA**

- Dates to ~ 7th century BC. Problems with this:
If Lykurgus presented it, then it means it had to be preserved orally for a number of centuries because writing was not widely practiced.

The issue of the Delphic Oracle. When did it become so influential that its utterances became law?

- Plutarch tell us Kings Polydoros and Theopompos inserted the clause into the Rhetra: If the people speak crookedly, the Gerousia and kings shall be setters-aside. However, there is debate whether this rider (amendment) came first. Ogden says the rider has more archaic language, and so, could predate the Rhetra. It also goes against the view of Spartan society evolving naturally (i.e. more freedom for Spartiate men over the centuries).

REFORMS

- Reforms of the Spartan constitution, establishment of the agoge, focus on military ethos, are all attributed to Lykurgus and recorded in Plutarch’s Life of Lykurgus.
- Establish a sanctuary to Zeus & Athena. Divide people into ‘tribes and obai’ and appoint a Gerousia.
- Herodotus mentions reforms include introduction of the ephorate.
- Redistribution of land so each citizen had a kleros and a number of serfs.
- Organised the army.
- Outlawed use of coinage; expelled useless crafts.
- Laid down rules for every stage of a Spartan’s development from birth to death.
- Gave attention to the role of women and education of girls. Spartan women enjoyed considerable power and freedom in society.
- The Great Rhetra mentions kings and Gerousia, but does not contain all elements of the Spartan constitution – it does not mention the five ephors. We might conclude that the office of ephors were established at a later date.
- Lykurgus is credited with:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic System</th>
<th>Political System</th>
<th>Social System</th>
<th>Military</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discouraged from pursuing luxury.</td>
<td>Mixed constitution, E phorate, Ekklesia (assembly), Gerousia, diarchy (two kings).</td>
<td>State ethos maintained through agoge, syssitia, hoplite training, and service.</td>
<td>Changes in structure of the army to maintain their position as the controlling elite. Introduced the syssitia and agoge.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Introducing iron currency (of course it was already introduced).</td>
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<td>Redistribution of land.</td>
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- The main purpose of the Great Rhetra was to instil and promote equality among the Spartans, but more significantly, to convert Sparta into a stable militaristic state.
- “Lycurgus… made his country pre-eminently prosperous.” – XENOPHON
2.2) Roles and Privileges of the Two Kings

**THE TWO KINGS**

- A diarchy with equal kingship. Herodotus tells us one came from the Agiad family and one came from the Eurypontid family. They claimed descent from Herakles.
- They were the war leaders but only one at a time led the army on campaign.
- Spartan government was a mixed constitution; containing elements of democracy, oligarchy, & diarchy.
- Sparta “…is made up of oligarchy, monarchy, and democracy…” ARISTOTLE

- Primogeniture – first-born son after their father becomes king.
- The dual kingship survived throughout Sparta’s history.
- The kings held their title for life.
- A Spartan king was expected to fulfil many roles: chief priest, commander-in-chief of the army, judge, & lawgiver.
- The kings are “Hereditary generals.” – ARISTOTLE
- “The Spartans viewed their kings as demi-gods.” – PARKER
- The kings were given special meats from sacrifices and double rations in mess. “…allowed for their own use as many cows as they wished.” – HERODOTUS
## ROLES AND PRIVLEGES OF THE TWO KINGS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Military</th>
<th>Religious</th>
<th>Political</th>
<th>Judicial</th>
<th>Control</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commanded the army on foreign expeditions.</td>
<td>Had two priesthoods – before campaigns they sacrificed to Zeus.</td>
<td>Prior the 6th century BC the kings could declare war.</td>
<td>Very little judicial powers.</td>
<td>Supervised by the ephors and swore a monthly oath to uphold the law.</td>
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<td>They made a sacrifice to Apollo monthly – for the city of Sparta.</td>
<td>This was changed to the Ekklesia who decided which king would lead the</td>
<td>Presided over the adoption of children.</td>
<td>Ephors acted as advisors to the kings and watched them uphold the law.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Good / bad fortune was attributed to them.</td>
<td>campaign.</td>
<td>Decided who would marry an heiress whose father had died without</td>
<td>Kings could be put on trial and deposed; for committing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Made the first offerings at sacrifices and all hides / sacrificed</td>
<td>Controlled foreign affairs by selecting &amp; appointing ephors who</td>
<td>betrothing her.</td>
<td>unconstitutional acts or being illegitimate.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>animals were theirs.</td>
<td>entertained foreign visitors.</td>
<td>All matters affecting public roads.</td>
<td>Demaratus was deposed after being charged with illegitimacy.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Responsible for the safekeeping of oracles.</td>
<td>Originally the kings received foreign ambassadors; this changed in the</td>
<td>These matters had wider implications for wealth distribution &amp;</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Gives political advantage as the king has time to develop an interpretation to present to the Gerousia.</td>
<td>5th century.</td>
<td>Spartiate numbers.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“At all public games seats of honour are preserved for them.” –</td>
<td>Both kings were members of the Gerousia.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HERODOTUS</td>
<td>Had 2 votes in the Gerousia.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Allowed a piglet from every sow’s litter; could always consult the gods</td>
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<td>(from Xenophon)</td>
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“On service the kings go first and return last…” – HERODOTUS

“All in debate shall heaven’s favourites, the kings … speak” – TYRTAEUS
2.3) Government: Ephorate, Gerousia, Ekklesia

**EPHORATE**

- The ephors were elected annually by the Ekklesia and composed of all Spartan men over the age of thirty.
- The 5 ephors were the highest authority in Sparta after the two kings.
- 5 ephors (representing each territorial region / obai)
- Ephors chosen by the Ekklesia for one year only. Had to be full citizen & 30 years +. Could not hold office more than once.
- “…enjoys supreme authority in matters of the highest importance…” – ARISTOTLE
- At end of term, could be asked to justify the actions they had taken.
- “...enjoys supreme authority in matters of the highest importance...” – ARISTOTLE
- At end of term, could be asked to justify the actions they had taken.
- “Any ephor who was too zealous in the exercise of his constitutional power at a king’s expense was well aware that he was vulnerable to retaliation at the hands of the same king in the following year.” – BUCKLEY
- Aristotle believed that the ephors “…holds the state together…” because the people/demos have a share in the magistracy.
- Main Jobs:
  - called meetings of Gerousia & Ekklesia
  - criminal & civil judgements
  - control periokoi
  - control of the Krypteia
  - maintaining homoioi’s discipline & education
  - two accompanied king to war
  - could fine people on the spot
- The Ephorate shows a change occurred in Sparta’s government after Lykurgus, as it was not mentioned in the Great Rhetra.
- In the second half of the 5th century became the most powerful political institution in Sparta because they adopted some of the kings & Gerousia’s roles.
- Took over the areas of foreign policy (took from king’s roles).
- Could also put bills towards the Ekklesia (as well as the Gerousia).
- Got some powers of the other institutions.
- Two ephors on campaign with the king – could investigate, fine, sentence to death, or exile a king (from Thucydides).
  - Gives sense that the kings have too much power, need to restrict.
- “…very poor men often find themselves elected…” – ARISTOTLE
  - Thus, all Spartans are not equal as Aristotle states that poor Spartans exist.
- Every year declared war on the Helots
- exchanged vows with the king each month (from Xenophon).

