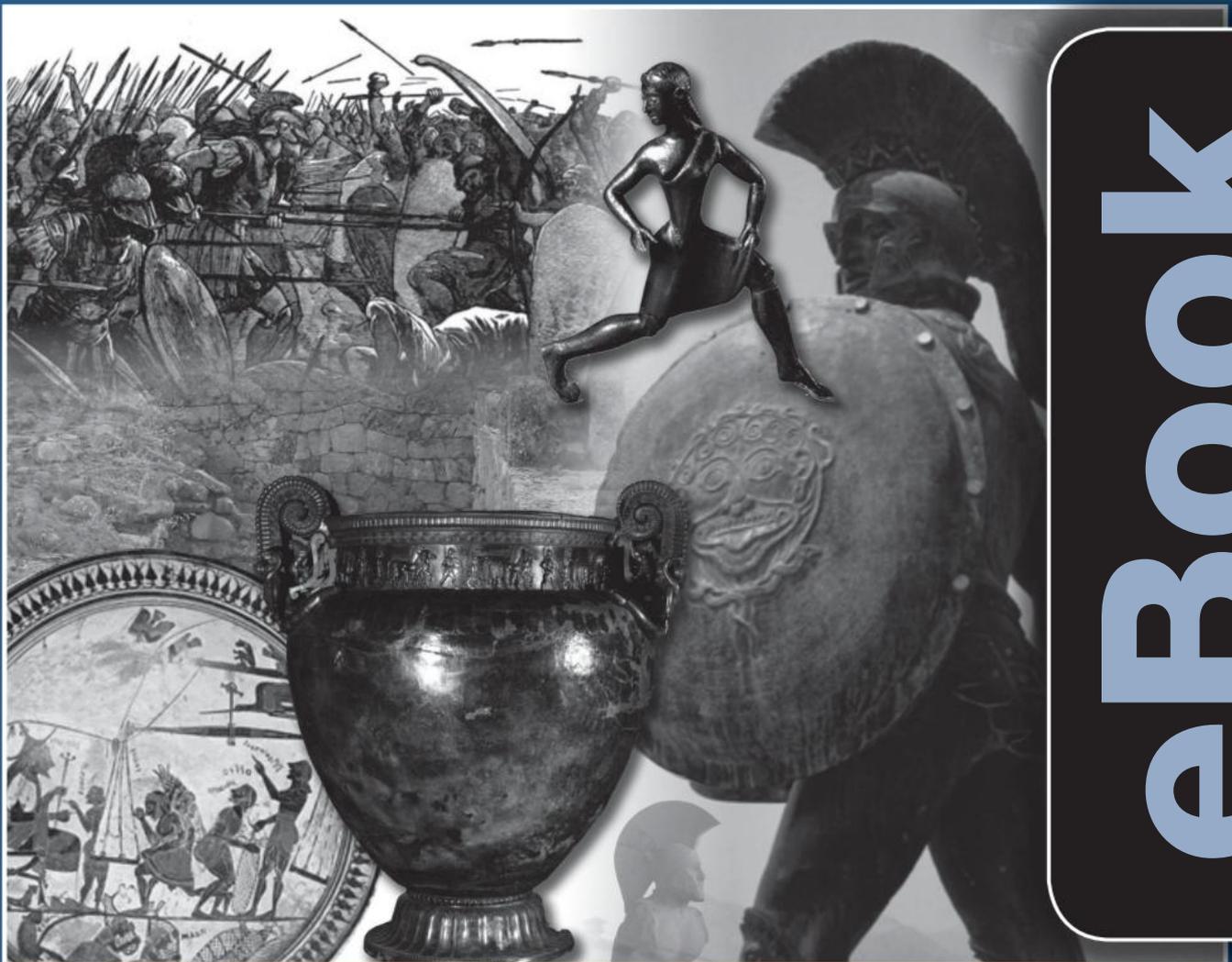


SPARTAN SOCIETY

TO THE BATTLE OF LEUCTRA 371BC

by Ken Webb

Here it is: the factual detail, the historiography, revision exercises and advice on how to write HSC responses on Spartan society to the Battle of Leuctra 371BC.



eBook

“Everything you wanted to know about Spartan society to the Battle of Leuctra 371BC, but were afraid to ask.”

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by Ken Webb M.A. (Oxon), C.Ed

*“Everything you wanted to know about Spartan society to the
Battle of Leuctra 371 BC, but were afraid to ask.”*

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1st Edition

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About the author

Ken Webb was educated in the United Kingdom and graduated from the University of Oxford. He taught in several state schools before moving to Pymble Ladies' College where he taught Modern, Ancient and Extension History. In March 2008, he moved to Ravenswood School for Girls where he also taught the International Baccalaureate course in History. He is a member of the Independent Schools Examination Committee for Modern History. He frequently lectures and runs workshops for Year 12 and teacher groups in Sydney and Regional NSW. In addition to his own work, Ken Webb has contributed to colleagues' work and to newspapers and periodicals. He has also been a consultant on various history video documentaries. In 2012, Ken Webb was a NSW winner of the "National Excellence in Teaching" award.

Over the years, Ken Webb has written a wide range of study guides and textbooks for NSW and Australia wide including "The Age of Imperialism" (Nelson Cengage Learning), "Discovering Australian History" (Cambridge University Press), "The Augustan Age 44 BC-AD 14" (Get Smart Education), "Extension History: The Historians" (HTA of NSW), "Power and Authority 1919-1946" (Nelson Cengage Learning), "International Relations Between the Wars" (McGraw-Hill).

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First Edition

Published 2012 by

© Get Smart Education Pty Ltd

PO Box 684 Mona Vale NSW 1660

Tel: 0400 401 005

Fax: 9012 0988

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ISBN 9780648072355

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Printed by Razer Graphix

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Foreword

This book has been written with the “new” HSC specifically in mind (examined first in 2019):

- it strictly follows the format of the Ancient History syllabus¹;
- its content has been designed with the type of questions in mind which might be asked in the HSC;
- the advice given for responding to questions on “Spartan society to the Battle of Leuctra 371 BC” is the result of years of teaching and studying this period, and marking the HSC.

But why do we need yet another book on “Spartan society to the Battle of Leuctra 371 BC”?

There are many excellent textbooks available in NSW that cover this topic. Several of them are listed in the “Further Reading” section, or are referred to throughout this text. There are also countless websites and videos that can be consulted. There are useful study days to attend, such as the annual HTA sessions at the University of Sydney each June. Some students may even have been fortunate enough to have visited Greece.

So, why another book?

- This book will prove to be extremely useful to the majority of students studying *Spartan society to the Battle of Leuctra 371 BC* at the HSC. It does not weigh down students with a mass of factual detail.
- It provides source references, both primary (written and archaeological) and secondary.
- In other words, it is hoped that this book will equip students with enough information and tips on examination technique to cope with the types of questions usually set on *Spartan society to the Battle of Leuctra 371 BC*.

Further reading, internet searches and viewing are always of value. However, for those students who lack the time, the resources or are burdened down by other subjects or issues, but who still seek a comprehensive coverage of the issues involved in *Spartan society to the Battle of Leuctra 371 BC*, this is the book for you!

¹ In some places, topics listed in the syllabus have been combined in the same way they probably would be in the classroom. For example, the *krypteia* is dealt with in the section on helots.

Section One ■ The geographical setting

Chapter One

Geographical setting, natural features and resources

Geography and natural features

In ancient times, Greece was a geographical expression, not a unified political unit. Politically, Greece was a collection of independent city states. These city states shared a common culture, spoke the same language, believed the same myths and worshipped the same gods. However, they jealously protected their independence. During the 6th and 5th centuries BC, the Greek city states lived under a range of political systems, ranging from tyranny, to oligarchy, to democracy. Sparta's form of government is not so easy to categorise.¹

Geography partly explains the development of Greece into separate, jealous independent city states. The prevalence of rugged mountains and isolated valleys assisted the development of independent political units. Such was the case with Sparta.

The southern part of Greece is a peninsula called the Peloponnese which is connected to the northern part of Greece by the Corinthian isthmus. In ancient times, the Peloponnese comprised six regions: Achaea, Elis, Messenia, Laconia, Argolis and Arcadia. Laconia extends about 1600 sq miles and is predominantly mountainous. To the north is the Arcadian range, to the west the Taygetus mountains and to the east the Parnon mountain range runs southwards towards Cape Maleia. To the east of the Parnon range is the rugged Aegean coastline.

Sparta is situated in central Laconia, in the fertile valley of the Eurotas river, the plain of Sparta, approximately only 70 sq kms in size. The river Eurotas flows south towards the Laconian Gulf.

*"...The plain of Sparta is not continuous, since a rocky barrier, cut by a gorge through which flows the river Eurotas, divides the northern portion (of the valley from) a swampy and unhealthy, but highly fertile coastal plain..."*²

Sparta is located in Laconia but for its wealth it relied upon the neighbouring region of Messenia.³

*"...Messenia is a softened, more open repetition of Laconia with a westward outlook, with a milder and moister climate and of great fertility..."*⁴

Like Laconia, Messenia is bounded by mountains, the Taygetus range in the east and a gentler coastal range in the west. The river Pamisus, which flows through the centre of Messenia, waters a plain which provides the region with most of its fertile lands. The geographical setting of Sparta is illustrated in Figure 1.1.

The Spartan climate is quite severe with hot summers and cold winters. The climate of neighbouring Messenia is much milder, avoiding both extremes.

¹ Sparta's form of government will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5

² Michell, H, *Sparta*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1964, p 4

³ See Chapter 3.

⁴ Michell, p 5

Figure 1.1 The Geographical setting of Sparta



The geography of Sparta has given rise to a series of names to which the Spartans are referred. These are given in brackets as follows:

Sparta (*Spartans*) is a town in Laconia (*Laconians*), which is part of Lakedaemon, the area controlled by Sparta (*Lakedaemonians*) which is located in the Peloponnese (*Peloponnesians*). The Spartans are also sometimes referred to by their ethnic origin (*Dorians*). For the sake of convenience, they will be referred to as Spartans (unless an ancient source specifically does otherwise).

Resources

Sparta was not blessed with an abundance of natural resources but once it had gained mastery over Messenia to the west, it managed to survive without any reliance on external trade and colonial acquisitions, which was very much the practice of other Greek states.

Sparta's resources included:

- agricultural:
 - the usual range of crops including barley and wheat
 - fruits including grapes and figs; olives
 - livestock, principally sheep, goats and pigs
 - wild boar were hunted in mountainous areas

- minerals were mined:
 - iron, and more importantly copper and tin for bronze, lead
 - more valuable stones such as marble and porphyry were found in the mountainous regions
- shellfish were collected for producing purple dye for clothes

Exercise 1.1

1	How was Greece organised politically during the 6 th century BC?	
2	How is the Peloponnese connected to the rest of Greece?	
3	Name the six regions of the ancient Peloponnese.	
4	On which river does Sparta stand?	
5	Name the three mountain areas which surround Sparta?	
6	Name the fertile area immediately west of Laconia.	
7	What was Sparta's climate like? How did it compare with Messenia?	
8	Name three metals the Spartans mined.	
9	Why did the Spartans collect shell fish?	
10	Why were the Spartans sometimes called Laconians?	

What do the historians have to say about Sparta's geographical setting, natural features and resources?

1. L F Fitzhardinge: *The Spartans*

Fitzhardinge comments on Sparta's location, making the point that the city stood near the sea and was only a few hours march from possibly hostile neighbours. It was 46 kms from its only port, Gytheum and only 57 kms from its nearest independent neighbour, Tegea.

"...Between Sparta and Tegea, and Sparta and Argos to the north east there were no clearly defined frontiers, but a broad wilderness of tangled and sparsely populated hills. It was the distance from her enemies, not the valour of her soldiers, that allowed Sparta to remain unwallled until the fourth century." ⁵

2. C E Robinson: *A History of Greece*

Robinson comments on the enormous advantage that the presence of the river Eurotas brought to Sparta. Though Sparta was nestled between inhospitable mountain ranges – Taygetus and Parnon – and though snow could linger year round:

"...The stream of the Eurotas, unlike most of the Greek rivers, runs clean and strong among its fertile orchards; and to the early Greek invaders coming down from the bleak north the country must indeed have seemed an earthly paradise..." ⁶

5 Fitzhardinge, L F, *The Spartans*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1985, p 23

6 Robinson, C E, *A History of Greece*, Methuen Educational, London, 1957, p 45

Chapter Two:

Significant site: Sparta

There is a difference between the location of a city and the site of the city. Location refers to the bigger picture: where is Sparta in relation to the whole of Greece? Sparta is located in the southern part of Greece, in the Peloponnese peninsula in the region of Laconia which is east of Messenia and south of Arcadia.

Site refers to the precise position of the city and the features immediately surrounding it.

A low spur from the Arcadian hills pointed into the town of Sparta and provided it with its “acropolis”, though it was really no more than a hummock poking out of the ground.

The river Eurotas flowed to the east of the town, quite fordable in the summer months but it became swollen in the winter months.

An older version of the temple of Artemis Orthia was destroyed by the flooding river in the early 6th century BC.

The town stretched over some low hills, comprising four villages (or suburbs) with a fifth at Amyclae, which was about 6km further south. Sparta lacked a true town centre. In the north eastern part of the town stood the temple of Athena of the Bronze House. At the base of the “acropolis” was a market, where the Council met. From the 5th century BC, memorials to Leonidas and Pausanias could be found here. ¹

In Sparta today there is a statue (shown on the right), honouring Leonidas. The Greek inscription on the plinth at the base of the statue contains Leonidas’ response to the Persian king, Xerxes’ demand that the Spartans “lay down their arms”.

Leonidas’ reply was: “Come and take them”.

Spread throughout the town could be found shrines to the family members of the two royal families. Sparta’s most significant temple was that of Artemis Orthia which was situated to the east of the acropolis, close to the river bank. To the south, near the village of Amyclae, was the shrine of Apollo Hyacinthus.

A shrine to Menelaus and Helen could be found on the eastern side of the river. ²

The soil of the plain on which Sparta was sited was fertile but over the centuries, stones had been washed down the Taygetus range and this made it difficult to grow crops. As a result, the Spartans preferred to grow fruit trees and vines. The plain of Sparta was quite small; at its greatest extent it extended 14 kms north to south, and 5 kms west to east. Throughout its history, Sparta suffered a series of earthquakes due to the existence of a nearby geological fault.

Figure 2.1 Statue of Leonidas



- ¹ Leonidas was the Spartan king who led the 300 at the Battle of Thermopylae against the Persians in 480 BC. Though Leonidas and the 300 were all killed, their sacrifice was seen as all that was good about Sparta. Pausanias led the Spartans to victory the following year at the Battle of Plataea.
- ² Menelaus was the king of Sparta and brother of Agamemnon at the time of the Trojan War. It was Helen’s abduction by Prince Paris of Troy that sparked the beginning of the Trojan War.



