

## SPARTAN LIFE AND SOCIETY.

### INTRODUCTION

Life in Ancient Sparta was different from other city-states, as it developed an elaborate military education program aimed at producing well trained soldiers. The program was based on physical fitness and obedience, which was necessary in order to keep the large Helot population under control. Intensive military education was compulsory for all male citizens know as **Spartiates**.

### SPARTAN EDUCATION

Spartan education was different from that of other Greeks, and certainly from our own. Children were taught basic numbers and reading so they could read simple messages and count. The Spartans were not interested in intellectual or academic activities, and subjects like science, history and geography were disregarded.

The main aim of Spartan “educators” was to bring up the next generation in a way that they would be obedient to the state and would have the courage and strength required in war.

### CHILDHOOD

When a Spartan baby boy was born he was taken by his parents to a group of elders. If the child appeared to be normal and healthy he was given back to his parents to bring him up. If the child appeared weak or handicapped he was left at the foot of Mount Taygetus to die

*“How was it in the power of the father to dispose of the child as he saw fit. He was obliged to carry it before certain triers at a place called Lesche: these were some of the elders of the tribe to which the child belonged. There business was carefully to view the child, and, if they found it stout and well made, they gave the orders for its rearing, and allotted it one of the nine thousand shares of land ....but if they found it puny and ill—shaped, ordered it to be taken to what was called the Apotatae a sort of chasm under Taygetus*

*Plutarch Lycurgas 16*

An infant child was brought up with the bare necessities (i.e. plain food and simple clothing). He was consistently bathed in wine, the reason being that if the child was weak he would faint, and therefore regarded useless to Spartan Society.

At the age of seven all boys were removed from their homes, and from that time until there were thirty they lived entirely in communal barracks.

The children had to exercise and were taught war songs.

### YOUTH

Full military training started at the age of twelve. This meant the boys had to cut their hair short, go bare foot and without under clothing. They also exercised naked. They slept in beds made of rushes which they picked themselves from the river's edge. Rushes are not very comfortable to lie on, and it is difficult to pick them without cutting one's hands. As a result of having to do this continually the boys developed tough skin.

They were also given little food, as they had to supplement their diet by stealing. This was considered as an important part of their military training and if they were caught they were whipped.

#### Boys required to steal food.

*"This young man sent the eldest of them to fetch wood, and the weaker and less able to gather salads and herbs, and these they must either go without or steal; which they did by creeping into the gardens, or conveying themselves cunningly and closely to the eating houses; it they were taken in the fact they were whipped without mercy, for thieving so ill and awkwardly."*

Plutarch Lycurgus 17

*"So seriously did the Lacedaemonian children go about stealing, that a youth having stolen a young fox and bidden it under his coat, suffered it to tear out his bowels with its teeth and claws and died upon the rather than let it be seen"*

Ibid. 18

Spartan youths were also beaten before the Altar of Artemis Orthia as is evident in the following extract "*for I myself have seen several of the youths endure whipping to death at the foot of the Altar...*" Or involved in fights as part of their military training.

The following extract the modern historian H. Michell describes the annual fights between the boys.

*"The annual fights of the youths... were certainly strenuous enough to satisfy anyone- nothing was barred... The fight between two bands of young men proceeded the night before by a drawing of lots to decide which should represent the band of Lycurgus and which that of Heracles. This ceremony took place at the Phaihian and after it was done a puppy was sacrificed to Ares. Then a boar fight took place between two animals representing the opposite sides, the outcome of which pressured the decision on the morrow.*

*Next day the two bands marched onto the place of combat, an island in the river, approached by two bridges..... Thereupon they fell on each other with stounging ferocity using their hands and kicking with their feet, biting and gouging out the eyes of the opponents in an attempt to drive the opposing sides into the river."*

H. Michell (*Cambridge, 1964*) pp.190-91.

The final stages of Spartan education began at the age of nineteen. <sup>The</sup> boy was now an **erien** and could help with the education of younger boys. He could also fight in the backline of the phalanx.