**GEROUSIA**

- The Spartan council of elders; which was made up of men over the age of sixty.
- Council of elder noblemen (28 homoioi plus 2 kings).
- Members had to be the “…best and most deserving.” – PLUTARCH Chosen by merit and by noble birth.
- Elected by acclamation in the Ekklesia.
Geronte for life.
Served as a court for capital offences – also tried cases involving the kings & could impose the loss of citizenship or exile.
Prepared laws for debate and voting by the Ekklesia.
“…with control over death and loss of citizenship rights, and the most important matters generally.” – PLUTARCH
Real power rested in ability to summon, dismiss, or reject legislation by the Ekklesia.
“…would perhaps be the most important element of government.” – WELCH
Main criticisms:
- Open to bribery and favouritism
- Were not answerable to anyone and were appointed for life → lead to corruption.
Prepares the agenda for the Ekklesia.

EKKLESIA

The assembly of the people.
Membership consisted of all Spartiates over 30 (from Xenophon).
Members had to have completed the agoge and be a member of a syssition.
Elected by the ephors and gerontes.
Could vote for or against proposals put by kings, ephors, or the Gerousia. The Ekklesia could not put forward their own proposals.
Only voted by acclamation. Yes or no. (from Thucydides)
Had the power to declare war, ratify treaties, and choose which king to lead the army.
Were presided over by the kings and gerontes; in the 5th century by the ephors.
2.4) Social Structure and Occupations: Spartiates, Perioikoi, ‘Inferiors’, Helots

SPARTIATES/HOMOIOIS

○ The real Spartan full citizens.
○ Requirements:
  - Male
  - Born to Spartiate parents
  - Completed the agoge
  - Belong & contribute to a syssitia
  - Held a kleros
  - Had to live under the Lykurgan code & conform to strict social behaviour
○ Privileged class holding all political power.
○ Forbidden to engage in farming. Full time soldiers. State supported them.
○ Perioikoi and Helots outnumbered Spartans by several thousand.
○ Perioikoi always sided with the Spartans.
○ Homoioi translates to equal. Meant to have equal life, kleros and wealth.

PERIOIKOI

○ ‘Dwellers around’ or ‘those on periphery’.
○ Members of different communities spread around Laconia and Messenia. Lived in small villages/towns. Not unique to Sparta.
○ Allied to Sparta.
○ Not citizens – not permitted to be part of the Spartan political system but were subject to Spartan laws.
○ Not permitted to intermarry with Spartans.
○ Had monopoly on trade and manufacturing. Were the economic heart of Sparta and manufactured goods such as furniture, armour, weapons, and ships. Were fisherman, and craftsmen – traded with other Greek communities. Used silver & gold currency.
○ As Spartiates were forbidden to engage in trade, the Perioikoi gained considerable wealth. Paid taxes.
○ “The economic role of the Perioikoi must have been an important one.” – PLUTARCH
○ Were apparently autonomous and self-governing but could not form independent alliances.
○ Supervised by the Ephors who could put them to death without trial
○ Advantages of being loyal to Sparta outweighed the advantages of rebelling.
○ Never allied themselves with the Helots.
○ Were contented with their situation: security in Sparta, had monopoly on trade, free to do as they wished except in times of war.
○ “The Spartans could not get on without the Perioikoi or the Helots.” – MICHELL
○ “Spartans were bound to them, certainly by no tie of affection.” – GROTE
INFERIORS

○ Hazy category of people who either lost their citizenship or never qualified, but at the same time, were not Helots or Perioikoi.
○ Spartans had a code of honour through life; cowardice in battle resulted in public disgrace. If disgraced, the man lost political rights, had to wear special clothes, shaved head, no one to eat or exercise with him, no marriage, had to sit alone in public.
○ Tresantes – Cowardly Spartiates. ‘Tremblers’.
  – Had been deprived of their citizenship, not necessarily permanent.
  – Could fight with the Spartan army but in separate, ‘inferior’ units.
○ Partheniai – Illegitimate children of helot men and Spartan women born during the Messenian wars. Sent off to colonies to live.
○ Mothakes – Sons of Helots who had been taken as playmates for Spartan boys.
  – They had subsequently shared in the training of the agoge.
○ Neodamodes – Freed helots. Helots whose courageous military service earned them freedom. Not true Spartiates and did not share in political rights.
○ Trophimoi – sons of foreigners sent to Sparta for education.

HELOTS

○ Lowest level of society. Comprised ~70% of the population but had no political rights.
○ Were state owned serfs, bound to the land and could not be bought or sold.
○ Tyrtaeus compares them to donkeys worn down by heavy loads.
○ They were discontented and rebellious.
○ Thucydides reports that Spartans “constantly take most of their decisions with a view to precautions against the Helots.” Emphasising that they were people always ready to revolt.
○ Lowest class in Spartan society. Had no political/legal rights at all.
○ "The Helots are made to perform the most ignominious and degrading tasks…” – MYRON (3rd century).
○ Occasions where they could be given freedom – Neodamodes.
○ Sometimes served as light skirmishers in battle. Were used to supplement declining number of soldiers.
○ Worked the land and did most menial labour – allowing Spartiates to focus on military training & freeing women from many household chores.
○ Obliged to pay ~50% of what they produced from the kleros they worked to their masters. Entitled to a portion of what they produced.
○ “Half-slave, half-free.” – POLLUX
○ Information extracted from Xenophon:
  - Often publicly humiliated by Spartan masters.
  - Subject to random killings by the Krypteia if found roaming at night.
  - Could be selected for public beatings as an inducement to other helots to behave.
  - Had war declared on them each year by newly elected ephors.
Spartan Socio-Political System

- Two Kings (Religious and military leaders)
- Gerousia (Council of Elders)
  - Hereditary positions
  - Aristocratic
  - Worked closely in running of state
- Ephors (5 of them elected for one year)
  - Devised state policy
  - Controlled Kryptia
- The Ekklesia (assembly)
- Inferiors
  - Perioikoi (limited local rights)
- Helots (Serfs)
2.5) The Spartan Army: Training (Agoge), Composition

**TRAINING (AGOGE)**

- The agoge was the rigorous education and training program mandated for all male Spartan citizens.
- Said to have been created by Lykurgus.
- “Obedience was one of the chief characteristics of the classical Spartan.” – WELCH
- The purpose of the agoge was the socialisation and development of values that served Sparta’s needs.
- It also aimed to prepare the best possible warriors – with physical and mental preparation.
- They were deliberately underfed to encourage self-sufficiency.
- Physical preparation – phalanx tactics, endurance.
- Mental preparation – courage, obedience, discipline.
- “He emerged into manhood mentally and physically tough and hardened…” – MICHELL
- “It was the intense discipline and training that allowed them to fight effectively…” – OBER
- The system of education, training, and socialisation turned boys into fighting men whose reputation for discipline, courage, and skill was unsurpassed.
- Boys sung Tyrtaeus’ poetry to inspire aggression and patriotism.
- The whole purpose of the education system was to develop “…smart obedience, perseverance under stress, and victory in battle” – PLUTARCH
- Brief stages of the Agoge:
  - Examined by ephors after birth at the Lesche.
  - Between the ages of 7-12, the boys were inducted into the agoge in order to weaken ties to the family and to strengthen their bond and focus to the state.
  - “It broke in boys, like horses are broken in whilst colts.” – PLUTARCH
  - By the ages of 13 – 18, the boys began intensive training under stricter codes of behaviour.
  - By the ages of 18-20 the boys could join the krypteia.
  - By the ages of 20-24, the boys would graduate the agoge, could be selected for the 300 bodyguards of the kings, and were allowed to marry, but still lived in the barracks.
  - By the ages 24-30, they were fully trained hoplites, mostly married, members of the syssitia, but not citizens.
  - Between the ages 30-60 they could be fully qualified Spartiates/Homoioi.
  - When they were 60 + they qualified for the Gerousia.