Figure 2.2 The Taygetus range shown to the west of the modern town of Sparta

Sparta did not seem like other Greek city states. Visitors to the Athens of Pericles, in the second half of the 5th century BC, were impressed by, and were meant to be impressed by, an array of grandiose constructions. Sparta was not like this at all. As Fitzhardinge puts it:

“...To the ordinary Greek, the town looked more like a cluster of rural villages than a city.”³

Few of us are able to jet over to Greece and examine Sparta on the ground or go around the Museum of Sparta. However, the internet can take us there. The following website provides an array of maps and on the spot images of what remains of ancient Sparta.

http://www.goddess-athena.org/Museum/Temples/Sparta/Sparta_map.html

Exercise 2.1

Use the terms in the box below to complete the following passage.

The river Eurotas flowed to the _____ of the town of Sparta, while from the _____ a spur of slightly higher ground extended into the town to provide Sparta with its _____. The river was often very swollen in the _____ and in the 6th century destroyed an early version of the temple of _____. Sparta lacked great temples such as _____ and to outsiders seemed more like a collection of _____ than a great Greek _____. Stony soils persuaded the Spartans to grow _____ and _____ in its fertile valley which measured at its greatest extent _____ kms north-south and _____ kms west-east.

Athens	east	villages	fourteen	north	Artemis Orthia
five	acropolis	city	fruit trees	winter	vines

³ Fitzhardinge, L F, *The Spartans*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1985, p 15

Chapter Three

The issue of Lycurgus and The Great Rhetra

Introduction

Few cities' names have provided the English language with terms which represent what that city was like. Sparta is one that does. To eat a "Spartan meal" means to eat a very basic meal while to have a "Spartan existence" suggests that one is living a life without luxury. To speak in a "laconic" (from Laconia) manner means one is a person of few words, as Spartans were thought to be.

The traditional view of Sparta is that of a strict, disciplined, militaristic society based on the suppression of an enslaved population. Here is a typical view of Sparta written in the late 1960s:

"...A militaristic and totalitarian society, holding down an enslaved population, the helots, by terror and violence, educating its young by a system incorporating all the worst features of the traditional English public school, and deliberately turning its back on the intellectual and artistic life of the rest of Greece." ¹

This has been the **orthodox view** of Sparta from time immemorial. Spartans spurn excess, dedicate themselves to the state to which they are unquestioningly obedient and isolate themselves from the outside world. The 5th century BC Athenian historian, Thucydides, has Pericles echo such sentiments in his Funeral Oration in which the openness and cultural excellence of Athens is compared favourably with the austerity of Sparta.

"...Our city (Athens) is open to the world (unlike Sparta)...we rely, not on secret weapons, but on our own real courage and loyalty. There is a difference, too, in our educational systems. The Spartans, from their earliest boyhood, are submitted to the most laborious training in courage; we pass our life without all these restrictions, and yet are just as ready to face the same dangers as they are..." ²

And so, Sparta is noted for its regimentation, order, repression and for its failure to develop the arts and learning. However, such a view of Sparta is not without its opponents. In his 1985 book, *"The Spartans"*, Fitzhardinge suggests that such a view is too simplistic and that this militaristic view of Spartan society cannot be applied throughout Spartan history. Fitzhardinge argues that up until the 5th century BC, Spartans lived very much like other Greeks, though perhaps in a slightly more rustic style.

"...The immediate sequel to the (second) Messenian war (late 7th century BC) was not austerity but a new wave of luxury and artistic achievement, seen in the poems of Alcman and in the exuberance of Laconian II artefacts and in ivory and bronze. The succession of Olympic victories continued. Foreign contacts grew wider, and the export of pottery and of decorated bronze vessels began." ³

Indeed, Fitzhardinge introduced the term *"swinging Sparta"* to contrast with the traditional view of the city as *"barrack Sparta"*.

¹ Rawson, E, *The Spartan Tradition in European Thought*, OUP, Oxford, 1969, p 1

² See Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, Book Two, 39

³ Fitzhardinge, L F, *The Spartans*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1985, p 157

Sparta first appears in literature in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

- The legendary cause of the Trojan War, approximately 1200 BC, is the abduction of Helen by Paris, prince of Troy.
 - Helen is the wife of Menelaus, King of Sparta and brother of the leader of the Greek forces in the war, Agamemnon.
- Thucydides places the Sparta occupation of the Peloponnese less than a century after the fall of Troy.
- By about 800 BC, the Spartans had settled in the Eurotas valley of Laconia.

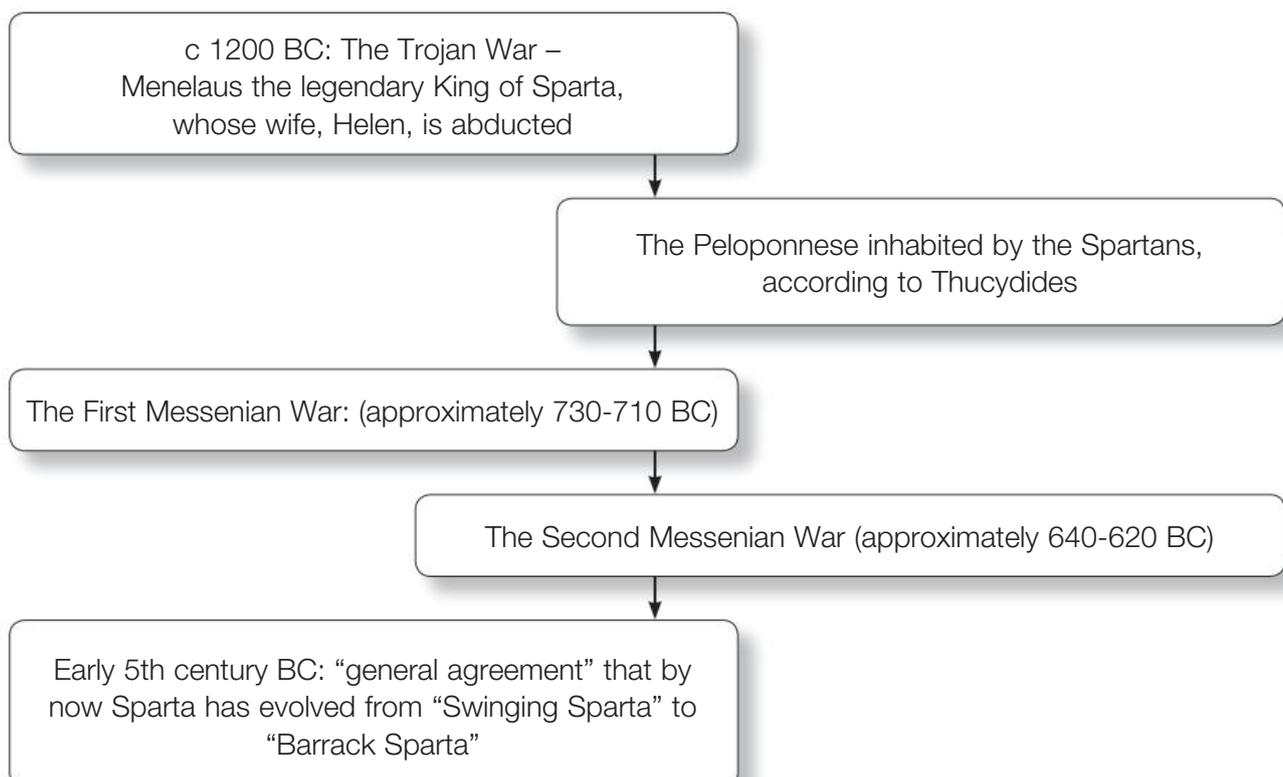
During the period from the 8th to the 6th century BC, Greek city states participated in widespread colonisation of the Mediterranean world from Sicily in the west to the Black Sea in the east. Such expansion was motivated by a variety of factors including shortage of land, population pressures and a desire for political freedom. However, Sparta did not join in this imperialist adventure, save for its lone colony in southern Italy, Taras, founded in 706 BC.

Instead, Sparta chose to deal with its problems in a different way.

- Once it had control of Laconia, it advanced to the west and took over the region of Messenia.
- This region was to become of key importance for Sparta as a major food producing area.
 - The local Messenian population now became “serfs” to the Spartans.
- The Spartan poet, Tyrtaeus, writes of the campaign and places it during the reign of King Theopompos, roughly 730-710 BC.

The traditional view of Sparta suggests that the takeover of Messenia had a profound impact on Sparta by altering the course of Spartan development. Instead of following the normal Greek development, Sparta was forced to become a strict, military-style state in order to control its new slave population, and so all aspects of life underwent drastic change. A new form of law and order was formed, known as *eunomia*. Who was behind this drastic development? The great lawgiver, Lycurgus.

Figure 3.1 Timeline of early Spartan development



Exercise 3.1

Answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

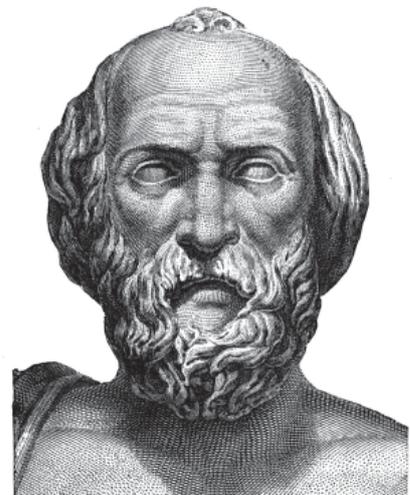
1	What is the usually accepted view of Spartan society?	
2	What did Pericles have to say about Spartan society?	
3	How does Fitzhardinge's view of Spartan society differ to the usual view?	
4	Why did Sparta invade Messenia?	
5	When did the invasion of Messenia occur?	
6	What was the impact of the invasion of Messenia on Sparta as seen in the orthodox version of the development of Sparta?	
7	Who was the legendary lawgiver of Sparta?	

Lycurgus

One of the major problems in dealing with Lycurgus is that we know extremely little about him that can be agreed upon with any certainty. Indeed at the beginning of his life of Lycurgus, *Plutarch*⁴ notes:

*"...Generally speaking it is impossible to make any undisputed statement about Lycurgus the lawgiver, since conflicting accounts have been given of his ancestry, his travels, his death, and above all his activity with respect to his laws and government; but there is at least agreement about the period in which the man lived..."*⁵

Herodotus and Aristotle agree with Plutarch that Lycurgus was a real figure in history, living sometime in the 9th-7th century BC. Xenophon says Lycurgus lived during the first half of the 8th century BC. Other writers have suggested that there were two men called Lycurgus who lived

Figure 3.2 Lycurgus

⁴ Greek historian and biographer, AD c 46-120

⁵ Plutarch, *The Life of Lycurgus*, 1

during different times. Some argue that the reforms introduced under the name of Lycurgus appeared over a long period of time and that there was no actual person called Lycurgus. This leads one historian to suggest:

*“...It is safe to say that not a single statement in (Plutarch’s) narrative can be accepted with certainty, and that even the very existence of Lycurgus is strongly open to doubt.”*⁶

The life of Lycurgus according to Plutarch

Lycurgus’ father was king of Sparta who met his death during a period of lawlessness. The king’s elder son, Polydectes, ruled briefly until the throne passed to Lycurgus. Lycurgus ruled for eight months until the birth of his late brother’s son.

He visited Crete and Ionia to study forms of governments. Plutarch then relates that it was believed that Lycurgus further visited Egypt, Libya and Iberia.

Lycurgus returned to Sparta, determined to “sweep away the existing order and to make a complete change of constitution, since piecemeal legislation would have no effect and value.”⁷

The most important of Lycurgus’ reforms was the institution of the council of elders. Plutarch argues that this provided a balance between the possibility of a royal tyranny and democracy.

Lycurgus was excited about the council and brought an oracle about it from Delphi which was called a rhetra. The oligarchic part of the constitution prevailed under Lycurgus which eventually led the Spartans to institute the office of ephor, some 150 years later.

Lycurgus’ second key reform was alleged to be land distribution. Plutarch states that Lycurgus recognised the seriousness of the situation in Sparta:

*“...there was dreadful inequality: many destitute people without means were congregating in the city, while wealth had poured completely into just a few hands.”*⁸

- In order to remove “*arrogance, envy, crime*”, Lycurgus persuaded the citizens to pool all the land and to redistribute it more fairly. This removed distinction and inequality, except “*for what censure of bad conduct and praise of good would determine*”.
- To further remove inequality, Lycurgus declared invalid all gold and silver coinage, stating that only iron could be used.
- To combat the desire for luxury, Lycurgus introduced common messes.⁹
- Lycurgus’ reforms aroused such anger among the rich that he was attacked in the street. One attack by a young man called Alcander, resulted in Lycurgus losing an eye. Alcander’s punishment was to become Lycurgus’ servant and Plutarch relates that Alcander became “*remarkably attached to him*”.

(Much of the rest of Plutarch’s life of Lycurgus deals with the specific measures allegedly introduced to change Sparta. Plutarch’s treatment of these aspects of Spartan life will be mentioned as each element is introduced in subsequent chapters.)

⁶ Michell, H, *Sparta*, CUP, London, 1952, p 20

⁷ Plutarch, *The Life of Lycurgus*, 5

⁸ Plutarch, *The Life of Lycurgus*, 8

⁹ See Chapter 8

The Great Rhetra

The Spartans liked to claim that their constitution went back to ancient times. However, Spartan development was probably little different to other Greek states up to the 7th century BC (or up to the early 5th century BC if one accepts the argument of Fitzhardinge). As was shown above, the changes that were introduced which were to make Spartan society so different were contained in *The Great Rhetra*.

Plutarch states that Lycurgus did not put his laws into writing and that in fact one of the rhetras forbade writing down the laws.

*“...Instead, he reckoned that the guiding principles of most importance for the happiness and excellence of a state would remain securely fixed if they were embedded in the citizens’ character and training...”*¹⁰

Plutarch says that the document was an oracular response from Delphi and that the word rhetra was used in Sparta as “law” or “enactment”. Essentially, the rhetra’s main purpose was for making laws and deciding on policy. The Council of Elders, comprising 28 elders and the two kings could introduce proposals, or refuse to introduce proposals, which would then be voted upon by the popular assembly.¹¹ Sealey comments upon this point:

*“...How far the power of the assembly extends is not wholly clear... But at least the Rhetra empowered the assembly to accept or reject proposals of the council; the assembly was to have a yea-or-nay competence...”*¹²

However, Plutarch provides a major qualification to this part of the Rhetra. He says that over time, the people “distorted proposals and mauled them by their deletions and additions”. As a result of this, kings Polydorus and Theopompus added to the Rhetra:

*“... ‘If the people should made a crooked choice, the Elders and the founder-leaders are to set it aside’ – that is, not to confirm it, but to withdraw it completely and to dismiss the people because they are altering and reformulating the proposal contrary to what was best.”*¹³

This addition to the rhetra is often referred to as “the rider to the great rhetra”.