### ADULTHOOD

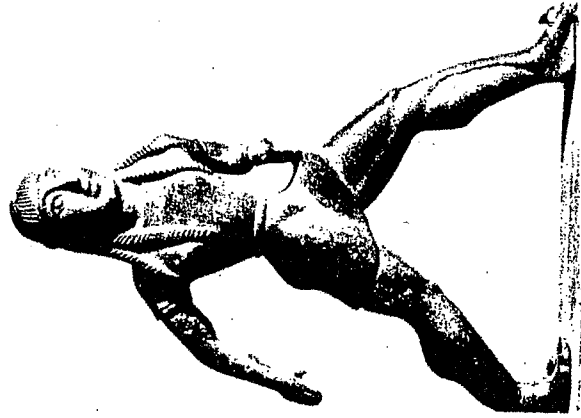
At the age of twenty<sup>or</sup>four the Spartan became a fully trained soldier and could fight in the front line. By the age of thirty he became a full citizen and was given membership to the Apella. He could now leave the barracks, grow their hair and enjoy private life. A Spartan citizen could be called up for military service up until the age of sixty.

### WOMEN.

Spartan girls were not brought up to perform domestic duties, as this was done by the Helots (slaves). Instead the girls were included in physical training and

fitness. Unlike the boys they were not involved in military training and did not live in the barracks.

The duty of the Spartan woman was to produce healthy children. This is why they exercised continuously during pregnancy. The mother's aim was to produce brave, strong courageous sons who would fight. Again Michell writes *“one woman, observing her son coming towards her inquired. “How fares our country?” And when he said, “all have perished,” she took a tile and hurling it at him, killed him, saying. “And so they sent you to bear the bad news to us!”*



A statue of a Spartan woman

# Athens

## The city

The city of Athens was very different from Sparta. In Athens, trade and ships were very important, and there were many workshops and markets. Great temples and large public buildings were built to show the wealth of the city. Poets, teachers and writers were all highly respected in Athens.

Athens was the largest city in the state of Attica. The farming land around it was not very rich, although it did produce some wheat, and a lot of olives and wine. But there were marble quarries, and lead and silver mines. There was good red clay for pottery, and there were fine harbours. Athenian trading ships sailed all over the Mediterranean.

## Government

The system of government and lawmaking in Athens was known as *democracy*. This meant that all the male citizens shared in choosing their leaders, and played some part in making laws and taking decisions. There was no King or Queen in Athens, but there was a Council of 500 men, and a large Assembly. This was a meeting open to free male citizens.

## Wealth

Athens was a very rich city. Many of its citizens were shopkeepers or traders, but only about 1% (2,000 people) were very rich. These men had made a lot of money from selling or making goods like wine, pottery and jewellery. They now owned great estates. When the city of Athens needed money for war, the rich citizens had to pay special taxes. Normally, the citizens paid no taxes at all.

The city's money came from 3 main sources:

- A Ships that visited the port of Piraeus and unloaded cargoes had to pay a tax to the city.
- B All non-citizens who lived in Athens had to pay taxes.
- C The owners of silver mines and other industries had to pay rent to the city.

## The Agora

People who lived in the city would be able to get all their supplies in the market or *agora*. Farmers would come in each market day from the surrounding countryside to sell their produce. Craftsmen would also have shops or stalls at the market.

The importance of the market can be seen at Athens. The agora was the focus of the whole city. The important city and religious buildings were all built around the agora.

While they were shopping the Athenians could meet their friends and do all manner of business. They loved to talk and had time to talk. They discussed ideas, made plans, carried them out and chewed over the results of all they had tried to do.