**RITES OF PASSAGE**

- **KRYPTEIA**
  - Boys are abandoned with only a cloak and a dagger.
  - They patrol the roads; with the job of killing helots.
  - Purpose: the child is able to kill and handle death.
- **FESTIVAL OF ARTEMIS ORTHIA**
- Eirenes line the sides. Each boy (age 14-16) has to run the gauntlet, pick up cheese, and bring it back; whilst the Eirenes whip them.
- Boys have died – whipped to death.
- Purpose: boys are showing they have perseverance and endurance.
- Will find a syssition is successful.
- “A brutal rite of passage…” – HUGHES

○ However, there is a revisionist view of the Agoge, by Kendall. He argues that the Agoge festivals were the institutionalise religious festivals. And his argument is supported by the lack of archaeological evidence. Yet, it is opposed by writing of historians.

**COMPOSITION**

○ Structure:
  - Thucydides says the organisation of the Spartan army was based on a row of 8 men deep.
  - Xenophon says “the average row was 12 men deep.”

○ Hoplite: the most common type of heavily armed foot-soldiers in ancient Greece.

○ Spartan culture was a warrior community – reputation amongst other Greek polises based on pre-eminence at war (Xenophon).

○ Education and training of Spartiates focused on their roles as hoplites in the phalanx.

○ “An honourable death is preferable to a dishonourable life.” – XENOPHON.

○ Fleeing the battlefield – loss of honour, become Tresante.

○ “Come back with your shield or on it.” – PLUTARCH

○ Cloth tunic covered by bronze breastplate.

○ Helmet made of thin bronze, often decorated with crest of horse hair. Had no earholes, would have been virtually death on battlefield.

○ Bronze greaves for lower leg protection.

○ 3m long spear – thrusting not throwing.

○ Spartan army did not have cavalry or bows & arrows. “… arrows were regarded by the Spartans as the weapons of the womanly and weak.” – CARTLEDGE

○ In war, the army was supplemented by perioikoi and lightly armoured helots.

○ “The commander should outclass his troops … in stamina and courage.” – AGESILAUS

○ Phalanx: Could be as many as 8 rows deep, and moving in formation, they were nearly unstoppable so long as their rear and flanks were protected. The phalanx was perfect for combat on open ground or level terrain.
Retreat tactic: The retreat tactic can be seen in the Battle of Thermopylae, where a faked retreat was used to lure the Persian immortals in the narrow parts of Thermopylae. The retreat was followed by a fast U-turn and reformation of the wall of shields and a fast march against the opponent which had already lost its cohesion trying to chase the retreating phalanx. That is the reason of the great number of Persian causalities. This tactic is sometimes also referred to as the ‘anastrofi’ or ‘U-turn’.

“SPARTAN SANDWICH”
Told to us by Herodotus.

Weaknesses of the Phalanx:

- If the opponent concentrated their forces in one central point, they could break the shield wall.
- The largest weakness inherent in the phalanx formation was in the weak flanks. Basically left unprotected, the phalanx flanks were open to cavalry charges, artillery barrages and rushing hordes of enemy infantrymen.

The role of the Spartan Army:

- Military – operating through the Peloponnesian League the Spartan army was responsible for the defence of Sparta and her allies from any external threat whether it be Greek or Persian.
- Civic – all warriors were citizens who made decisions about war and peace as members of the assembly.
- Domestic – suppression of helots.
- Economic – consumers of goods produced by periokoi and helots.
- Ideological – transmitters of military values, such as heroism, unity, loyalty, obedience, sacrifice.

2.6) Control of The Helots: The Military, Syssitia, Krypteia

CONTROL OF THE HELOTS

- Helot revolt was greatest fear of the Spartiates → could destroy unique social structure
- debate amongst historians regarding extent of threat
  “…as a city ruling over a large discontented population of subjects…she must always be prepared to fight…They were always bitterly dissatisfied and ready to rebel, whenever an occasion presented itself…” - BURY
- Fear caused by the outnumbering of the Spartiates by the helots (10000: 170000-224000)
- Houses were scattered to discourage banding
- According to Critias → Spartans had removable arm bands on their shields, special locks, and always carried a spear in fear of a revolt
  “…immediately upon taking up office the ephors would declare war on the helots, so that they could be killed without pollution (ramification).” – PLUTARCH

THE MILITARY

- Buckley argues the commonly held view → main role of Sparta’s military was to discourage the much-feared helot revolts.
Spartan policy … always greatly affected either directly or indirectly by the Helots. Helot revolt threatened the existence of the Spartan state.” – BUCKLEY

It was necessary for Spartans to be raised full-time soldiers; capable of battling against helot revolts. “Spartans did…genuinely fear helot revolt.” – CARTLEDGE

The army played a domestic role in the suppression of helots. “…they assign to the helots every shameful task leading to disgrace…so that they would never forget they were slaves.” - MYRON

This is why half of the Spartan army always remained in Sparta.

THE SYSSITIA

Syssitia was the name for the meals the Spartans (Homoioi) shared together in the messes.

“…maintaining equality among men.” – PLUTARCH

Spartans would have to eat with their brothers.

“…at the banquets and drinking entertainments of the men it was fit for the guests to sing the paean” – ALCMAN

The syssitia patently served to bring kinship groups together, and in having those who would fight together eat together in peacetime, a strong bond was formed.

The syssitia in effect became an extended family, where all were "children of the state"

Helots were responsible for providing Spartiates with their syssitia contributions “…and in giving land over to them they set them a portion which they were constantly to hand over.” - MYRON

Failure to be elected excluded one from citizenship, and were socially humiliated.

“…exclude anyone who wasn’t able to pay this particular due.” – ARISTOTLE

“…enforces the exclusive status of the Spartiates in a society.” – BRENAN

Design credited to Lykurgus to instil military ethos and break family bonds.

“The family unit counted very little.” – BETTANY HUGHES

THE KRYPTEIA

Secret police force of young Spartan men. Run by the ephors who annually declare war on the Helots.

They entered valleys at night hunting down and murdering any Helots they found.

Cartledge believes the purpose was “… to murder selected troublemaking helots and spread terror among the rest.”

“Rumour of bloodthirsty adolescent death squads created a reign of terror to help keep control over the large population and remind them of Spartan dominance.” – BETTANY HUGHES

Played a major role in the control and suppression of helots.

Portrayed as tyrannical/vicious weapon.

Method of enforcing the laws against the Helot population

Plato viewed the Krypteia as part of the Agoge. “Frequently … killing helots who stood out for their physique and strength.”
2.7) Role and Status of Women: Land Ownership, Inheritance, Education

- Unlike their Athenian counterparts, Spartan women were highly visible in Spartan society.
- In no other Greek polis did women have the privileges and freedoms like in Sparta. For they exercised and mingled freely with the menfolk.
- Women who died in childbirth were given the same funerary status as men killed in battle – marked graves.
- “Women underwent the servitude of maternity as men did the servitude of war.” – SIMONE DE BEAUVIOR
- Spartan women were forbidden [by Lykurgus] from wearing make-up, jewellery, or perfume (Plutarch).
- Outside writers critical of Spartan women because of their differences.
- They had more control over their financial situation – because the men were frequently away at war, they were responsible for managing the kleros.
- Had a reputation for great beauty. “… land of beautiful women.” – HOMER.
- Excluded from holding public office, and did not have the right to vote.
- Spartan women were “…very unique in the ancient world.” – BURROW
- “Spartan women live without restraint in every improper indulgence and luxury…they were unruly and undisciplined.” – ARISTOTLE. (misogynistic view) Aristotle misunderstands Sparta’s endeavour for procreation. It is not about hedonism, but creating children.