If the traditional view is accepted, the entire political, social and economic structure of Sparta was the result of the work of Lycurgus. Fundamental to the changes introduced by Lycurgus was the notion of eunomia. The term “eunomia” refers to the concept of order and good government. Sparta was admired by many writers because its people obeyed the laws of their state, did their duty and lived orderly lives. It was this that made Sparta the stable society that it became.

¹⁰ Plutarch, *The Life of Lycurgus*, 13

¹¹ The details of Spartan government will be covered in later chapters.

¹² Sealey, R, *A History of the Greek States 700-338 BC*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1976, p 75

¹³ Plutarch, *The Life of Lycurgus*, 6

Exercise 3.2

Who or what are the following?:

1	Thucydides	
2	Plutarch	
3	Lycurgus	
4	Alcander	
5	Rhetra	
6	The “rider”	
7	eunomia	

What do the historians have to say about the issue of Lycurgus (the Great Rhetra)?

1. Xenophon: *Spartan Society*

Xenophon was a Greek historian, essayist and soldier. Though born c 430 BC in Athens, Xenophon spent much of his life in Sparta. His most notable works are *Anabasis Kyrrou* (The Persian Expedition), *Hellenica* (a continuation of Thucydides’ history of the Greeks from 411-362 BC) and the *Memorabilia of Socrates*. Xenophon opens his essay on *Spartan Society* by asking the question how could a small state like Sparta have become so powerful and influential. He credits this success to the institutions set down for Sparta by Lycurgus.

*“...for they have achieved success by obeying the laws laid down for them by Lycurgus. I certainly admire him and consider him in the highest degree a wise man, since it was not by copying other states, but by deciding on an opposite course to the majority that he made his country outstandingly fortunate.”*¹⁴

2. Herodotus: *The Histories*

Herodotus is better known as the “the father of history” and historian of The Persian Wars. He briefly mentions Lycurgus early in Book 1 and credits him with bringing good government to Sparta. He relates the story of Lycurgus’ visit to the oracle at Delphi where Sparta’s system of government was allegedly revealed to him. When he entered the shrine, he was told:

*“...Hither to my rich temple you have come, Lycurgus,
Dear to Zeus and to all gods that dwell in Olympus.
I know not whether to declare you human or divine –
Yet I incline to believe, Lycurgus, that you are a god.”*¹⁵

¹⁴ Xenophon, *Spartan Society*, 1

¹⁵ Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 1, 65

Chapter Four:

The roles and privileges of the two kings

Introduction

The pattern of political development in Greece had been for the institution of monarchy to gradually fade away. Over time, it was replaced by aristocracy, or tyranny or democracy. Some Greek states ended up with annual magistrates such as the archons in Athens, while others experienced the rule of tyrant, such as Corinth. Sparta was different in two ways:

- it retained the monarchy for hundreds of years;
- it also retained two kings.

Sparta had a hereditary monarchy which claimed descent from Heracles. In the early 9th century BC, there were two kings. One came from a distinct tribe centred around Sparta, the Agiads clan. The second came from southern Laconia, the Eurypontids clan. Sparta's choice to retain monarchy might be explained by the existence of two men in the role because each was able to act as a check on the other.

A Spartan king was succeeded by his eldest son. However, if the eldest son had been born before the accession of his father, that son had to give way in the line of succession to the first son born after his father had become king. If a king died without a son, the throne passed to the nearest male kinsman. If a new king came to the throne as a minor, the eldest male kinsman would rule as regent until the young king had come of age.

The roles and privileges of the kings

The roles and privileges of the Spartan kings are summarised in Figures 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4.

Limitations on the powers and privileges of the kings

Though the kings of Sparta were held in high regard, and though their person was "sacrosanct", this did not mean that they were immune from the anger of the people.

The king's power was limited by the fact he had a co-ruler.

The kings were members of the gerousia, the Council of Elders. ¹ However, as Sealey suggests:

"...They were members of the Council of Elders, but there is nothing to indicate that this was a source of special influence." ²

On campaigns, the king was accompanied by two ephors ³ who would report back to the people on the king's conduct after the campaign. Such reports could lead to an investigation and prosecution of the king. ⁴

¹ The role of the gerousia will be covered in Chapter 5.

² Sealey, R, *A History of the Greek States 700-338 BC*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1976, p 71

³ The role of the ephors will be covered in detail in Chapter 5.

⁴ This process is similar to that of the Russian Bolshevik party during the Russian Civil War, 1918-21. The Bolsheviks employed former tsarist officers in the Red Army but to ensure their loyalty, political commissars accompanied the officers on campaigns. If the political commissar detected any disloyalty, the officer could be arrested and face the discipline of the Bolshevik Party.