## Women

Women could not become rich or powerful in Athens. A woman could not go to the Assembly, serve in the law courts, or take part in business. Women were given away in marriage by their fathers, and their husbands gained a large amount of money (a dowry) on marrying. This money had to be returned to the bride's family if the marriage broke up, so most husbands looked after their wives. Women could not go out on their own. They had to stay at home and see to the household and the slaves. Nearly all wives baked bread, spun cloth and made clothes at home, with the help of slaves. An Athenian citizen, Apollodorus, declared, 'We have wives to give us children and look after our houses.'

## Visiting Athens in 320 B.C.

Dicaerchus visited Athens about a hundred years after the death of Pericles. Here is part of his description of his visit.

'The road is pleasant, through farmlands which are friendly to look at. But the city is a dry place with poor water supply. The street plan is bad. Many of the houses are of poor quality. Only a few are of a good size. A stranger who suddenly saw the place for the first time would hardly believe this was the famous city of Athens. But he would soon find out it was.

'The Odeion is the most beautiful theatre in the world. The temple of Athena, called the Parthenon, stands above the theatre. Anyone who sees it cannot fail to be quite amazed by it.

'There are three gymnasia; the Academy, the Lyceum and the Cynosarges. All three are in grounds covered in grass and trees. There are beautiful gardens in which philosophers can wander to rest the soul. There are many ways of spending time. There is always something new to see.'

# Sparta

## People

Sparta was the only important city in Laconia. In 450 BC, about 8,000 male citizens lived in the city. They were known as Spartiates. The land in Laconia was divided into large estates. Only Spartiates could own these. No Spartiate could trade, so land could not be bought or sold. The Spartiates formed themselves into a very powerful army of foot-soldiers (Hoplites). Every Spartiate had to pay taxes, live in a military barracks, serve in the army and send his sons to a state school. In return, he had the right to a place in the Citizens' Assembly, which made the laws for the state.

Spartiates spent their time hunting, fighting and training, or on official state duties. Sparta was the only Greek city that used iron coins instead of gold or silver. One writer, Plutarch, said that no teacher or silversmith should bother to visit Laconia, since no one would want their services. The Spartiates were fit and well trained, and the army was famous for its toughness.

## Periods

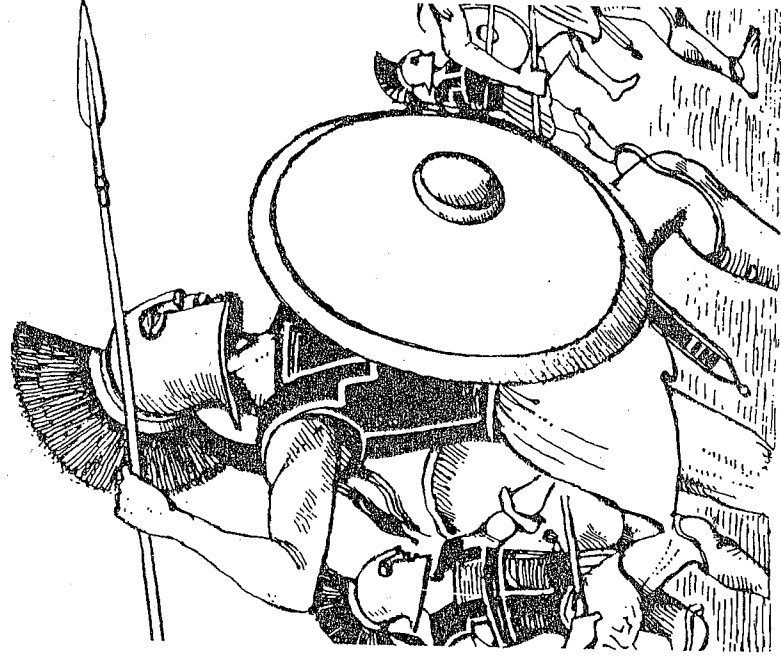
The **Outlanders** were free men who lived either in Sparta or in the country. Many were skilled craftsmen, who made weapons and armour for the Hoplites, as well as hard-wearing clothes. They could join the army or the navy, but they could not become citizens. They had no right to go to the Citizens' Assembly, to make laws or to change rules. They could not send their sons to state schools, and never became rich or powerful.