**LAND OWNERSHIP AND INHERITANCE**

- The kleros could be passed down within families, and in cases where there was no son to inherit, daughters became heiresses.
- Women could own land. “… nearly two-fifths of the whole country are held by women.” – ARISTOTLE
- Upon marriage, women tended to their husbands land as well as their own.
- They did not lose control of their inherited property upon marriage including dowries.
- Managed the kleros whilst me were at war.
- “…they were entitled to own and manage property…in their own right…” – CARTLEDGE
- Spartan women were able to acquire wealth – inheriting from fathers and husbands.
- These entitlements were viewed by other Greek poleis as too liberal and with men away at war and women running the kleroi, some feared this would lead to gynaikokratia – ‘government run by women’ (Aristotle). Aristotle has incorrectly equated property ownership with citizenship rights.

**EDUCATION**

- Participated in sport – inscription at Olympia telling of Kyniska’s victory at the Olympics in chariot racing.
- Had an education and were encouraged to be athletic and active. As well-fed as boys – unusual for Greece.
- Assumed they were at least partially literate – although very little evidence for this.
“… there is reliable evidence that Spartan women could at least read, if not write …” – CARTLEDGE

Forbidden by Lykurgus to weave or spin – done by Helots.

“They did not have to prepare and cook food, make clothes or do the housework: Helot women did all that for them.” – CARTLEDGE

Physical training included running and athletics – sometimes with boys in the agoge (Plutarch).

Eugenic principles underlie much of Sparta’s reproduction. By eliminating weak male infants, they assured survival of the fittest. The rigorous training of women, including the bibasis, ensured women were fit and fertile → could thus produce strong warriors.

Physical fitness was seen as essential to produce sons who would be warriors (Plutarch).

Instead of lamenting at the death of their sons, Spartan women took pride in their bravery (Plutarch).

Spartan girls were renowned for their beauty, athleticism, and independence – they ridiculed Spartan boys who were skinny and underdeveloped (Partheniai)

Were unofficial enforcers of the Spartan code – LITTLEFAIRISM.

**SPARTAN WOMEN SOURCES**

*All from Sayings of Spartan women – PLUTARCH*

- **Darmatria**
  
  After hearing that her son was a coward and unworthy of her, Damatria killed him. This is the epigram about her: Damatrius who broke the law was killed by his mother, she a Spartan lady, he a Spartan youth.

- **Archileonis**
  
  Some Amphipolitans visited Archileonis after her son was killed in battle. She asked them if he had died nobly, in a manner worthy of Sparta. They heaped praises on him and declared that in his deeds he was the best of all the Spartans. She said ‘Strangers, my son was indeed noble and brave, but Sparta has many better men that he.’

- **Gorgo**
  
  When Gorgo, wife of Leonidas was asked by Leonidas was asked by Athenian women ‘Why are you Spartan women the only ones who rule over their husbands?’ she answered ‘Because we are the only women who bring forth men.’

- **Kyniska**
  
  ‘My father and brothers were kings of Sparta. I Kyniska, won a victory with my swift-running horses and set up his statue. I claim that I am the only woman from all Greece to have won his crown.’

- **Mother of Pausanias**
  
  When the Spartan king Pausanias was accused of treacherously conspiring with the Persians, he sought refuge in a temple. It was sacrilege to punish someone taking sanctuary in a sacred place, but Pausanias’ mother found a solution. She place a brick at the entrance of
the temple. Following her lead, the ephors walled up the temple so Pausanias starved to death.

- **Unnamed Spartan woman**
  When a Spartan woman heard that her son had fallen in battle, she said: ‘Let there be weeping for cowardice but you child, without a tear do I bury you. You are my son and Sparta’s too.’

*Extract From Constitution Of The Spartans – XENOPHON*

- Not a Spartan
- Admirer of Sparta- bias
- Ancient written
- “the highest function…was the bearing of children”
- “where both parents were strong their progeny would be found to be more vigorous”
- “a man should be ashamed to be seen visiting the chamber of his wife”
- “marriage…must only take place in the prime of bodily vigor”
- “one might select one woman…and…raise up children for himself through her”
- “at Sparta a wife will not object to bear the burden of a double establishment or…to adopt sons a foster-brothers of his own children”

*Extract from Lysistrate – ARISTOPHANES*

- Athenian play writer- comedy
- Enemy of Sparta
- “how healthy…how tough”
- “Naked exercise, jumping on the spot, heels kicked up behind”

*Extract from Life of Lykurgus – PLUTARCH*

- Roman
- Written well after the time
- “The Spartan girls have to wrestle, run and throw the javelin”
- “babies should be strong and healthy…born from strong and healthy mothers”
- “made, by jests…upon those who had misbehaved themselves in the wars”
- “sang encomiums upon those who had done any gallant actions…inspired the younger sort with an emulation of their glory”

*Extract from The Spartans – CARTLEDGE*

- Modern written source
- Gorgo - Spartan woman
- “Gorgo was sharper and smarter than all the other Spartans, especially the men in authority.”
Bronze figurine of a young female in an athletic pose

- Broad shoulders
- Narrow waist
- Wide hips
- Muscled arms and legs

Bronze figurine of Dodona Runner

- Muscular thighs
- Very exaggerated muscles
- Defined buttocks

Extract from *Laws* – *PLATO*

- “You are mistaken in leaving the women unregulated by law”
- “prone to secrecy and stealth”
- “women’s nature is inferior to that of men in capacity for virtue”

Fragment of the poetry of *ALCMAN*

- Spartan poet
- Poem about women
- “Our purple finery is not the treasure that defends us”

Extract from *Women in Ancient Greece* – *MC DONALD, F.*

- Modern written
- Written for teenagers
- “their freedom and their lack of modesty”
- “men might be absent for months…Spartan women had to be independent…manage households all alone”
- “could own land and property and decide how it should be run”
- “freely expressing their views on current affairs”
- “married late…18 or over…men aged about 25”

3) The Economy, Including:
3.1) Land Ownership: Agricultural, Kleroi, Helots

**LAND OWNERSHIP**

- Lakonia was one of the most fertile farming areas in Greece.
- Sparta had a strong agricultural economy – had most fertile land, cheap labour (helots) and could fund the Messenian wars for over 10 years.
- Lakonia was annexed and the regions of Cyunria and Thyreatis were added. This led to conflict with Argos.
- Rich plains of Messenia were annexed.
In both cases the original Achaean populations were Helotised.
The conquest of Messenia suggests that land was in short supply by the 7th century BC.
Wealth disparity existed. “While some of the Spartan citizens have quite small properties, others have very large ones.” – ARISTOTLE

**AGRICULTURAL**

- Sparta was largely an agricultural economy.
- Agricultural work and cultivation done by the helots
- Fertile Eurotas Valley allowed production of all cultivated food needs
- “Agriculture was at the heart of the Spartan economy…” – WELCH

**KLEROI**

- Land ownership is a key part of the Sparta system and economy.
- Having a kleros was one of the important aspects of being a Spartiate and a Spartiate without a kleros became an inferior.
- The kleros was one of the main features that established and maintained equality amongst the Spartiates.
- A modern historian, Hodkinson claims that the ownership of land was never equal and became more unequal as time went on creating a big division between rich and poor
- The basic landholding (kleros) was cultivated by the helots who had to annually give a fixed proportion of produce to the ‘owner’ of the kleros they worked evidenced by Tyrtaeus.
- Distribution of kleroi was ‘traditional’ and older families had larger holdings resulting in marked differences of wealth within the state
- Land divisions also included Perioikoi – Lycurgus reputedly gave 30 000 allotments to Perioikoi (Plutarch).