Figure 4.1 The kings' religious roles

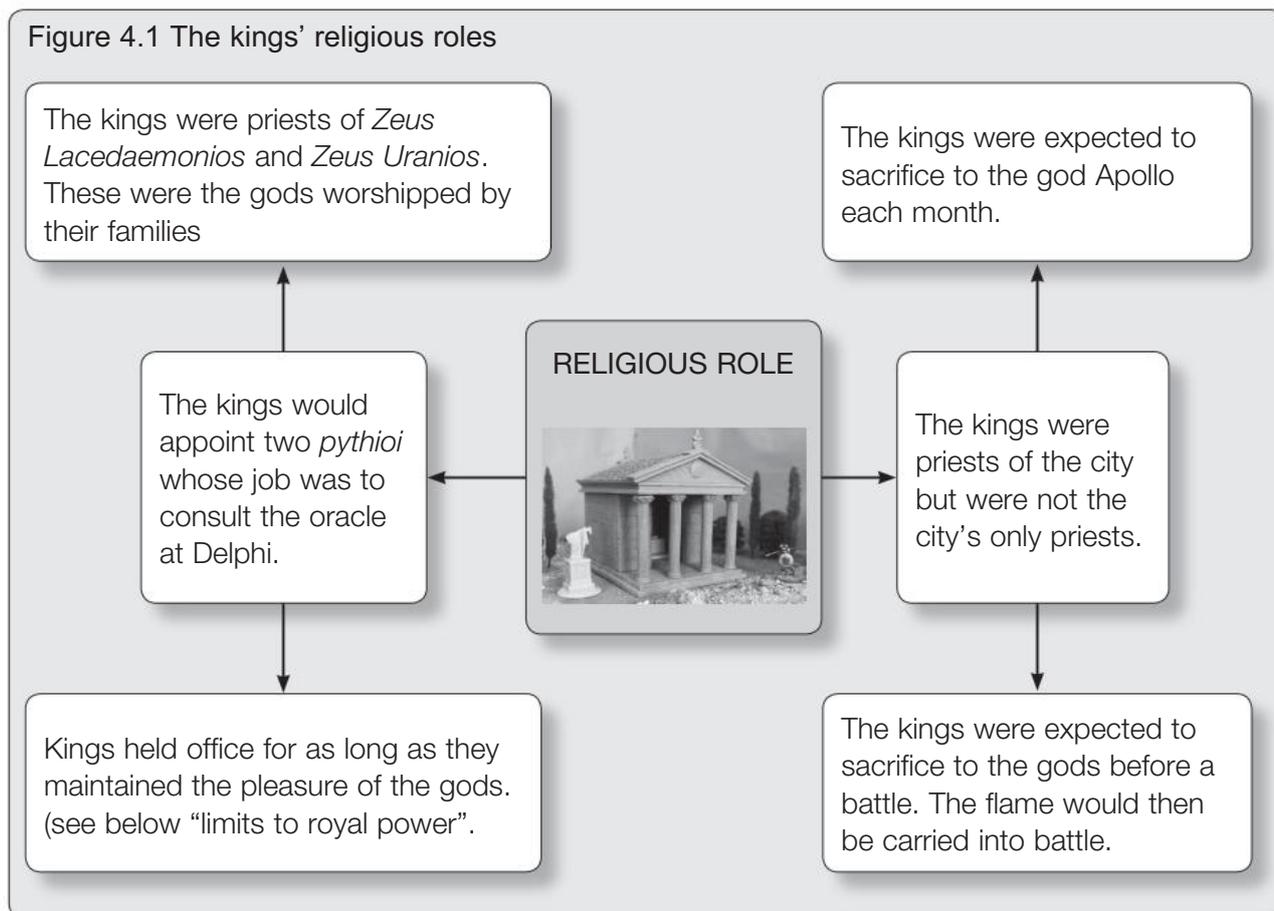


Figure 4.2 The kings' military role

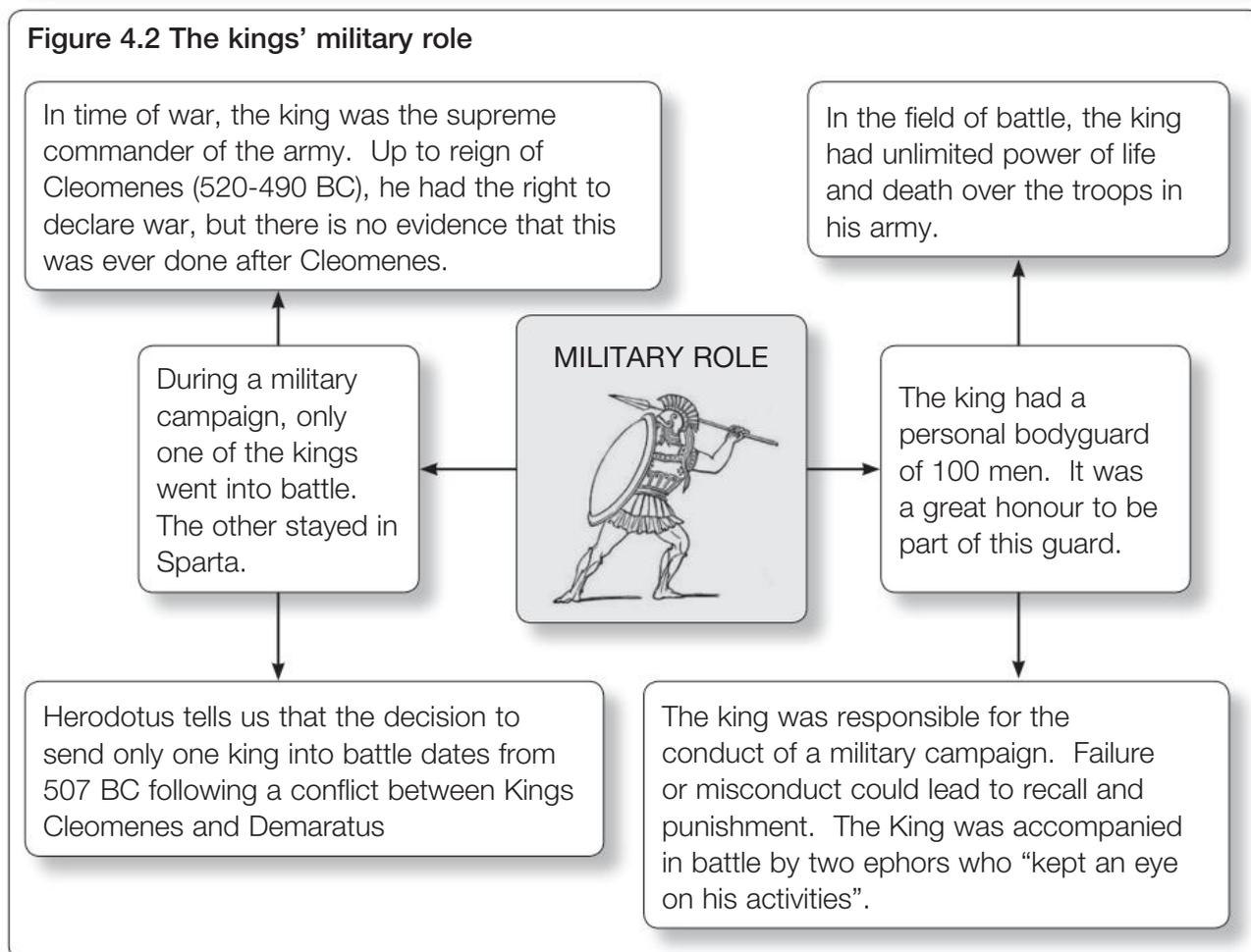


Figure 4.3 The kings' judicial role

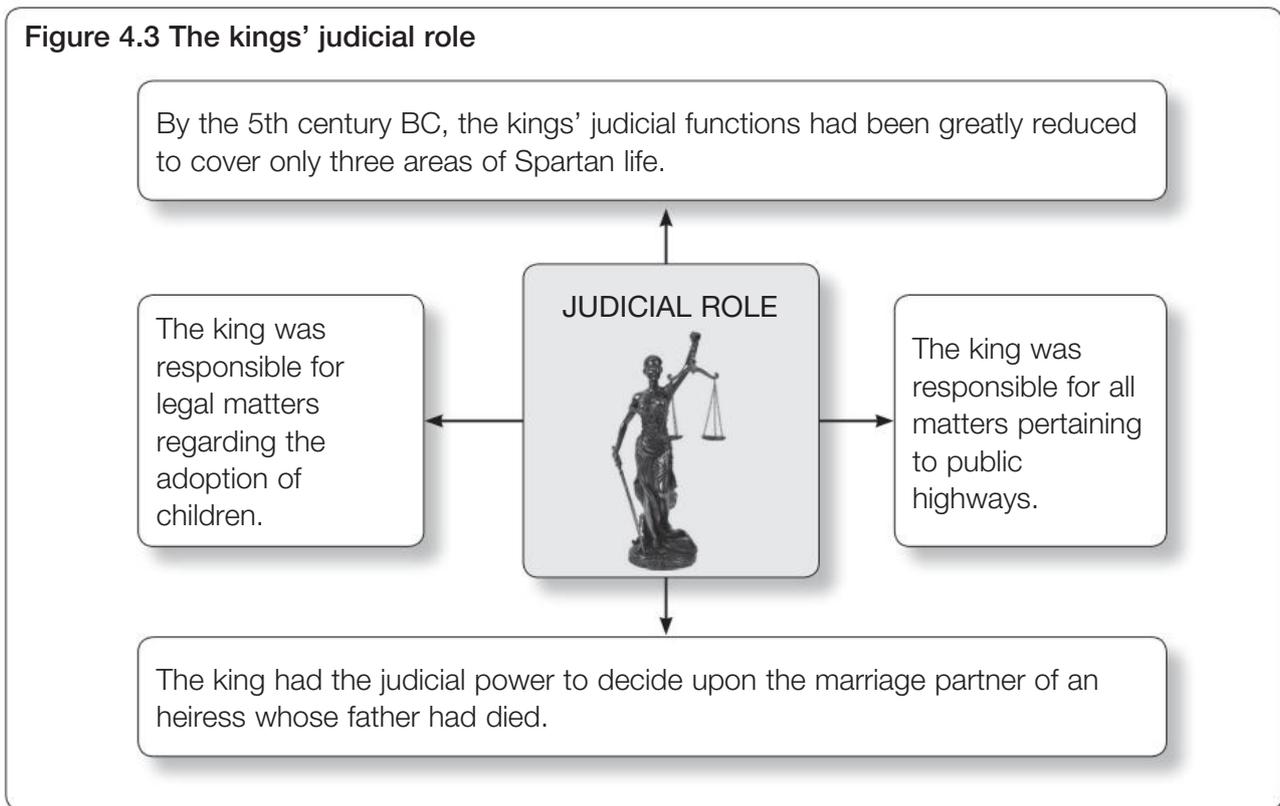
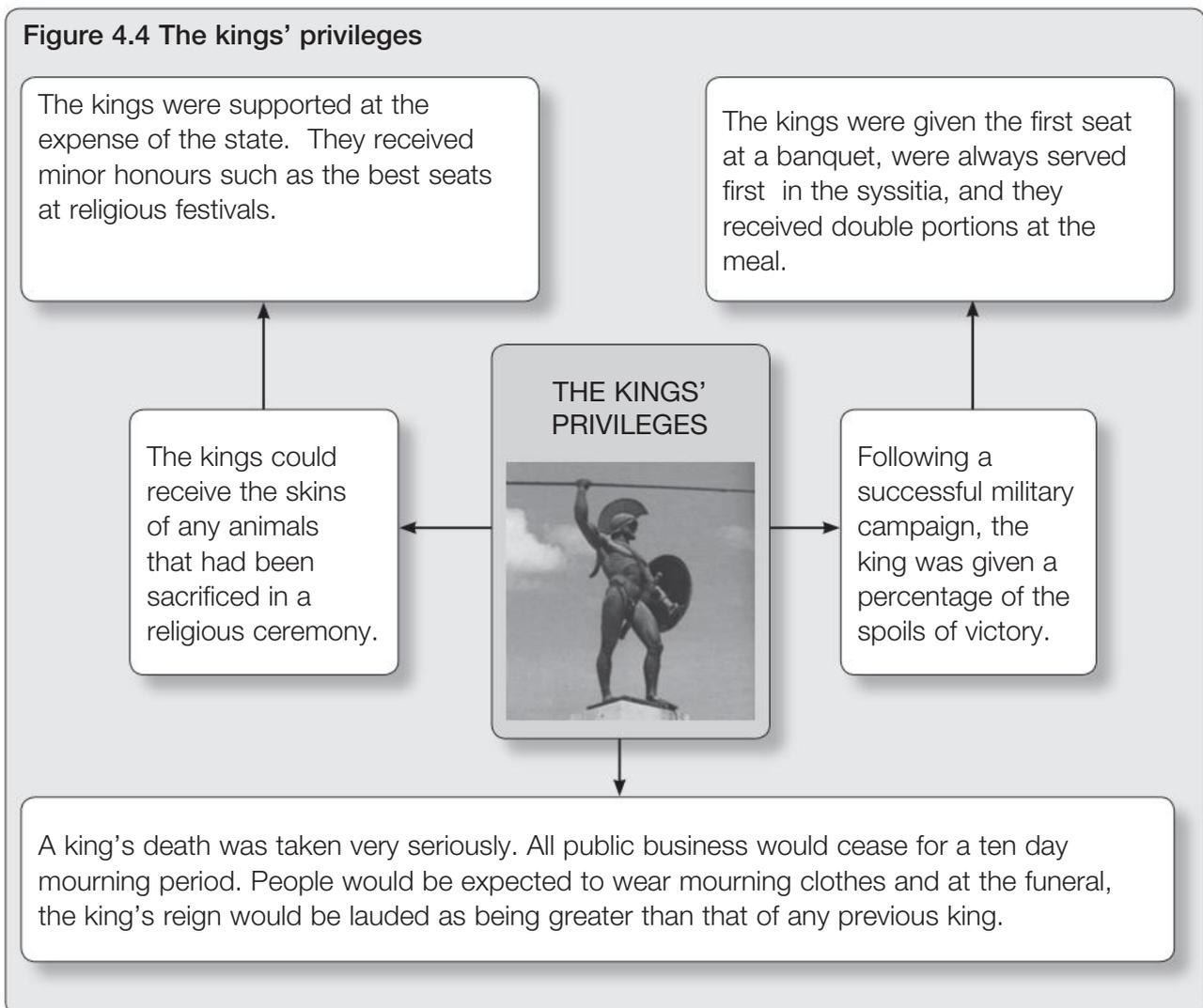


Figure 4.4 The kings' privileges



The kings swore an oath to uphold the constitution. Their position was guaranteed by the oath of the ephors on condition that the kings acted in a constitutional manner. Presumably, the ephors could decide “what was constitutional or unconstitutional”. This gave the ephors enormous power over the kings. Michell suggests that:

*“...An easy-going acquiescence in whatever the ephors desired was the safest thing for a king...”*⁵

It is not certain whether the oath taken by the ephors occurred only at the beginning of the king’s reign or monthly.

*“...Perhaps the monthly oath-taking gave the ephors the chance of checking up formally on the kings and threatening that if both, or either, did not behave better the oaths would not be taken, and makes it more likely that the latter view is correct.”*⁶

If they had acted inappropriately or were guilty of corruption, punishment could be severe. The following kings suffered this fate.

King Leotychidas (491-476 BC)

Leotychidas became king in 491 BC after he successfully challenged King Demaratus for the throne. He fought in campaigns against Aegina and later was a key figure in the Persian Wars. In 476 BC, he led an expedition to Thessaly against those who had been collaborating with the Persians. He accepted bribes and withdrew his forces. He was tried for bribery and sentenced to exile.

King Demaratus (515-491 BC)

Demaratus was a fierce rival of his co-ruler, Cleomenes, who successfully bribed the Delphic oracle to declare that Demaratus should not be king. He was removed in favour of Leotychidas. Demaratus spent the rest of his life in the Persian court and accompanied Xerxes during the Persian invasion of Greece in 480 BC.

King Pleistoanax (458-409 BC)

Pleistoanax led an invasion into Attica in 445 BC though he was still quite youthful. He was suspected of receiving a bribe to leave the territory from the Athenian leader, Pericles. Pleistoanax was fined and exiled for the next nineteen years.

King Pausanias (409-394 BC)

In 403, King Pausanias was accused of not carrying out the orders of the ephors. He was tried before a court of 34 people – his fellow king, the five ephors and the 28 members of the Gerousia. The court acquitted him, 19 votes to 15. However, he was accused a second time in 395 BC, and was tried and sentenced in absentia. He had meanwhile fled to Tegea.

⁵ Michell, H, *Sparta*, CUP, London, 1952, p 105

⁶ Michell, H, *Sparta*, CUP, London, 1952, p 105

Exercise 4.1

Indicate whether each of the following statements is TRUE or FALSE.

1	Sparta maintained the monarchy far longer than most other Greek states.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
2	The kings of Sparta played no role in the city's religious life.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
3	Kings were under the control of the ephors during a military campaign.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
4	Both kings were expected to lead the troops in battle.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
5	Kings were responsible for matters relating to the adoption of children.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
6	The kings' judicial functions were limited to three specific areas.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
7	The kings received preferential treatment when eating in the syssitia.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
8	Ephors lacked the power to have the king put on trial for unconstitutional behaviour.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
9	King Leotychidas was executed for his improper behaviour as a king.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE
10	Each of the kings was equal in prestige and importance.	THIS IS TRUE/ THIS IS FALSE

What do the historians have to say about The roles and privileges of the two kings?

1. Raphael Sealey: *A History of the Greek City States 700-338 BC*

Sealey explains that since the beginning of the 5th century BC, there was no evidence of any Spartan king using his sole authority to declare war. He makes the point that during the time of Thucydides (late 5th century BC) and Xenophon (into the 4th century BC), any decision to declare war was taken by the public assembly. The ephors would then make arrangements for calling up troops.

*“...This does not mean that the royal prerogative of declaring war was specifically abrogated; rather as public authority grew more articulated, it became customary for other organs to have a share, eventually a predominant share, in deciding questions of war and peace.”*⁷

2. Xenophon: *Spartan Society*

Xenophon comments on some of the privileges that the kings were allowed. He makes the point that these benefits were not there so that the kings might develop a tyrannical attitude or to make the people envious of their power. Rather he says there were specific reasons for the existence of the various privileges.

*“...(Lycurgus) gave them the honour of double portions at meals, not for them to stuff twice as much, but so that they should have something to offer as a mark of respect to anyone of their choice... He further permitted a king to take a piglet from every sow’s litter, so that he should never lack victims with which to consult the gods at any time the need arises.”*⁸

3. Plutarch: *Agis*

In his account of King Agis, Plutarch describes the process by which the ephors consulted the heavens to see if a king still had divine favour. Every ninth year, the ephors would choose a clear, moonlit night and sit gazing at the sky.

*“...Should, then, a star shoot from one sector, they conclude that the kings have committed some fault relating to religion, and they suspend them from their office until an oracle comes from Delphi or Olympia to support the kings who have been convicted by the omen.”*⁹

⁷ Sealey, R, *A History of the Greek States 700-338 BC*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1976, p 71

⁸ Xenophon, *Spartan Society*, 14

⁹ Plutarch, *Agis*, 11

Chapter Five:

Government: *ephorate, gerousia, ekklesia*

Introduction

The Spartan system of government managed to combine elements of several styles of government and ascribing a simple description to it is difficult.

- It had two kings.
 - Thus, in an obvious way, it can be described as monarchical.
- However, the government's legislative powers and some of its judicial powers were vested in the Council of Elders, or the *gerousia*.
 - The powers held by this body would tend to suggest that Sparta's government was more akin to an oligarchy – rule by a few.
- However, laws had to be passed by the *ekklesia*, the people's assembly.
 - This would seem to suggest a democratic element.
 - However, the “rider” to the *rhētra*¹ suggests that the democratic element was constrained.
 - However, the office of ephor presented an additional democratic aspect to the Spartan system.

The Gerousia

Plutarch refers to Plato in his explanation of the origins of the *gerousia*. He says it appeared at a time when there was conflict within Sparta, and the state faced the possibility of heading towards either tyranny or extreme democracy. Thus, the establishment of the *gerousia* can be seen as an attempt to avoid either extreme.

“...But now by placing the office of the Elders in the middle as a kind of ballast, and thus striking a balance, it found the safest arrangement and organisation, with the twenty eight elders always siding with the kings when it was a matter of resisting democracy, yet in turn reinforcing the people against the development of tyranny.”²

The *gerousia* comprised 30 members: 28 elders plus the two kings. To become a member, one had to be male, at least sixty years old (apart from the kings) and thus no longer expected to fight. Once elected to the *gerousia*, a man was a member for life. Membership was considered a great honour and was much sought after. It was a reward for a meritorious life.

Members of the *gerousia* were elected by the assembly using the method known as acclamation. Candidates would be paraded before the *ekklesia* which would cheer for each one in turn. In a neighbouring area, judges would assess which candidates had earned the greatest cheers and had thus gained election. The potential for bribery and corrupt practice in this process were great. Aristotle further considered such a method of election as “childish”. Aristotle was not overly impressed with the *gerousia*. He commented on their age and possible honesty:

¹ See Chapter 3

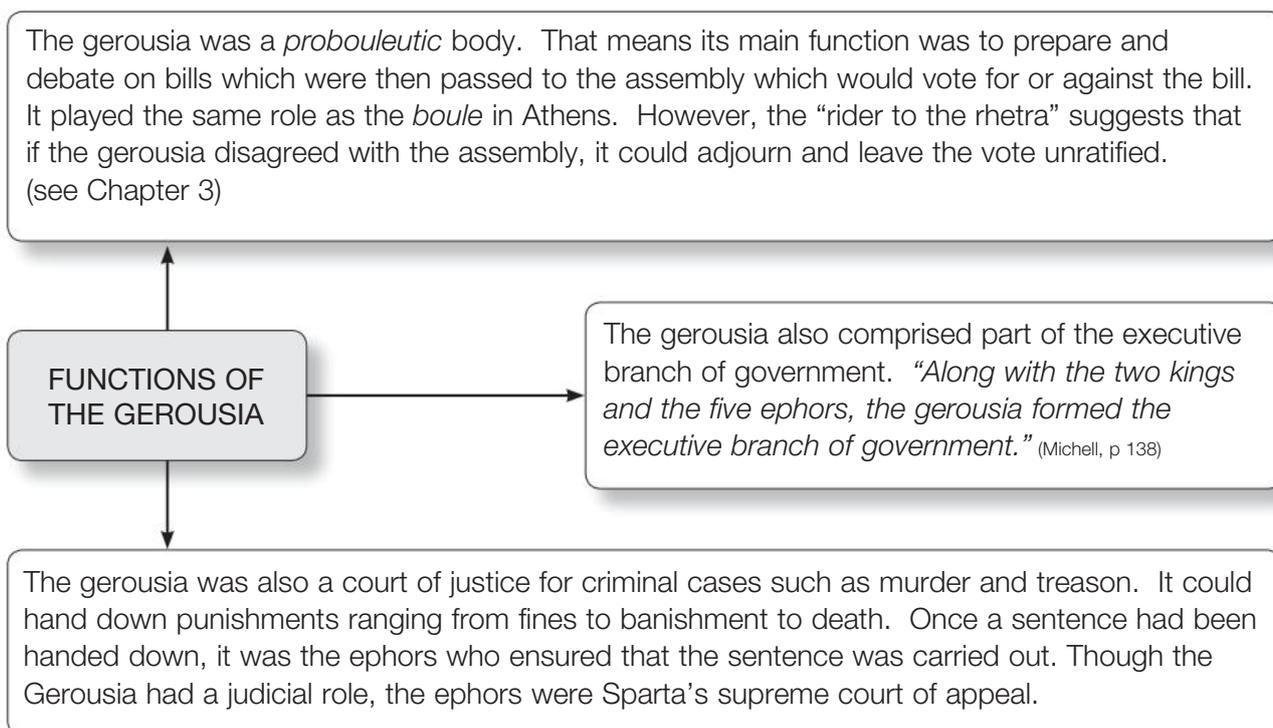
² Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, 7

“...it might be debated whether they should be continued judges for life and so determine matters of the greatest importance, since the mind has its old age as well as the body... it is known that the members of that body have been guilty of both bribery and partiality in many public affairs...”³

Following election, new gerousia members were paraded around the temples by a group of young men and women before being taken to their syssition for a meal where they would be given double portions.

Figure 5.1 summarises the main functions of the gerousia.

Figure 5.1 The functions of the gerousia



The ephorate

One of the more interesting aspects of the Spartan constitution was the ephorate. The ephorate was a body of five *ephors*.⁴ The ephors had great administrative and judicial power within Sparta and represented the most democratic element of the Spartan system.