## Government

Sparta was ruled by 2 Kings, a Council of 28 elders, 5 elected officials (Ephors), and the Citizens' Assembly.

The 2 Kings claimed to be related to Hercules, the great hero. Each King was allowed to lead the army, but he could not declare war or alter the size of the army. The Kings were considered to be the religious leaders of Sparta. But they could not make laws alone, or appoint their friends as members of the Council.

The Council advised the Kings or the Assembly, and said what it thought about laws and rules. The elders were chosen by the citizens. They had to be over 60 years old.



Hoplites in battle

The Helots were slaves, who worked in the fields to produce food for the city. They had no rights at all, and were forced to work hard for no pay. They were owned by the state, and could not run away or change jobs. They could be forced into the army or the navy if there was a war. They could not own land, sell goods or argue with their masters. They had to do hard, back-breaking work, and could be beaten or even killed by the Spartiates.

In 464 BC the Helots tried to break free in a revolt, but this was crushed by the Spartan Army.

If a councillor had to be replaced, an election was held. Two senior councillors were shut in a room, and the candidates went out to the courtyard to present themselves to the citizens. The candidate who got the loudest cheer from the crowd (in the opinion of the 2 councillors) was elected.

The Ephors were the chief judges in Sparta. They discussed laws before they were presented to the Assembly. There were 5 Ephors; they were chosen each year by the Assembly.

The Assembly was open to every citizen over the age of 30. They met to talk about important matters, such as rules about citizenship or war, and to appoint generals.

# GOVERNMENT 1

## Spartan government

- Two kings**
- One a military leader who led the people into battle.
  - The other a political leader who ran the government.

- Ephors**
- Had the real power.
  - Five men were elected each year by the citizens.
  - Responsible for administering the laws and running day-to-day life.

- Council of Elders**
- Made up of two kings and 28 citizens over the age of 60. The Spartans believed that wisdom came with age and it was this group's responsibility to act as advisors.
  - Also sat as judges in the courts.
  - Prepared the matters that the Assembly of Citizens had to discuss and vote on.

- Krypteia**
- Spartan secret police.
  - There to ensure that there was no opposition to the decisions made by the government and that the helots were under control.
  - Killed any helots that they thought might start a rebellion. They didn't have to do anything; it was sufficient that the secret police thought they might.

- Assembly of Citizens**
- Met each month away from the city.
  - All Spartan citizens could attend the Assembly but couldn't speak or give their opinions.
  - Listened to the kings and ephors discuss an issue then voted by shouting. The side that shouted the loudest won the vote.

## Athenian government

- The Assembly**
- Composed of all male citizens over the age of 18.
  - Responsible for making laws.
  - Elected all the government and state officials.
  - From the Assembly were elected the Council of 500 and the generals.

- Council of 500**
- Were male, over 30 years of age.
  - Held power for one year.
  - Advised the Assembly.

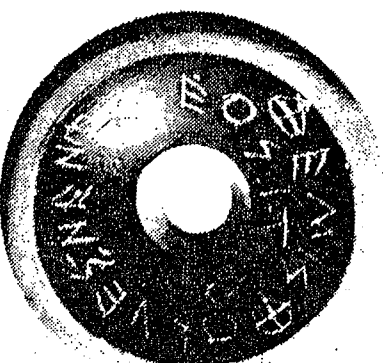
- The generals**
- Were male with experience in the army or navy.
  - Held power for one year.
  - Led the armed forces.
  - Controlled foreign policy.

- Prytani**
- An inner council of 50.
  - Responsible for day-to-day running of the state.
  - Changed ten times a year so everyone on Council had turn.

## Ostraka



1.



2.

*Ostraka 1. Kallikhenos the traitor.*

*2. Out with Themistocles (5C B.C.)*