**HELOTS**

- Sparta was technical brilliant at exploiting resources – helots, land management, and roads.
- Required to fight in wars as light infantry.
- “The Spartans could not get on without the Perioikoi or the helots.” – MICHELL
- The helots were state-owned and tied the kleros. They were serfs.

3.2) Technology: Weapons, Armour, Pottery

**WEAPONS AND ARMOUR**

- The Perioikoi made hoplite armour and weapons – leather, copper, tin and iron were in sufficient supply as natural resources.
- From around the 6th century, after the second Messenian War, Spartiates were forbidden from engaging in any trade or work except war.
- Soldiers had:
  - Hoplon shield
  - Metal of leather cuirass (breastplate)
  - Bronze greaves (armour that protects the leg from the knee down)
  - Long thrusting spears (1.5 to 3 metres)
  - Kopis (short sword)
- Phoinikis (red cloak)
  ○ Spartans had come to dominate the original inhabitants of Laconia and Messenia through iron weapons which were stronger than bronze.
  ○ Archaeological evidence shows that high quality bronze work was being produced and exported from Laconia throughout the 6th Century BC
  ○ The ‘Bronze of a Spartan Warrior’
    - The statuette provides evidence of the hoplites dress, we can see the long cloak and bronze helmet with horsehair.
    - Brennan states that the unusual crest, side-to-side, may indicate an officer of royal status.

POTTERY

○ Painted Laconian pottery was highly valued by other Greek centres in 7th century along with bronze work vases (Herodotus).
○ Remains of Spartan pottery has been found in Egypt, Italy, Rhodes, France and North Africa.
○ Local clay was abundant, but little is known about the Spartan methods and who made it.
○ The remains we have suggest that they were interested in displaying human subjects, the figures are painted in black and sometimes there is a small use of colour.
○ The most famous piece of Spartan pottery is the ‘Arkesilas Cup’
  - The cup depicts a scene of the king Arkesilas of Cyrene in North Africa overseeing trade.
  - It demonstrates the extent of Sparta’s trade routes.
  - Unique as it depicts a contemporary foreign scene.
3.3) Economic Roles of the Perioikoi and Helots

**PERIOKOI**

- Perioikoi were Sparta’s economic muscle. Engaged in mining, manufacturing, trade.
- Vital to the Spartan military – made weapons from metals.
- Pliny and Herodotus note Perioikoi made shoes, purple garments, objects of wood and iron.
- Fisherman, shipwrights, and navy personnel at Gytheum were all Perioikoi.
- Made and imported Spartan chariots.
- Perioikoi could become wealthy – Niocles competed at Olympia.
- Plutarch suggests Lykurgus gave the Perioikoi 30,000 allotments of land.
  - We can confidently say they had a part in land distribution → were involved in agriculture.
- Perioikoi have an absolute monopoly on trade in Sparta.
- Earlier, Spartans were involved in manufacture and Spartiates could have various occupations.
  - Sometime after the 2nd Messenia War (7th/6th century BC) this changed.
  - Changed because there was now a need for a large permanent army. They had conquered Messene and were outnumbered → were now dependent on the soldiers to protect them from internal revolt and external threats.
- According to Welch up until the 6th century Spartans were also architects, potters, and painters.
- Argument against Spartans not producing → suggests they were uncultured. However, the Spartan elite were non-productive as were the Athenian elite.
- Craftsmen in Sparta were Perioikoi. Archaeological evidence:
  - bronze figures of Hermes (god of commerce).
  - krater found in Celtic grave at Vix – believed to be Lakonian → shows the trade.
  - Over 100,000 votive offerings at the Sanctuary of Artemis-Orthia. Were lead; probably came from iron ore mined at Neapolis. → Shows considerable and significant extent of manufacturing by the Perioikoi.
- “As tradesmen they must have been useful.” – MICHELL
- “The economic role of the Perioikoi must have been an important one.” – PLUTARCH

**HELOTS**

- Tyrtaeus compares helots to donkeys worn out by their burdens.
- Tyrtaeus informs us that Helots have to hand over 50% of what they produce. The remaining half was theirs – incentive to work hard.
- Spartan society had fundamentally an agricultural economy and helots were the agricultural workers.
- Their productivity freed the Spartiates to pursue military interests – even their contributions to the syssitia were provided by the helots.
- Household tasks usually performed by slaves in other Greek poleis, were done by helots in Sparta.
• Helots produced the food needed for the syssition. They were essential for a Spartan man’s citizenship.
• The threat of helot revolt prevented the Spartans from establishing an empire.
• “Spartan foreign policy was always greatly affected … by the helots.” – Buckley
• They are the machinery of production → critical to the economy.
• Agricultural industry was labour-intensive → Sparta required a large supply of helots.
• Required a full-time army to instil fear and protect Sparta from Helot revolt.
• One cannot have a non-producing military elite without an exploited and much larger productive lower class as the basis of the economy.
• Spartans did “…genuinely fear helot revolt, and with reason, in the light of the actual revolt of the mid 460s.” – Cartledge

3.4) Economic Exchange: Use of Iron Bars, Trade

**USE OF IRON BARS**

• Iron spits do not infringe on Sparta’s economy.
• Iron spits (credited to Lykurgus) seen as a deliberate introduction to stop Spartans from purchasing luxuries.
  ↓ Attaching Lykurgus’ name to a law gives it standing and prestige.
• Sparta was the one Greek polis that didn’t adopt silver currency – because they didn’t have silver. It is thus a smart economic decision to stay with iron currency. *Littlefairism*
• Cawkwell suggests that Sparta must always have used some Greek currency in order to pay mercenaries and send ambassadors abroad.
• Law that states ephors can search houses for stockpiles of gold → implies it was available. “… the possessor [of gold and silver] subject to a penalty.” – Xenophon
• According to Plutarch, gold and silver “wormed its way into the city” during the 4th century BC.

**TRADE**

• The Giglio shipwreck is evidence that Laconian goods were part of a traders’ stock.
• Horses and Castorian hounds were exported to other Greek poleis.
• Wool and flax- excellent material for clothing. Lakonian textiles highly prized in other Greek states.
• The murex mollusc was found in waters off Kythera and Gytheion- this provided the valuable red dye used in the Spartan hoplites’ cloaks, and as a sought-after export commodity
• Gytheum was also principal trading port located 46 km outside of the polis.
4) Religion, Death, and Burial, Including:
4.1) Gods and Goddesses: Artemis Orthia, Poseidon, Apollo

ARTEMIS
- Apollo’s twin sister.
- Infallible archer.
- Goddess of hunting, the forest and the moon.
- Goddess of chastity and protector of women who were about to be married or who were approaching childbirth.
- Sanctuary of Artemis Limnatis in the west Taygetus foreland.

ARTEMIS ORTHIA
- Goddess of hunting, wild animals and vegetation.
- Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia was outside the city on the banks of the Eurotas River.