Mystery surrounds the origin of the office. The ephor might have been the early representative of each of the five villages which originally comprised Sparta. Some historians have suggested that the ephors were originally priests. However, Michell dismisses this as the ephors seemed to have lost any religious attributes. He argues:

“...The one thing a priestly caste will never do is to let these extraordinary (religious) functions lapse.”⁵

Whatever their origin, by the 7th century BC, they had become the key part of the Spartan system of government.

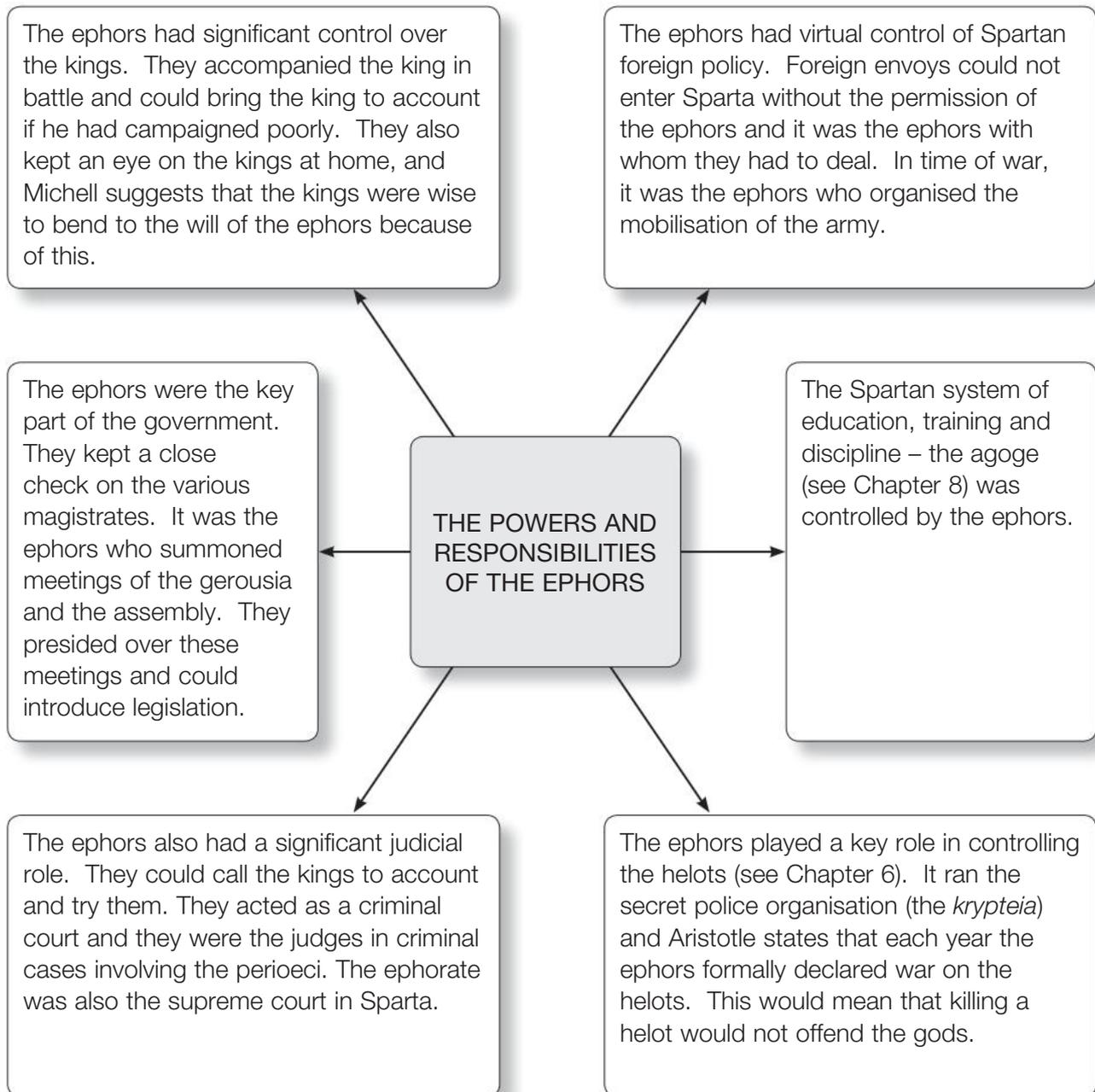
The ephors had significant powers and responsibilities. These are summarised in Figure 5.2.

³ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1270B

⁴ The word ephor roughly means overseer

⁵ Michell, H, *Sparta*, CUP, London, 1952, p 120

Figure 5.2 The powers and responsibilities of the ephors



Though the ephors had significant power, there were also limitations on that power. To become an ephor, one had to be male, aged thirty and be elected by the assembly. However, one could be an ephor only once in a lifetime and the term of office was a single year. On the completion of their year in office, the ephors then reverted to being private citizens. However, this meant that they could be investigated and brought to trial if it was considered that they had behaved inappropriately whilst in office.

Sealey suggests that it is wrong to view the position of the ephors as the result of a long struggle with the kings. He argues that the increasing role and power of the ephorate was more the result of public authority asserting itself in a growing number of areas.

*"...the ephors acquired a miscellaneous bundle of powers and administrative functions."*⁶

⁶ Sealey, R, *A History of the Greek States 700-338 BC*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1976, p 74

However, Sealey, like Aristotle (see end of the chapter) saw dangers in ephor power.

*“...Hence any man who happened to be in office as ephor was well placed for influencing the process of reaching political decisions; in other words, the ephorate was an invitation to political intrigue.”*⁷

The ekklesia

The ekklesia is the Spartan assembly, referred to in older textbooks as the apella. Once a Spartan male had reached the age of thirty, he was eligible to sit in the assembly, unless he had lost his citizenship.

The functions of the assembly were limited:

- Once a month the assembly met and voted on laws that were introduced by the ephor. The assembly could vote for or against the law. However, it could not offer amendments. The ‘rider’ to the rhetra also suggests that the gerousia could ignore a vote of the assembly if it chose.
- The assembly had certain foreign policy functions:
 - it had the power to declare war;
 - it ratified treaties;
 - it chose which king would lead the army in war.
- It also had important electoral functions:
 - it was responsible for the election of the gerousia and the ephors;
 - the assembly decided on any disputes regarding the royal succession.
- The assembly was also responsible for the freeing of helots.

⁷ Sealey, p 74

Exercise 5.1

Below are twenty statements. In the space in the right, circle the term which applies correctly to the statement being made.

1	Has the power to declare war	gerousia/ ephors/ ekklesia
2	Prepares and debates bills	gerousia/ ephors/ ekklesia
3	Is a court of justice for criminal cases such as murder and treason	gerousia/ ephors/ ekklesia
4	There are five of them	gerousia/ ephors/ ekklesia
5	It ratifies treaties	gerousia/ ephors/ ekklesia
6	Michell argues against their earlier priestly role	gerousia/ ephors/ ekklesia
7	The 'rider' suggests it could ignore the assembly	gerousia/ ephors/ ekklesia
8	It was responsible for electing the ephors	gerousia/ ephors/ ekklesia
9	Has the power to try the kings for alleged misdemeanours	gerousia/ ephors/ ekklesia
10	Accompany the kings into battle to check upon their conduct	gerousia/ ephors/ ekklesia
11	Comprises thirty members	gerousia/ ephors/ ekklesia
12	Met once a month to vote on laws presented to it	gerousia/ ephors/ ekklesia
13	Was responsible for freeing any helots	gerousia/ ephors/ ekklesia
14	One had to be at least 60 to become a member	gerousia/ ephors/ ekklesia
15	Was responsible for the Spartan system of education	gerousia/ ephors/ ekklesia
16	Held office for a year and for once in a lifetime	gerousia/ ephors/ ekklesia
17	All citizens were member of it	gerousia/ ephors/ ekklesia
18	Aristotle considered their method of election as childish	gerousia/ ephors/ ekklesia
19	After a year in office, they could be called to account for their actions	gerousia/ ephors/ ekklesia
20	Tended to represent the oligarchical aspect of Spartan government	gerousia/ ephors/ ekklesia

What do the historians have to say about Government: *ephorate, gerousia, ekklesia*?

1. Xenophon: *Spartan Society*

Xenophon is full of praise for the gerousia as it meant that men had to continue to pursue excellence even in old age. By giving gerousia members responsibility for capital cases, the Spartan system was producing more respect for “old age than for those at the peak of their strength”. He comments that though athletic contests are honourable:

*“...they are merely trials of physique, whereas the competition for the Gerousia involves a test of the noble qualities of the spirit. Thus just as the spirit is superior to the body, to the same degree contests of spirit merit greater rivalry than those of physique.”*⁸

2. Aristotle: *Politics*

Aristotle believed that the ephors were the most powerful part of the Spartan system of government. He believed that it was this post rather than power in the assembly that kept the people happy with the constitutional set up. However, he further considered that they also comprised the most corrupt part of the government. He argued:

*“...For this post has total control over the greatest of Spartan affairs but the Ephors come from the whole people with the result that very poor men often gain office who because of their poverty are often bought.”*⁹

3. Thucydides: *History of the Peloponnesian War*

It is not certain whether members of the assembly were allowed to debate issues and speak on proposals that were presented. However, some clue might be found to this issue in Thucydides’ lengthy description of the debate that took place in 432 BC just before the beginning of the Peloponnesian War. In this debate, Sparta’s allies, and their Athenian opponents were invited to speak to the Spartan assembly. Once the foreigners had spoken, they were removed from the assembly and the Spartans themselves then discussed the issue. If Thucydides’ account is correct, it provides evidence that assembly members could speak on issues

*“...After this speech he himself, in his capacity of ephor, put the question to the Spartan assembly. They make their decisions by acclamation, not by voting, and Sthenelaides said at first that he could not decide on which side the acclamations were the louder. This was because he wanted to make them show their opinions openly and so make them all the more enthusiastic for war. He therefore said: “Spartans, those of you who think that the treaty has been broken and that the Athenians are the aggressors, get up and stand on one side. Those who do not think so, stand on the other side,” and he pointed out to them where they were to stand. They then rose to their feet and separated into two divisions. The great majority were of the opinion that the treaty had been broken...”*¹⁰

8 Xenophon, *Spartan Society*, 10

9 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1270b

10 Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Book 1, 87

Chapter Six:

Social structure and occupations: Spartiates, perioeci, 'inferiors', helots

By the 5th century BC, Spartan society was strictly divided into three main groups: Spartiates, perioeci and helots. There was also an additional smaller group referred to as inferiors. Each group had specific rights and obligations, and each group had specific functions and occupations which they were expected to pursue within Spartan society.

Spartiates

The Spartiates comprised the elite class of society.¹ Historians disagree on exactly when Sparta had evolved into a military-style state, but it had certainly achieved this by the early 5th century BC. There is a story regarding King Agesilaus (c 400-360 BC) that highlights the role of the Spartiates.

During a military expedition, he asked the men under his command to stand to one side if they were a blacksmith, a carpenter or any other trade.

Eventually, all his allies had moved to one side while the Spartans remained seated.

The point he was making was that Spartans lived the life of a full-time, professional soldier. From an early age, a Spartan was trained in the ways of the soldier, training which carried on throughout his entire life.²

Agesilaus concluded his story by saying:

*"...Do you see, gentlemen, how many more soldiers we send out than you?"*³

The fundamental purpose of this way of life was to maintain the supremacy of the Spartans in the face of a large, sometimes hostile helot population. Once Sparta had taken over Messenia in the late 8th century, the inhabitants of that region became a serf class subject to Spartan control. This serf class was known as helots. Periodic helot revolts against this situation forced the Spartans to take on their military style life to ensure their supremacy and the subjection of the helot class. In about 700 BC there were approximately 10 000 Spartiates; by 400 BC the figure had fallen to a little over 1000. Helot numbers are difficult to calculate but modern estimates place the number between 170 000 and 225 000. Fear of this vast serf population was the fundamental factor behind the Spartan way of life.

There were several qualifications required to be a Spartiate:

- a Spartiate had to prove descent from the original Dorian conquerors of the region;
- he had to submit to the Spartan system of education and training (agoge).
- he had to be a member of a "mess" (syssition) and share common meals;

The syssitia

A "syssition" was a group of Spartan men who always dined together.⁴ From the age of twenty, a Spartan male was able to join such a group and membership of such a group was a key part of

1 Several terms are used to refer to Spartiates. Other terms include "equals", "peers", "homoioi".

2 The education and training of Spartan men will be covered in Chapter 8. The role of the Spartan army will be covered in Chapter 7.

3 Plutarch, *Sayings of Spartans*, Agesilaus, 72

4 Some textbooks use the British army term "mess" to illustrate what a syssition was.

being “an equal”. Exclusion from a syssition was something that a Spartan male would have found almost impossible to bear.

Election to a syssition involved the current members taking a small piece of bread and placing it in a bowl. If the piece of bread had been rolled into a ball, the vote was in favour of the new man's membership; if it was squashed flat, the vote was against.

Membership of a syssition had major implications for a Spartan male:

- He had to provide food for the mess, in equal proportion to each of the other men. The food would come from his estate.
- A Spartan male was expected to dine with his comrades in the syssition for the rest of his life. The only excuse for a man's absence was illness or attending to a public sacrifice or a hunting expedition.
- Membership was significant:
 - it created very strong bonds of comradeship between the members;
 - the syssition became more important than a man's family.

Plutarch suggests that the introduction of the syssitia was Lycurgus' “finest reform”. He says the syssitia prevented Spartan men staying at home, lounging around on expensive couches:

*“...being waited upon by confectioners and chefs, fattened up in the dark like gluttonous animals, and ruining themselves physically as well as morally, and by giving free rein to every craving and excess which demanded lengthy slumbers, warm baths, plenty of rest, and, in a sense, daily nursing.”*⁵

The Spartan king, Archidamus (c 469-427) supported this view of the syssitia. He was alleged to have said, in response to being told by a man that he could make their wine sweet:

*“...What for? More wine will then certainly be consumed and it will reduce the value of the messes...”*⁶

Figure 6.1 presents a generalised view of the role of the Spartiates in Spartan society. The issues referred to in the diagram are dealt with throughout the text.

The perioeci

Between the Spartiates and the enslaved helot masses were the perioeci, referred to as “the dwellers around”. This section of Spartan society lived in villages across Laconia and Messenia.

The origins of the perioeci are not clear. If they were “Dorian” like the Spartan elite, why did they not enjoy the same privileges as the elite? If they were not Dorian, the question to be asked is why were they not subjected to the same conditions of servitudes as the helots?⁷

Function

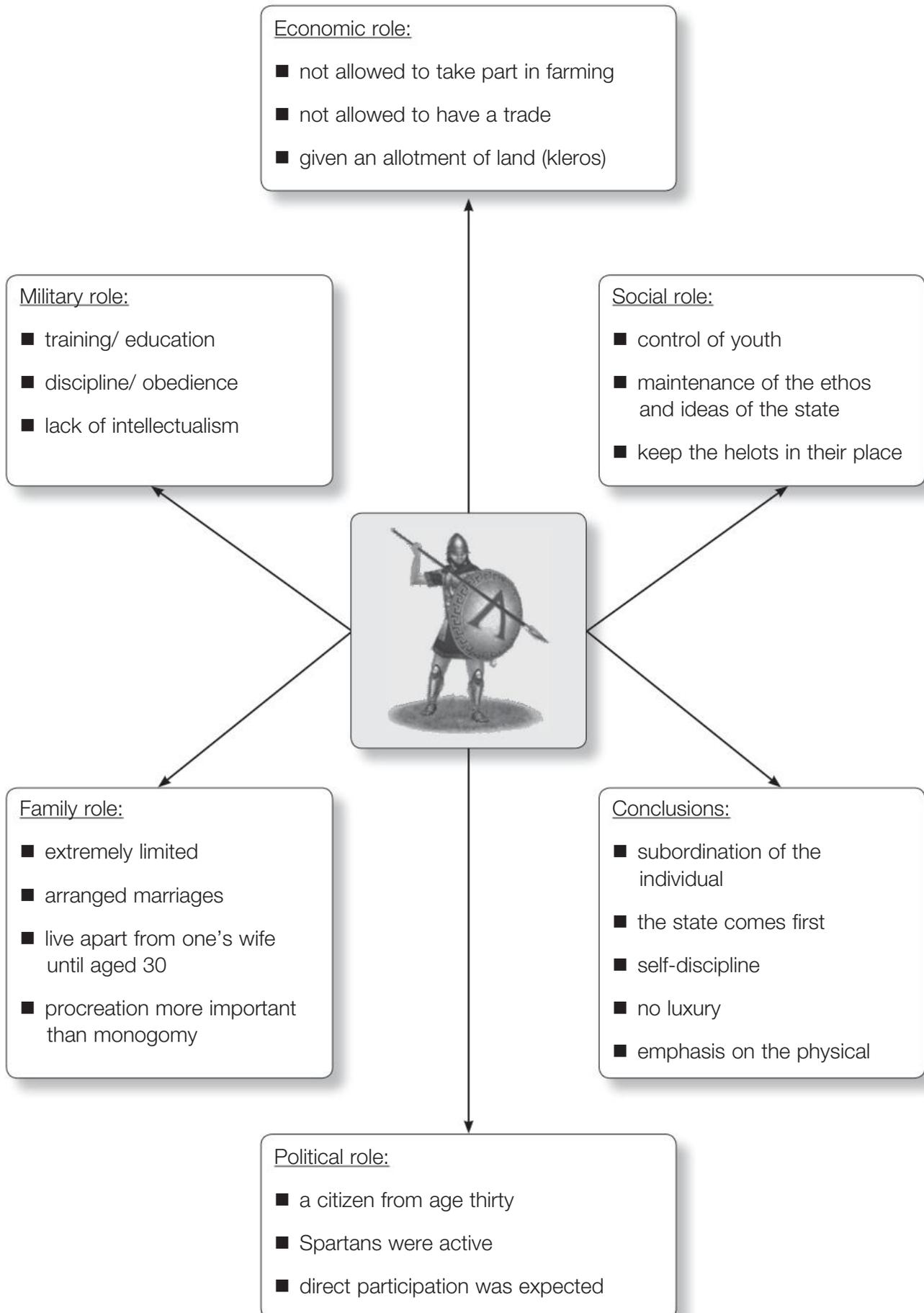
Regardless of the origins of the perioeci, they played a crucial role in Spartan society. Indeed, it would not be too much to argue that they were indispensable to the functioning of the Spartan system. If this is true, it raises the question as to why the perioeci were so willing to accept their second class status. This issue will be dealt with below.

⁵ Plutarch, Lycurgus, 10

⁶ Plutarch, *Sayings of Spartans*, Archidamus son of Zeuxidamus, 4

⁷ For a detailed discussion of the origins of the perioeci, see Michell pp 64-72.

Figure 6.1 The role of the Spartiates



The Spartiates looked down on the perioeci much as 19th century English aristocrats looked down upon factory owners and merchants. The reason for this was that the perioeci were involved in economic activity, a role despised by the Spartan elite as being beneath them.

- The perioeci were Sparta's craftsmen and manufacturers. It was the perioeci who produced the shoes, purple cloaks, pottery, metal work and furnishings.
 - In keeping with the austere nature of Spartan society, the output of the perioeci was simple and utilitarian.
- Poorer perioeci might be given land close to the villages, though few perioeci were farmers.

Plutarch refers to land being allocated to the perioeci:

*"...And this outer territory would be divided among those of the perioeci fit to bear arms, while the territory inside it would be for the Spartiates themselves..."*⁸

- The perioeci provided the merchants of the Spartan economy.
- In coastal areas, many perioeci were fishermen, and the shipwrights in the navy yard at Gythium were almost certainly perioeci.

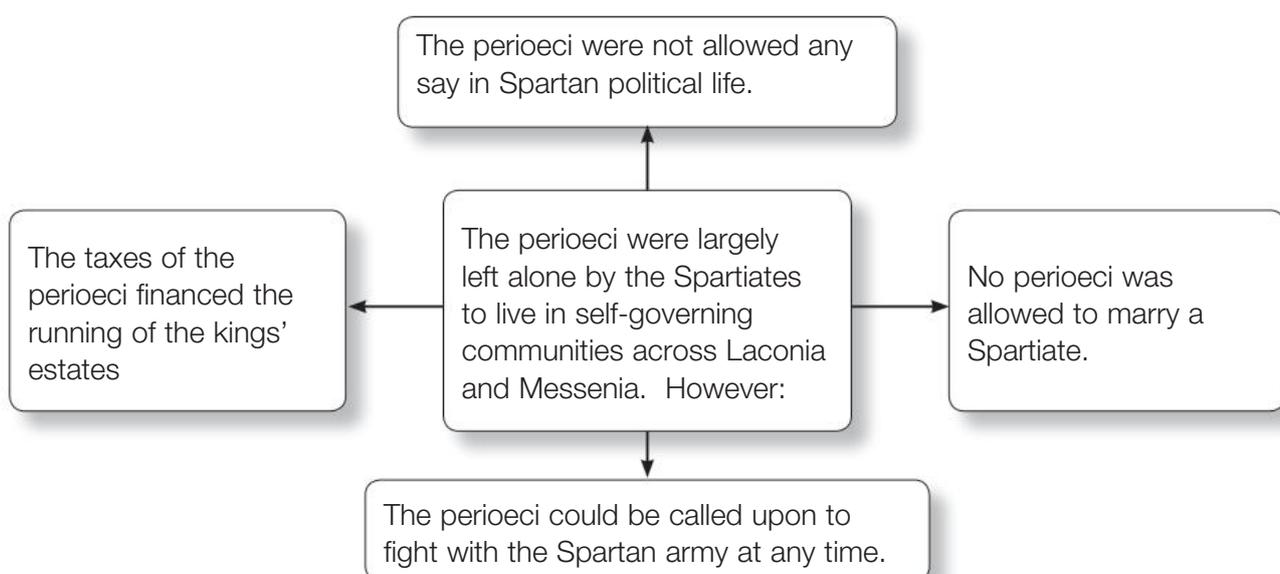
*"...Those who lived on the sea-coast were doubtless fishermen, and the best sailors in the Spartan navy; some of them rose to be admirals..."*⁹

The perioeci also had a military role to play. If required, the perioeci could be called upon to fight alongside the Spartans in battle as hoplites, though they did not undergo the rigorous training of the Spartiates. Plutarch refers to this in his account of the life of Cleomenes:

*"... He made up the citizen numbers with the most eligible of the perioeci, raising 4000 hoplites and training them to use a sarissa gripped by both hands instead of a spear, and to carry their shield by means of an arm-strap rather than with a handle..."*¹⁰

Though granted a fair degree of freedom, the perioeci were also subject to various restrictions as shown in Figure 6.2.

Figure 6.2 Restrictions on the perioeci



8 Plutarch, *Agis*, 8

9 Michell, H, *Sparta*, CUP, London, 1952, p 74

10 Plutarch, *Cleomenes*, 11

Why did the perioeci tolerate their secondary status and accept the contempt in which they were held by the Spartiates? Why did they not rebel?

There are several possible explanations.

1. The perioeci may have realised that a successful rebellion against the well-trained Spartans was untenable.
2. If the perioeci were indeed Dorians, there might be a racial element in their decision not to join in a revolt with the "inferior" helots.
3. Though the perioeci were obliged to fight if ordered by the Spartiates, this was not unusual in the Greek world. For the Ancient Greeks, war was a way of life. The paradox of Sparta is that though it was a military state, it engaged in warfare far less than other Greek states. Thus, the burden of military service on the perioeci was far less than most other Greeks.
4. Perhaps the main reason for the perioeci's acceptance of Spartan control was that life for them was pretty good:
 - a. they were essentially free to do as they wished;
 - b. they played a key role in society for which they were rewarded;
 - c. they enjoyed a far higher status than the despised helots.

The helots

The Spartiates came to view their military way of life with great pride, as something to be proud of. Indeed, there is evidence that other Greek states also viewed the Spartans with admiration, if not a desire to copy them. Indeed at the Hellenic Congress called in 481 BC to deal with the coming Persian invasion, it was taken for granted that Greece's military (and naval) forces would be led by Sparta.

However, though Sparta might be proud of its system, it had been put into place out of fear. This was certainly Thucydides' view.

*"Spartan policy with regard to the helots had always been based almost entirely on the idea of security."*¹¹

Once Messenia had been conquered by the end of the 8th century BC, Sparta found itself with a massive enslaved helot population to control. It realised that this could only be done by being in a constant state of military preparation. Indeed, the Spartans had to deal with helot revolts on several occasions.

Slavery was not uncommon in the Greek world. The glory of Athens, its empire and its democracy would not have been possible without the existence of slavery. However, the position of the helots in Sparta was different.

Helots were not owned by individual masters, as was the case with Athenian slaves, but by the state.

Helots were assigned to the estates of individual Spartans but they were generally left alone. The function of the helots was to work the land of the Spartans and produce the food. Some helots also worked in the homes of their Spartan masters.

Provided the helots produced the food that was expected of them and looked after the land, they tended to remain unmolested.

¹¹ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Book 4, 80

Indeed, once they had provided their masters with the food that was expected of them, they could sell the rest for a small profit.

However, regardless of their standard of life, the helots had no legal or political rights at all.

During time of war, helots could be ordered to serve as lightly armed troops.

A notable act of bravery could bring a helot his freedom.

However, if a helot became renowned for his bravery and independence, this could also lead to his death.¹²

Treatment of the helots was haphazard, and could range from indifference to brutal beatings to murder. Plutarch states that the Spartan treatment of the helots could be "callous and brutal".¹³

Some helots would be made to drink excessive amounts of rough wine and were then paraded in the messes to show Spartan men the dangers of drink. They were forced to sing and dance vulgar and ludicrous songs. Plutarch suggests that the poor treatment of the helots came only after the major revolt of the late 460s BC, following the earthquake of that time.

The krypteia

The fear that the Spartans had for their enslaved helots is highlighted by the fact that the ephors ritually declared war on them each year. Even more sinister was the existence of a kind of "secret police" called the krypteia. The ancient sources are limited in their information on the krypteia. It might have been a rite of passage for young Spartan men. Young Spartans were ordered into the countryside by their overseers equipped with only a dagger and basic rations. Once there they would rest and hide. Plutarch describes what was supposed to happen next.

*"...At night they made their way to the roads and murdered any helot whom they caught. Frequently, too, they made their way through the fields, killing the helots who stood out for their physique and strength."*¹⁴

Inferiors

There were other Spartans who for various reasons did not fit into the category of Spartiate, perioeci or helot. They were collectively known as "inferiors". Figure 6.3 explains who these people were and how they became "inferiors".

Exercise 6.1

Answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

1	Approximately how many Spartans were there to helots?	
2	What was needed to be a Spartiate?	
3	What was the main purpose of the syssition?	

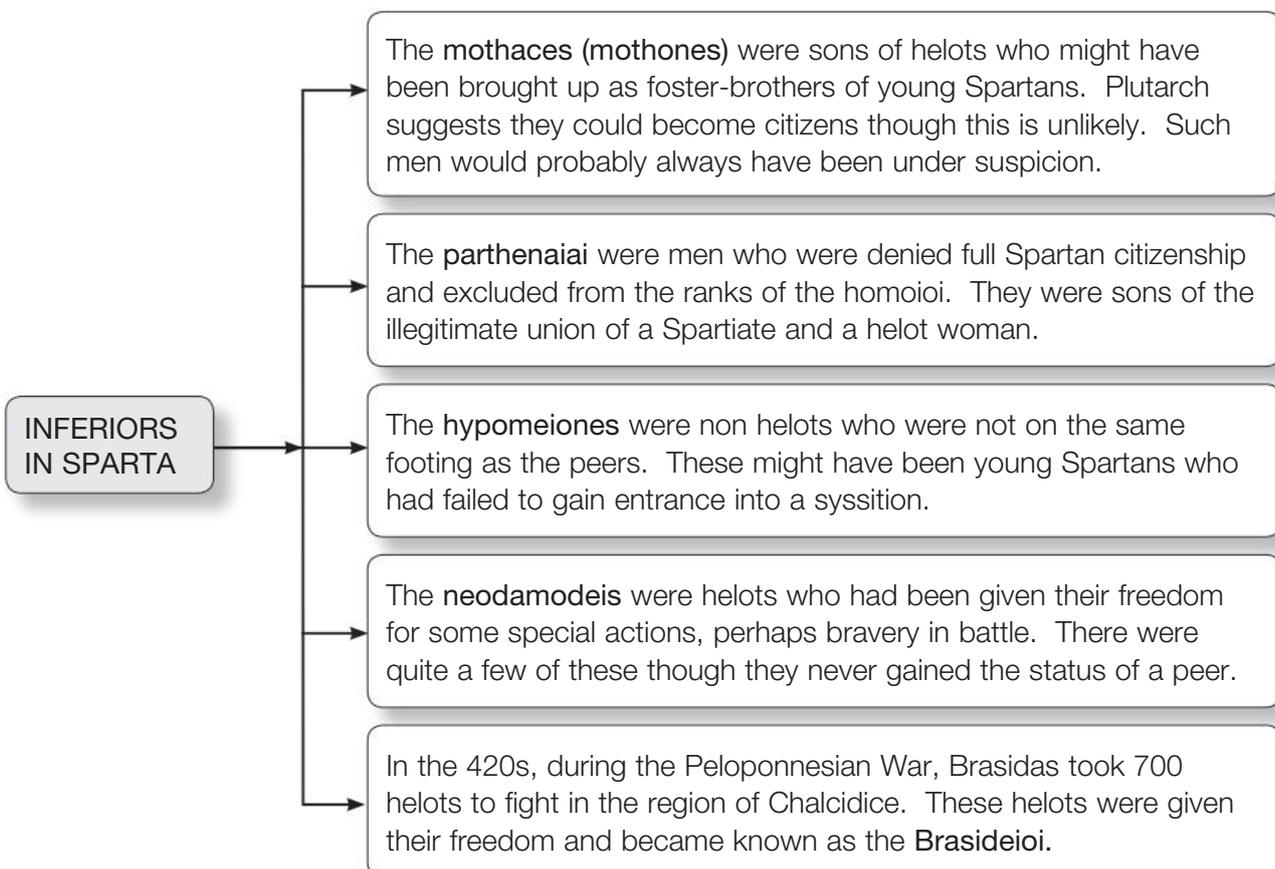
¹² See the reference to Thucydides in Historian 2 below.