POSEIDON
- Brother of Zeus.
- God of the sea and horses.
- Responsible for earthquakes and was known as the ‘Earthshaker’.
- There were several sanctuaries of Poseidon in Lakonia.
- Helots were entitled to asylum at the sanctuary of Poseidon at Tainaron.
- They believed Poseidon sent the devastating earthquake of 464 BC to punish them for violating this sanctuary by dragging helots from Poseidon’s altar and murdering them.

APOLLO
- Son of Zeus.
- Temple of Apollo at Delphi is where Apollo is believed to send messages that influence decisions of the entire Greek world.
- God of light, music and truth and bringer of health.
- Archer-god whose arrows never missed their target.
- The sanctuary of Apollo Amyklaios at Amyklai.

4.2) Myths and Legends: Lykurgus and The Dioscuri

LYKURGUS
- Claimed to have instituted government and strict social order.
- Plutarch talks of institutions in Life of Lykurgus.
- He is thought to have brought good order (Eunomia), with a conservative form of government that effectively prevented revolutions.
- Unique culture emphasizing austerity and discipline to facilitate military society.
- Herodotus tells us that the Oracle at Delphi was believed to have recognised Lycurgus’
divinity.
- Archaeological record does not support Lycurgus.
- **Tyrtaeus**, Spartan poet fails to reference Lycurgus.
- According to **Herodotus**, when he died a “…temple was built in his honour, and he is still regarded with profound reverence.”
- Modern historian **Andrews** says that “…the perpetuation of his name was one of the most successful frauds in history.”

**DIOSCURI**
- The mythical twin Spartan heroes Castor and Polydeuces.
- Dioscuri means youth of Zeus.
- Born from an egg.
- Were the twin sons of Zeus, and brothers of Helen of Troy.
- Myth is: Zeus (in swan form) came to Earth. Leda had affairs with both Zeus and Tyndarus on the same night.
- Polydeuces’ dad was Zeus → he is immortal.
- Castor’s dad was Tyndarus → he is mortal.
- In battle, Castor was killed by brothers Idas II and Lynkus.
- So Polydeuces killed Lynkus, and **Pausanius** tells us that “…Not far from Asklepios stands a trophy, raised, they say, by Polydeuces to celebrate his victory over Lynkus.”
- Polydeuces persuaded Zeus to allow him to share his immortality with Castor.
- They spent alternate days in Hades and in Mt. Olympus.
- Spartans saw the Dioscuri as patrons and protectors of Sparta.
- At Dromos, there was a sanctuary to the Dioscuri with a statue of them. They are naked – signifying both their heroic stature, and their association with athletics.
- Thousands of votive offerings have been found at Amyclae, to the Dioscuri. - archaeological evidence for their importance.
- Spartans worshipped them as they represented youth, warfare, and athletics.
- Reflected in the institution of ‘twin’ kingship.

4.3) Festivals: Hyakinthia, Gymnopaedia, Karneia

**THE HYAKINTHIA**
- This was the most important festival of all for the Spartans, according to **Welch**.
- Occurred annually in July for 3 days.
- Was a festival named after Hyakinthos – a youth who was a lover of Apollo. He died when Apollo accidentally hit him with a discus. In his grief, Apollo ordained a festival.
- Festival was held at the shrine of Apollo at Amyclae. The site was the location of a huge statue of Apollo, and the tomb of Hyakinthos. Designed to unify the state.
- **Athenaeus** (writing in the 2nd century AD) has given an account of the festival. It revolves around the mourning for Hyakinthos and their dead, then praise for Apollo. Festival had 2 stages:
  1. Sorrow and mourning for their dead. **Hooker** interprets the festival as a ritual for their own dead. Eating of bread and cakes was forbidden & a ban on
wreaths and joyful songs. Littlefairism — was the day where they could
mourn their own dead.

2. Involved the rejoicing of Apollo. Wearing of wreaths, singing joyful songs,
sacrifices to Apollo, procession to Amyclae.

○ There was processions, dancers, and chariot races. Pausanius wrote “A choir of boys … accompanied by the flute, sang the praises of the god in a high pitch.”
○ An unusual feature of the Hyakinthia was that the elite Spartans entertained the Helots.

THE GYMNOPAEDIA

○ This was the ‘Festival of the Unarmed Boys’ or the ‘Festival of the Naked Boys’.
○ According to Pausanius it was the “… most solemn of all Lakonian festivals.”
○ A dance was performed with military aspects. Historians, such as Darlington and Murray, believe it commemorated Sparta’s defeat by Argos at the Battle of Hysiae in 669 BC. It was to remind future generations to avoid such defeats.
○ The festival consisted of a series of athletic competitions and musical events among boys and men.
○ “It looks like Spartans have transformed even choral dancing into a test of endurance and an ordeal.” – PARKER
○ It has been interpreted as rite of passage on the way to manhood. May have been an initiation into the harsh life of a Spartan soldier.
○ It required “… terrific endurance.” – PLUTARCH
○ Agamoi were not allowed to take part in the Gymnopaedia. They were forced to re-enact the procession during the cold of midwinter (naked) and sing a song blaming themselves for failing to marry and produce children.
○ Agamoi were forced to give up seats to younger citizens. The were seen as a threat to the social order of the polis, and to the survival of the Spartans.
○ Thucydides states that Spartans could not go to war during the Gymnopaedia.
○ Hooker states that “The principle aim of the Gymnopaedia was the habituation of the Spartiate manhood to arduous activity.”
○ Demaratus was humiliated at the Gymnopaedia, and his status as illegitimate was emphasised (evidenced by Herodotus).

THE KARNEIA

○ Was a harvest festival that occurred for 9 days during August (late summer). Took its name from Apollo Karneios; the god of the herd or ram god.
○ Archaeologists have found coins depicting Apollo Karneious as a horned god.
○ It celebrated the migration and colonisation of the Doric people.
○ A foot race occurred where a young man was chased by an Agamoi. If the frontrunner was caught, it was a good omen for the polis. If not the future and harvest was bleak.
○ Five Agamoi (called karnetai) were chosen to cover the cost of the festival.
○ The Spartans would not venture to wars or battles during this festival.
○ The Karneia “… prevented the Spartans from taking the field in the ordinary way …” – HERODOTUS
○ It was held in the summer so there was enough food.
○ “… reflection of military training system.” – DEMETRIUS
4.4) Religious Role of The Kings

○ The kings were the most important priest in Sparta. They were the priests of the Dioscuri, as well as holding the two priesthoods to Zeus: Zeus Lacedaemonios and Zeus Uranios.
○ Performed sacrifices on the way to battle 3 times – leaving Sparta, leaving Lakonia, and before battle.
○ Elected the Pythoi to receive the oracles from Delphi. They were responsible for the safe keeping of the oracles.
○ Made a monthly sacrifice to Apollo for the polis of Sparta. “On the first and seventh day of each month each king is given a full grown animal to offer in sacrifice in the temple of Apollo…” – HERODOTUS
○ “If a Spartan king had a reasonable religious excuse, he could be forgiven for not winning a battle or even for not fighting one.” – WELCH
○ Cleomenes in 494 BC set out to invade Argolid by land, but the omens were bad, so he was obliged to go by land.
○ The Spartans completely missed the Battle of Marathon due to their religious festivals.
○ “…omens might hold back the day of joining battle or the beginning of a siege.” – XENOPHON

4.5) Funerary Customs and Rituals

○ Marked graves only for men killed in battle or women killed in childbirth. - Shows how highly they praised courage in battle and child-rearing – to have inscribed monuments.
○ Permitted for warriors to be buried on the battlefield with grave markers to show who it was.
○ One major difference compared with other Greek poleis is that the dead were buried within the city area rather than outside it.
○ “Lykurgus removed all superstition by not placing any ban on the burial within the city or on sitting tombs close to temples.” – PLUTARCH
○ Spartans were encouraged to view death as familiar and normal – removes the fear-factor.
○ A strict period of eleven days was set for mourning. The twelfth day was marked by a sacrifice to Demeter and the end of grieving.