¹³ For a more detailed look at Plutarch's description of helot treatment, go to: Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, 28

¹⁴ Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, 28

4	What was a Spartiate's position regarding the Spartan state?	
5	What does the term perioeci mean?	
6	Suggest why the perioeci accepted their inferior position in Sparta.	
7	What does Thucydides suggest Spartan society was based on?	
8	How were helots different to Athenian slaves?	
9	What institution was used to control the helots?	
10	Why was helot bravery a mixed blessing?	

Figure 6.3 Inferiors in Sparta



What do the historians have to say about: Social structure and occupations: Spartiates, perioeci, 'inferiors', helots?

1. H Michell: *Sparta*

Michell argues that there was no bitterness between the Spartiates and the perioeci. They certainly did not antagonise the perioeci and it would have been against the interests of the Spartiates to have done so.

*"...there is nothing to show that they treated the perioeci with more than a 'haughty roughness'..."*¹⁵

2. Thucydides: *History of the Peloponnesian War*

During the Peloponnesian War, the Athenians captured Pylos on the west coast of the Peloponnese. The Spartans became extremely fearful that the Athenians might be able to incite rebellion amongst the helots. This would have been serious at any time, but particularly dangerous when Sparta was at war. To pre-empt this, the Spartans proclaimed that the helots should choose from their number those who had been the bravest and provided Sparta with their best service. The implication was that these men would receive their freedom. About 2000 were selected. They were garlanded and paraded around the temples.

*"...Soon afterwards, however, the Spartans did away with them, and no one ever knew exactly how each one of them was killed."*¹⁶

3. Raphael Sealey: *A History of the Greek States 700-338 BC*

Sealey suggests that relations between the Spartans and the helots were not so bad, and that any deterioration probably did not come until after the earthquake and revolt of the late 460s BC. In this view he echoes Plutarch. To support his view that the helots could not have been that unhappy, he comments that at the Battle of Plataea in 479 BC, for every Spartiate that went to battle, seven helots accompanied him. These helots did not have hoplite equipment, but Sealey suggests:

*"...Even so, before the invention of the machine gun it would have been folly to send on campaign seven unarmed men with every armed man, if the unarmed men hated him."*¹⁷

¹⁵ Michell, H, *Sparta*, CUP, London, 1952, p 73

¹⁶ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Book 4, 80

¹⁷ Sealey, R, *A History of the Greek City States 700-338 BC*, University of California Press, London, 1976, p 68

Occupations:

A summary of the primary occupations of the Spartiates, the Perioeci and the Helots is repeated in Chapter Nineteen, pp 84-85. This chapter deals with leisure activities and daily life of the various groups living in Sparta.

Chapter Seven

The Spartan Army

Introduction

In his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides gives a lengthy description of Spartan fighting methods in his examination of the Battle of Mantinea of 418 BC.¹ By the time of Mantinea, army organisation had long been based on hoplite warfare organised into phalanxes.

In earlier times, Greek soldiers had fought in a free for all, or man on man, style. However, by the 5th century BC, this style of fighting had been replaced by the more disciplined **phalanx**.

- A phalanx was a long block of soldiers, called **hoplites**, often up to eight ranks deep.
- They were organised in “files” (lines front to back) so that if a man fell, his place could quickly be taken by one behind.
- An open order phalanx had a gap between each man of about 1.5 metres; closed order occurred when the men doubled up, leaving no space between them.
- The rear ranks’ purpose seems to have been to provide added weight, similar to the operation of a rugby scrum.

The phalanx was a formidable piece of army organisation. However, it did have its drawbacks. It was only of any use on level ground. It was useless for besieging a town as its failure in the early stages of the Peloponnesian War showed. It was also not particularly mobile.

Not only had there been a revolution in army organisation but also in the equipment used by hoplites. The hoplite was a heavily-armed spearman.

- He carried a spear about two metres in length and a sword about a metre in length. The spear was used for thrusting not throwing.
- What made the Phalanx organisation possible was the shield each hoplite carried. It was called a hoplon (hence hoplite).
 - It measured about a metre wide and weighed 7-8 kilograms.
 - Held in the left hand, the shield was able to protect the left side of the body and a closed order phalanx would be protected by a long line of shields.
- A hoplite wore a thin bronze (Corinthian) helmet, bronze greaves to protect his legs and a bronze-reinforced linen cuirass. The characteristic red cloak worn by Spartan soldiers was usually discarded in a battle.

Historians are in disagreement about the development of the phalanx. One view is that in Homeric times, fighting was mainly the preserve of ‘aristocratic heroes’ and that the development of hoplite warfare came much later, perhaps not until the 7th and 6th centuries BC. Others suggest it had been a feature of Greek warfare much longer and changes in warfare in the 7th century were the result improved weaponry rather than a fundamental change in military tactics. For more details on the development of the phalanx over time, the following is a useful and straightforward site:
http://www.ancientgreekbattles.net/Pages/90087_PhalanxHistory.htm

For fun, students might check images from the film “300”:
<http://www.300spartanwarriors.com/frankmillers300/300phalanxformation.html>

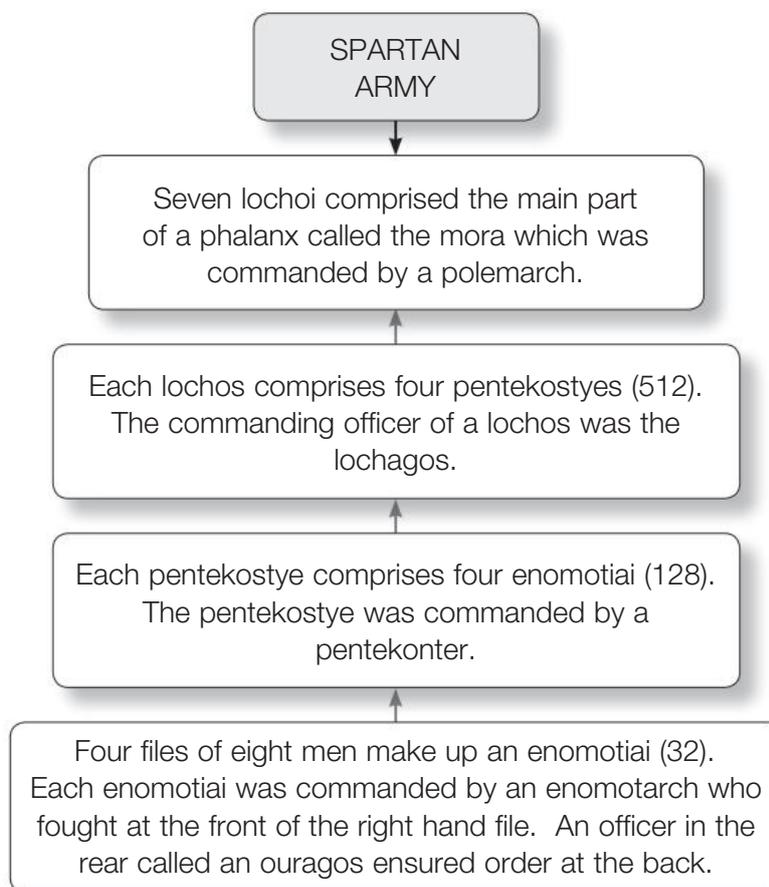
¹ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Book 5, 63-74

Spartan army organisation

Every Spartan from the age of 18 to 60 was enrolled in the army in one of 42 age classes. Usually the youngest and oldest were not called upon to fight unless there was a real emergency situation. Most Spartan soldiers were aged 20-50.

Thucydides points out that the king could rely on a clear chain of command through which his orders would reach the troops in the field. Immediately subordinate to the king were polemarchs who passed on the king's orders to the various officers in charge of units. Accurate numbers for Spartan army organisation are difficult to know. However, Thucydides suggests that the largest Spartan unit was the **lochos**, (or battalion comprising about 512 men). The lochos was divided into four **pentekostyes** (or companies of up to 128 men). Each pentekostye was further divided into four **enomotiai** (or platoons of up to 32 men each). At the Battle of Mantinea, the Spartan army comprised seven battalions. This organisation is illustrated in Figure 7.1.

Figure 7.1 Spartan army organisation (according to Thucydides) ²



The battle front measured about 450 men from one wing to the other, and behind the front line were supporting ranks up to eight deep. A Spartan king also had an elite force of 300 knights on horseback called **hippeis**. In addition there were lightly armed foot soldiers, armed with javelins and sling shots. These were often helots who served their masters on the battlefield.

Spartan tactics served them well for a very long time.

- At Thermopylae in 480 BC, an ability to fool the enemy into thinking a retreat was in progress, worked well when the Spartan were quickly able to regroup and inflict losses on the Persian enemy.

- At the Battle of Plataea in 479, Spartan discipline and training showed its worth when, in the face of thousands of Persian arrows, the Spartans held their positions to eventually achieve victory.
- Their superiority in military tactics would finally be destroyed at the Battle of Leuctra of 371 BC when the Spartans proved unable to cope with the more innovative techniques of the Theban leader, Epaminondas.
- One type of Spartan army manoeuvre was called the “anastrophe”. This involved the doubling of the depth of the right wing of a phalanx.
- Another manoeuvre was known as the “Laconian countermarch”. This involved completely reversing the position of the phalanx to deal with an enemy which appeared in the rear. It ensured that the experienced men were always at the front in any battle.²

Both Thucydides and Xenophon had first hand experience of Spartan army organisation and tactics. However, their accounts of the Spartan army contain differences as well as similarities.

Thucydides	Xenophon
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A file averaged eight men and four files comprised an enomotia. Four enomotiai made up a pentecostye ■ Four pentecostyes made up a lochos ■ A regiment was made up of seven lochos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Only two enomotiai made up a pentecostye ■ Two pentecostyes made a lochos ■ A regiment was made up of four lochos
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ In battle, the enomotiai marched one behind the other in columns. ■ When deploying for battle, rear units lined up on the left of the leader, to make a phalanx of four columns. The commander was normally stationed on the right to prevent the phalanx veering to the right as each hoplite sought to gain the protection of his neighbour’s shield. ■ On the given order to form close order, the rear half of each enomotiai would move up to fill the gap on each file’s left. 	

Exercise 7.1

Use the terms in the box below to complete the following passage.

The main unit of Spartan army organisation was called the _____. It comprised highly trained _____ soldiers, so-called after the name of their shields, the _____. They wore a _____-style helmet, a bronze-reinforced _____ and _____ to protect their legs. The basic unit of the army organisation was the _____, four of which comprised a pentecostye and was commanded by a _____. Four pentecostyes comprised a _____. Seven lochoi comprised a _____ which was commanded by a _____. The Spartan king was accompanied in battle by a personal force of 300 _____. The army was also accompanied by lightly armed foot soldiers who were probably _____.

Corinthian	phalanx	helots	lochos	mora
hoplon	enomotia	cuirass	polemarch	hippeis
	pentekonter	greaves	hoplite	

² See Xenophon, *Spartan Society*, 11

What do the historians have to say about the Spartan army?

1. Thucydides: *History of the Peloponnesian War*

Thucydides describes the chain of command that existed in the Spartan army. His description suggests a strong degree of efficiency and the idea that every man knew what was expected of him in battle. At the Battle of Mantinea, the Spartan army was led by King Agis. Thucydides states that when the king is leading the army, all decisions are given by him personally.

*“...He gives the word to the divisional commanders and it is passed on from them to the regimental commanders, from them to the company commanders, from them to the platoon commanders, and from them to the platoons. So, too, if an order has to be passed along the line, it is done in the same way and quickly becomes effective, as nearly the whole Spartan army, except for a small part, consists of officers, serving under other officers, and the responsibility for seeing that an order is carried out falls on a great many people...”*³

2. L F Fitzhardinge: *The Spartans*

Fitzhardinge takes issue with Thucydides' glowing description of the efficiency of the Spartan army (as he does with some of the details Thucydides gives of army organisation). He suggests that though the Spartan army system was impressive, it was certainly not foolproof, and that this fallibility was present at the Battle of Mantinea (as it had been at Plataea). Fitzhardinge states that the king's plan on each occasion was almost ruined due to officer disobedience.

*“...The Spartans are said to have been taken by surprise, coming while still in marching order upon their opponents drawn up for battle. The day was saved by the steadiness of the rank and file against the headlong charge of their opponents, and their victory was due not to professional skill or training, but solely to their courage.”*⁴

3. Xenophon: *Spartan Society*

Xenophon is full of praise of the way in which the Spartan army was able to regroup, act almost spontaneously and not panic in the face of unfamiliar situations. He dismisses the idea that Spartan organisation was complex by arguing that it worked so well because each man knew exactly what was expected of him. To support this he gives the following example.

*“...If...an enemy phalanx suddenly appears in front, the order is passed to each enomotarch to form a front to the left, and this continues down the entire line until the counter-phalanx is in place. Now should the enemy appear from the rear... each line countermarches itself so that it is always the men of the highest calibre who are facing the enemy...”*⁵

3 Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Book 5, 66

4 Fitzhardinge, L F, *The Spartans*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1985, p 147

5 Xenophon, *Spartan Society*, 11

Chapter Eight

The educational system: *agoge*

The Spartan education system was totally geared towards the development of highly-trained warriors for whom courage, strength, military skill and total obedience to the state would become second nature. For Spartan males, there was to be little room in their education and journey towards manhood for literary, artistic, academic or intellectual activities.

- The aim of the Spartan educational system was not to develop a questioning attitude as thinking men who might wish to change their society.
- The aim of Spartan education was to inculcate obedience to the values and ethos of the Spartan state, acceptance of the status quo and to produce soldiers. Plutarch has King Agis saying in response to a question on what form of training is practised in Sparta:

“...Understanding of how to take orders and to give them.”¹

Spartans were encouraged to speak in few words and to the point, and to avoid lengthy arguments (as Athenians might).²

“...Boys were further taught to express themselves in a style which was at once sharp, yet at the same time attractive and suited to concise exposition of a variety of points.”³

The rigorous and tough training system through which all Spartan males were expected to pass was known as the *agoge*.