DEATH OF A KING

○ If a king died in battle, a statue would be constructed and form part of the funerary procession – which was attended by all sections of Spartan society.
○ When a Spartan king died, horseman travelled from all over Lakonia, informing the inhabitants.
○ Women went around beating a cauldron.
○ Two people from each house (man and woman) were expected to join in the mourning; failure to do so resulted in heavy penalties.
Residents of Sparta displayed a public outpour of emotion – striking their heads and proclaiming that the king was the best king they ever had.

All political activity was ceased for 10 days (Herodotus).

“…no elections or public meetings for ten days, all of which are spent in mourning.” – HERODOTUS

After the death of a king, all debts owed to him were remitted by his successor.
5) Cultural and Everyday Life, Including:
5.1) Art: Sculpture, Painted Vases, Bone and Ivory Carving

- Sparta enjoyed an artistic Golden Age from c. 650 to 550 BC.
- The decline in Sparta’s production of carvings and pottery seem to have set in by the 6th century. One explanation for this is the increase in the number of Helots and Perioikoi and the decrease in the number of Spartiates. The fear of Helot/Perioikoi revolt engendered in the Spartans a sense of need to devote more attention to the military efficiency of the state; to the detriment of artistic pursuits.
- It was “…the necessity to keep large populations under control which turned Sparta into a bleak and barren military camp.” – FINE
- However, an alternate view is given by Oswyn Murray, who says that “…the military ethos and Spartan educational system produced a society which no longer needed the artist.”
- Yet, art is still being crafted, however, not by the Spartiates. Instead, by the Perioikoi.

SCULPTURE

- Spartan sculptors were active not only at home, but also in cultural centres such as Olympia and Delphi.
- At the Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia, over 100,000 lead figurines have been unearthed.
  - Because of the votives’ large numbers and the rough workmanship, it is believed they were mass-produced by the Perioikoi.
- Sculpture in stone and marble was mostly associated with religion.

PAINTED VASES

- Lakonian pottery was (for about 100 years; up to the 6th century) sufficiently valued to be a significant export commodity.
- Lakonian vases have been found all over Greece and the Mediterranean world – indicating production for export as well as domestic use.
- A number of early 6th century BC Lakonian vase painters have been identified. The images depicted on the vases are of animal scenes, daily life, and mythological subjects.

BONE AND IVORY CARVING

- Ivory work was another export product, reflecting the high quality of the craftsmen.
- Over 200 ivory carvings were found at the Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia.
- The ivory was imported from traders in Syria. Archaeologists have commented on the style of Spartan ivory carvings as having a strong artistic influence from the east.
- Dated to the 7th century BC, the ‘Spartan Ivory Plaque Showing a Ship’ shows a warship leaving or entering a port. It is interpreted as a decoration once fixed to furniture.
  - The plaque depicts a scene of great complexity as a realistic background to the arrival or departure of a naked hero, who is greeted or farewelled by a woman.
  - It is art, as stated by Brian Brennan.
  - It was clearly prized and therefore a suitable offering for the goddess Orthia.
5.2) Architecture: Amyklaion, Menelaion, the Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia

**AMYKLAION**
- One of several shrines built at Amyklaion.
- Not strictly a temple, but a Throne of Apollo. It was a stoa-like building with an altar, which surrounded on three sides the colossal, column-shaped statue of the god.
- One of the most important Spartan festivals, the Hyakinthia, took place at the Amyklaion.
- Admired in antiquity as the most significant shrine in all Lacedaemon (Pausanius).
- Tripods of the spoils of war against Messenia were placed at the shrine.
- The care and expense put into the throne indicates the piety and the resources of the society.

**MENELAION**
- This is a shrine to Menelaus and Helen.
- Overlooks Mount Taygetus and the Eurotas Valley.
- Excavations have found votive objects including ceramic figurines and urns inscribed with dedications to Helen.

**SANCTUARY OF ARTEMIS ORTHIA**
- Temple site dates from 8th century BC.
- Carved ivory images found at the site show the winged goddess grasping an animal or bird in either hand.
- Place of annual trial of endurance for youths in the agoge, who had to steal cheese from the altar while being whipped (Plutarch and Xenophon). The ‘Festival of the Unarmed Boys’ or the ‘Festival of the Naked Boys’. 
### Religious Sites

#### The temple of Artemis Orthia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Written evidence</th>
<th>Archaeological evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The place called the Lake Sanctuary is sacred to Standing Artemis ... They used to slaughter a human sacrifice chosen by drawing lots; Lykourgos substituted the whipping of boys and the altar still gets its fill of human blood. The priestess with the idol stands beside them; the idol is small and light. | The British School of Archaeology discovered the foundations of an archaic temple of the 6th century bc. It measures 17 x 60 m and shows signs of repairs and alterations made as late as the 3rd century. The remains of successive altars have been found, the earliest dating to the 9th century bc. The excavations at the Temple of Orthia uncovered many smaller finds, such as:  
- terracottas  
- ivory and bone carvings  
- bronzes  
- lead figurines. |

#### The temple of Athena of the Bronze House

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Written evidence</th>
<th>Archaeological evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is a sanctuary built here of Athena of the city who is also called Bronze House Athena ... and it was the Lakonians many years afterwards who erected the temple and bronze statue ... beside the altar of Bronze House Athena stood two portraits of Pausanias who commanded at Plataea ... Near the figures of Pausanias is a statue of Aphrodite.</td>
<td>Archaeologists located the sanctuary of Athena Chalkoikos, and besides Roman remains, found traces of an older stone structure. Some archaic bronzes were found, as was a rich level of geometric pottery. Bronze plates and nails were also found, which may have come from the walls. They were badly corroded.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### The Menelaion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Written evidence</th>
<th>Archaeological evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The place called Therapne was named after Lelex's daughter; Meneleus' Shrine is there, and the story is that Menelaus and Helen are buried there.</td>
<td>The Shrine of Helen and Menelaus is thought to belong to the prehistoric settlement at Therapne. The remains of a temple of the 5th century bc and its precinct have been found. Cult objects—found onsite—suggest that the peak of the hill was a place of worship.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### The Amyklaion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Written evidence</th>
<th>Archaeological evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The part of the throne where the god would sit is not a single continuous thing, but it has several seats with a space beside each of the statues; the middle part is extremely broad, and that is where the statue stands. I know no one who has measured this, but at a guess you could say it was forty-five feet ... The base of the statue is shaped like an altar, and Hyakinthus is said to be buried in it, at the Hyakinthia, before Apollo's sacrifice, they pass through a bronze door to dedicate the offerings of a divine hero to Hyakinthus in this altar.</td>
<td>Archaeologists have found evidence of settlement at Amycla from the earliest years of the Bronze Age. The precinct of Apollo is located on the acropolis at Amycla. Traces of the enclosure wall have been found. The temple is believed to have housed a colossal statue of Apollo. Coins have been found showing a likeness of this statue.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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22 Pausanias, *A Guide to Greece*, p. 69  
5.3) Writing and Literature: Alcman and Tyrtaeus

- After the 6th century there was no original poetry coming out of Sparta.
- Instead, works of Alcman and Tyrtaeus were recited in the syssitia.

**ALCMAN**

- Significant as Spartan poetry written in the Laconian dialect.
- May have lived in the 7th century BC. He may have been Spartan.
- Alcman is a poet who was sensitive to the natural attractions of the region. His lines beautifully evoke the towering mountains of Sparta, the seasons of the year, and the twittering of the birds.
- The Partheneia (maiden songs) and Prooimia (preludes to recitations of epic poetry) are notable examples.
- His Maiden Song was probably sung at festivals by girl choirs.
- Parts of the Maiden Song may be connected to harvest or initiation rites.
- There are references (by Athenaeus) to other songs, now lost, composed for Spartan boys to be performed at the Gymnopaedia festival.
- Alcman’s poetry is concerned with early Sparta – a culturally sophisticated place whose citizens were intensely interested in love and beauty.

**TYRTAEUS**

- War poetry – possibly connected with the first Messenian War.
- He wrote military songs urging courage, manliness, and discipline.
- Fragments that exist show exhortations to bravery and a warning against the disgrace of cowardice.
- The soldiers sang them, and the polemarch rewarded the best singer with a piece of meat (Athenaeus).
- Some verses were sung by Spartan warriors going into battle (Pausanius).
- His poem, Eunomia (good order) was written to inspire the flagging spirits of the Spartan soldiers during the Messenian War, and to soothe the passions of the people in the political upheaval after the war.
5.4) Greek Writers’ Views of Sparta: Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Aristotle, Pausanius, Plutarch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writer</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Views on Sparta</th>
<th>Judgement of His Reliability</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Herodotus</td>
<td>c. 480 – 425 BC</td>
<td>- Critical of the Spartan Constitution</td>
<td>- Is a cool dude ☺</td>
<td>“... fighting singly, they are as good as any, but fighting together they are the best army in the world. They are free, yes, but not entirely free; for they have a master, and that master is Law, which they fear ... Whatever this master commands they do ...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thucydides</td>
<td>c. 460 – 400 BC</td>
<td>- Impressed by Eunomia</td>
<td>- Athenian bias</td>
<td>“If Lakedaimon ever laid waste and there remained only the foundation of the temples and the public buildings, those born into a world of the far future would find it difficult to believe that the power of Sparta had deserved its reputation.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xenophon</td>
<td>c. 428 – 354 BC</td>
<td>- Admirer of the Spartan state and the agoge</td>
<td>- Admires the Spartan military and the system that produces it; and makes no attempt to analyse or criticise it - This leads to him being called a ‘Lakonophile’ - Probably couldn’t afford to criticise his ne whome - Has eyewitness reports</td>
<td>“I must needs admire this legislator, Lykurgus, and hold him to be one of the wisest of mankind ... he brought his fatherland to this pinnacle of prosperity.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aristotle</td>
<td>c. 384 – 322 BC</td>
<td>- Aristotle influenced by teacher Plato - Critical of land ownership and small groups of elite citizens - Was critical: should not have helots, women had</td>
<td>- Was an Athenian who had reason to reject Sparta’s constitution as too radical – because it differed substantially from his own.</td>
<td>“And so long as they were at war, their power was preserved, but when they had attained empire they fell; for the arts of peace they knew nothing, and had never engaged in any employment higher than war.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Contributions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pausanius</td>
<td>2nd century AD</td>
<td>- His description of buildings and monuments offers a contrast to Thucydides, who claims there were no significant temples or public buildings in Sparta. - Wrote well after the glory days of Sparta.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plutarch</td>
<td>c. 46 – 120 AD</td>
<td>- Provides background and information on early Sparta - Praises Lykurgus - Acknowledges doubt: little can be said with certainty - Wrote biographies of Lykurgus and drew on many sources we do not have today.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Describes the city as “quite small” but notes the number of “temples and monuments”.

“Lykurgus, I say, stands in rank of glory high above the founders of all other Greek states...”

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5.5) Leisure Activities

Daily Life and Leisure Activities

- Had a lot more leisure time than most other Greeks, Plutarch they “did not waste this in idleness”:
- Spartan unmarried girls participated too in athletics, contests such as Heraia (Pausanius).

**HUNTING**

- Hunting dogs - shared amongst Spartiates so all could participate.
- Foothills of Mt Taygetus were the hunting grounds.
- Hunting was done with a javelin or spear.
- Killing a boar was a rite of passage for young men, a ‘blooding’ that proved men’s virility.
- Xenophon stated, “hunting made a man ready for war.”

**EQUESTRIAN SPORTS**

- Popular throughout the populace, as Greek city states where activity was reserved the
very rich.
- Sparta dominated the 4-horse chariot event at Olympia
- Not introduced to military structure until the 4th century.
- Women could breed and train horses for competition, famously Kyniska, monument raised to success at Olympia (recorded Pausanias).
- Alcman compared beautiful women to horses = Suggesting value

**COCKFIGHTING**
- Symbolised maleness and fought to the death according to Plutarch.

**BOARBAITING**
- Pausanias – “hand reared for the fight.”

**BANQUETS**
- connected with religious duties, called symposia.
- Prohibitions on getting drunk, we have pottery scenes depicting wine gatherings.
- More lively parities were called komos.

**MUSIC**
- Dancing to the flute or the lyre was done by both genders
- Most of these dances represented battles, military drill or wrestling, or stimulated wild animal hunts
- Religious dances were also common

**SINGING AND DANCING COMPETITIONS**
- Choral and dancing competitions were held annually
- At the Festival of Gymnopaediae whole battalions of soldiers sand of their prowess and courage

**FLOGGING CONTESTS**
- Endurance contests
- Flogging of the youths at the altar of Artemis Orthia
- May have been ties in with initiation and the shedding of blood as a bond between man and god

**ORGANISED GAMES AND FIGHTS**
- Once a year two teams representing Lycurgus and Herakles were chosen to face each other in combat
- Aim was to drive the other team into the river
- There were no rules, ad kicking, biting and eye gouging were allowed
- An annual ball game with teams of fifteen seemed to have as its sole object possession of the ball at the end of the game

5.6) Marriage Customs
- Arranged by male relatives, two kings able to step in and arrange the marriage for a widowed or orphaned girl.
- Married “when they were ripe for it” – meaning in late teens, when healthy conception was most likely, male and female were approx. the same age.
- Dowries, physical attractiveness, fitness for child bearing, and social class were important factors in marriage, as evidenced by Plutarch.
MARRIAGE BY CAPTURE

○ The ritual was designed to display a man’s strength in carrying off his wife (Brennan).
○ She would then have her head shaved and dressed as a man – a symbol of leaving behind her past life, designed to assist the bridegroom (Brennan).

EUGENICS

○ Hoping to produce stronger children.
○ Plutarch, Life of Lycurgus “men sneaked out of their barracks to visit their wives”
○ produce an active coupling more likely to produce strong children – militarism

WIFE LENDING

○ Discussed by Xenophon, Polybius, and Plutarch.
○ Wives were loaned for the purposes of reproduction.
○ For example, an old man should introduce his young wife to an appropriate man to have children with.
○ Men who did not reproduce were heaped with ridicule and socially excluded.
○ Children were in a sense a form of common property.