The structure of the *agoge* is outlined in the following table.

Age	What happened?	Ancient reference
at birth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ At birth the child was examined by the city’s elders at a special spot called the <i>lesche</i>. ■ If healthy, it was allowed to live. If it was weak or deformed in any way, it was taken to ‘the place of rejection’ (<i>Apothetae</i>) and thrown off a cliff. 	See Plutarch for more details on what mothers did with new born babies. (<i>Lycurgus 16</i>)
up to about the age of 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Young children were usually brought up by nurses, sometimes by their mothers. The nurses did not spoil the children. ■ If they were crying or sulking, they were ignored. Children were left alone in the dark. They ate the food in front of them or went hungry. 	For the work of the nurse see Plutarch (<i>Lycurgus 16</i>)
at age 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Boys were removed from their families and they would live communally until the age of 30. ■ The city appointed a <i>paidonomos</i> or warden who had complete authority over the boys and who was allowed to punish them if he felt it necessary. ■ The <i>paidonomos</i> was accompanied by young men over the age of 18 called <i>eirenes</i> who carried whips with them. 	(<i>Lycurgus 16</i>) See Xenophon (<i>Spartan Society 2</i>)

¹ Plutarch, *Sayings*, Agis 2

² The term “laconic” that means speaking in few words, to the point, perhaps tersely, comes from “Laconia”, the home of Sparta.

³ Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, 19

<p>from age 7 to about age 12</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ From now on, the boys were to learn obedience, develop physical strength, learn to respond to orders and to get along with their peers. ■ The emphasis in their education was upon athletic training and physical fitness. ■ Only light tunics could be worn, even in winter, and the head was closely shaven. ■ Boys were to walk in silence with their eyes looking down. They were always observed by adults and any citizen had the right to give orders to a child and to punish him for any perceived misbehaviour. 	<p><i>(Lycurgus 17)</i></p> <p>Xenophon <i>(Spartan Society 3)</i></p>
<p>from about age 13 to about age 18</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Discipline and training now became more severe. ■ Boys now passed into “herds”, based on year groups. ■ They were looked after by prefects (eirenes). ■ Training remained predominantly physical but the boys were also taught traditional songs, and they read Homer and Spartan poets. ■ There was an emphasis on athletic and musical competitions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ They lived in dormitories, slept on rushes, received one garment a year and ate basic rations. It was believed that a smaller diet produced taller and healthier people. ■ They were encouraged to steal food but were harshly punished if caught. This was good practice for possibly having to “live off the land” in future military situations. ■ Baths were forbidden but they were allowed to bathe in the cold River Eurotas. 	<p>Plutarch hints at the homosexual love shown by older boys to the youths. <i>(Lycurgus 17)</i></p> <p>He discusses this further later on. <i>(Lycurgus 18)</i></p> <p>Plutarch says the Spartans called homosexual love “inspiration”. <i>(Cleomenes 3)</i></p> <p>See too the reference to King Cleomenes’ relationship with the youth Panteus. <i>(Cleomenes, 37)</i></p> <p><i>(Lycurgus 17)</i></p> <p>Plutarch tells the famous story of the boy and the fox cub. <i>(Lycurgus 18)</i></p> <p>Xenophon <i>(Spartan Society 2)</i></p>

from about age 19 to about age 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A boy now became an eirene and could supervise the younger boys. ■ He could now be called upon to fight if Sparta was at war. ■ Physical training and fitness remained paramount. ■ State-promoted, controlled violence was not uncommon. Primitive rugby style games were allowed in which “anything went”. ■ During the year, magistrates would select the best young men, who in turn could select whom they thought the 100 next best. Such selections often caused resentment and led to violence. 	<p>Plutarch comments on the importance of minimal diet and the Spartan belief in the avoidance of being overweight. (Lycurgus 17)</p> <p>Xenophon (Spartan Society 4)</p>
from about age 24 to age 30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The young men were now eligible to be front line troops. ■ The king’s select 300 knights would come from this group. 	
from age 30 to age 60	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ At the end of their 30th year, each man was now a full citizen. He was allowed to exercise his political rights. ■ From now on, each man was liable for military service if called upon by the state. ■ Men were now allowed to grow their hair long. This was supposed to suggest physical vigour. ⁴ ■ The man no longer lived in the barracks but at home with his wife and family. ■ However, he was expected to dine in the mess (<i>syssition</i>) every night for the rest of his life (see Chapter 6). 	<p>Plutarch explains the reasons for the men’s special concern for their hair. (<i>Lycurgus 22</i>) – see below in the historians section.</p>

Exercise 8.1

Circle either THIS IS TRUE or THIS IS FALSE as it applies to each of the following statements.

1	Babies were inspected at birth by elders, and if weak or deformed, the babies were murdered soon after.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
2	Young children’s treatment differed little to that of young children in modern Australia.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
3	Young boys could be disciplined and beaten by older boys.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
4	Thieving by teenagers was actively encouraged by the authorities in Sparta.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
5	Homosexual relations amongst men in Sparta were strictly outlawed by the authorities.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
6	When men reached the age of 30, it was expected that they cut their hair extremely short.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE

⁴ The Spartans apparently took great care with their hair. On the eve of the Battle of Thermopylae (480 BC9), Leonidas and his 300 spent time curling their hair.

7	Boys were expected to express themselves in a concise and limited manner.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
8	Aggressive behaviour by the young men was promoted by the state in various sporting competitions.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
9	Physical training was even more rigidly enforced during time of war.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
10	Spartan males were never allowed to live at home with their wives and children.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE

What do the modern and ancient writers have to say about the agoge?

1. Plutarch: *Lycurgus*

Plutarch makes the point that in wartime the harshest parts of the training regime were relaxed. Instead the men were happy to groom their hair and decorate their clothes and their weapons. Apparently, long hair made good looking men more handsome while it made ugly men more frightening. On the issue of easing up on the strict training, Plutarch says:

*“...they permitted the young men a lifestyle which was generally less subject to punishment and scrutiny, with the result that for them uniquely among mankind war represented a respite from their military training...”*⁵

2. Plutarch: *Cleomenes*

One would expect that fear was an emotion totally out of place in a society such as Sparta. The point could be made of course that the entire system was based on fear (fear of the helots). However, Plutarch makes the point that the Spartans honoured fear but not fear as we think of it today. He said they feared the state and they feared for their reputation.

*“...the men of old seemed to regard courage not as fearlessness, but as a fear of censure and terror of disgrace. For the men who are the most cowardly before the law are the boldest in front of the enemy: those who are particularly nervous of gaining a bad reputation have the least fear of suffering. Thus, it has been well said too that: ‘Where there is fear, there is also a sense of respect’...”*⁶

3. H Michell: *Sparta*

Did Sparta always have the strict system of training and obedience which comprised the agoge? Historians are not agreed upon this. Certainly, in the 7th century BC, Spartan aristocrats were enjoying a comfortable and cultivated style of life, as the poems of Alcman suggest. However, by the time Xenophon was writing in the early 4th century BC, this has disappeared. Fitzhardinge has shown that Sparta had not been bereft of culture and luxury as the traditional view has presented.⁷ However, by the 5th century Sparta had been transformed. We can only speculate on why the agoge became so rigidly enforced. The helot revolt of the late 460s BC must have caused real panic in Sparta. Michell suggests the concerns can be dated earlier.

*“...One may suspect the discipline was tightened and made obligatory on all after the second Messenian war...”*⁸

5 Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, 22

6 Plutarch, *Cleomenes*, 9

7 Fitzhardinge, L F, *The Spartans*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1985

8 Michell, H, *Sparta*, CUP, London, 1964, p 38

Chapter Nine

The role and status of women

Introduction

Spartan women ¹ seemed to have been something quite special in the Greek world. Michell suggests that one way of understanding the position of Spartan women, as compared to other Greek women, is to think of the present day contrast between western women and those of more female-repressed eastern societies. ² In terms of dress, demeanour, upbringing and ultimately property ownership, Spartan women clearly seemed to have far greater freedom than their sisters in other city states.

- Contemporaries had mixed views of Spartan women.
- To some they were the most beautiful women in all Greece. ³
- To others they had a reputation for being out of control and sexually promiscuous.
- Athenians liked to poke fun at Spartan women and claim that they lacked femininity and were muscle-bound.

The following is an extract from the play *Lysistrata* by the Athenian playwright, Aristophanes, written in about 411 BC. ⁴ *Lysistrata* is Athenian while Lampito is presented as a Spartan woman.

LYSISTRATA

Yes, that is best...Ah! Here comes Lamipto.

(Lampito, a husky Spartan damsel, enters with three others, two from Boetia and one from Corinth).

Good day Lampito, dear friend from Lacedaemon. How well and handsome you look! What a rosy complexion! And how strong you seem; why you could strangle a bull surely!

LAMPITO

Yes, indeed, I really think I could. It's because I do gymnastics and practise the bottom-kicking dance.

CLEONICE

(opening Lampito's robe and baring her bosom)

And what superb breasts! ⁵

Aristophanes would have clearly had his Athenian audience laughing at such comments. But how accurate is this view?

A woman's life

Plutarch describes how Spartan children were examined at birth and if found weak or deformed were hurled off a cliff. ⁶ However, Plutarch's account is typical of the male-oriented accounts which are handed down to us from ancient times.

¹ What follows refers of course only to the daughters of Spartiates, not the daughters of perioeci or helots.

² Michell, H, *Sparta*, CUP, London, 1964, p 46

³ Homer, *The Odyssey*, XIII, 412

⁴ Aristophanes' tells the story of an attempt by Greek women to stage a sexual strike to force Greek men to cease fighting in the Peloponnesian War. It is considered quite bawdy even by today's standards.

⁵ Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, 48-53

⁶ Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, 16

- He says that the father was not allowed to make any decision about whether the child should be brought up.
- No mention is made of the woman who had just given birth, or what her feelings might be.
- It is also unclear whether the strict examination made of babies at birth applied to females as well as males.

The daughter of King Cleomenes, Gorgo, who later married King Leonidas of Thermopylae fame, when asked by a woman from Attica:

*“... ‘Why are you Spartan women the only ones who can rule men?’, she replied: ‘Because we are also the only ones who give birth to men.’”*⁷

Here lies the crux of the position of women in Sparta. Their purpose was to produce healthy children for the perpetuation of the Spartan state. For this reason, they exercised with the boys. A fit, healthy woman who exercised, looked after her body and ate well, would produce strong and healthy children capable of undergoing the agoge and maintaining Spartan supremacy. As a result of this:

- Young girls took part in athletic training though they did not join in military training with boys, and they lived at home whereas the boys lived in the barracks.
- To exercise more freely, they wore a special tunic that had a slit down the side which would enable them to move freely. Historians are divided about whether or not Spartan girls exercised in the nude.
- Girls also participated in dancing, singing and musical competitions.
- During the early months of pregnancy, women were expected to continue their training. They were also allowed to eat and drink freely. This is in sharp contrast to Athenian women who would stay at home and live quietly until the birth of their child.

The importance of the Spartan woman’s role as a bearer of children is borne out by the fact that if she died in childbirth, her name could be inscribed on her tombstone.⁸

Spartan women certainly had more freedom than most Greek women. They were not expected to fulfill the demands of the agoge as was demanded of their male counterparts. Thus, they could enjoy exercise without having to face the consequences of not reaching the demanding standards expected of men. However, neither did they have to stay at home and carry out domestic duties such as weaving, spinning and preparing meals. This was the function of helot women.

However, other restrictions were placed upon them.

- Women were not allowed to ‘adorn’ themselves or wear jewellery.
- They could not use perfumes and cosmetics.
- Clothing was to be simple. The art of dyeing was forbidden (except for the men’s red cloaks) and so bright colours were not allowed.
- Their hair was closely-cropped and boyish-looking.

Figure 9.1 Bronze statue of a Spartan girl running



⁷ Plutarch, *Sayings of Women*, Gorgo, 5 (It is thought Plutarch did not compile these sayings but they are usually included in his works.)

⁸ See Chapter 15.

The sources tell us that Spartan women took great pride in their roles as mothers. Gorgo's view has already been mentioned above. Many sayings of Spartan women have been handed down which emphasise women's view regarding what was expected of their sons. One Spartan woman, Damatria, on hearing that her son had been a coward, and was thus unworthy, killed him when he returned home. An unnamed woman on hearing that her son had died in battle said:

*"...Let there be weeping for cowards; but you child, without a tear
Do I bury: you are my son, and Sparta's too..."*⁹

Marriage customs

Spartan women tended to marry later than other Greek women. Athenian girls might marry as soon as they reached puberty while Spartan girls waited until their late teens and sometimes even past twenty, as Plutarch elegantly puts "when they were in their prime and ripe for it". Plutarch describes how a Spartan girl was 'captured'.

A 'bridesmaid' then shaved her hair, dressed her in male attire and then left her on a mattress alone in the dark.

Soon she would be visited by her husband who, having eaten normally and 'soberly' with the other men in the mess, would sneak in and carry her to the bed.

He would spend only a short time with her and then quietly leave and sleep where he usually did with the other men in the barracks.

This practice would continue for a long time with the husband visiting his wife in secret, desperate to avoid detection. His wife would concoct schemes to make it possible for them to be together without anyone knowing. This might carry on so long that the wife might become pregnant even before her husband had ever seen her in daylight.

Plutarch states that there was a clear purpose in such odd subterfuge.

*"...Such intercourse was not only an exercise in self-control and moderation, but also meant that partners were fertile physically, always fresh for love, and ready for intercourse rather than being sated and pale from unrestricted sexual activity. Moreover some lingering glow of desire and affection was always left in both..."*¹⁰

Plutarch goes on to explain that modern contemporary marital expectations were absent from Sparta. If an older man who had a young wife happened to take a liking to a younger man, he might introduce the man to his wife "so as to fill her with noble sperm and then adopt the child as his own." Equally, if a man took a liking to another man's wife, he might seek the husband's permission to sleep with her "thereby planting in fruitful soil".¹¹

Women and land ownership

Sparta was a warrior society in which the development of military skills was its reason for being. Few societies in history could be considered more male-oriented. However, by the early 4th century BC, it had become a society dominated by a small number of wealthy women. Women gradually gained control of the city's estates and as a result began to wield great power and influence. Aristotle states that women owned up to 40% of Spartan land. Plutarch in his life of King Agis explained the difficulties the king had trying to implement land reform.

⁹ Plutarch, *Sayings of Women*, Unnamed Spartan Women, 2

¹⁰ Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, 15

¹¹ Modern historians have often made comparisons between Ancient Sparta and Nazi Germany. Such a practice is dangerous but similarities exist. Both societies saw the role of women to bear children, both encouraged female athleticism to produce healthy bodies, both disapproved of women adorning themselves with cosmetics and make-up, and both had a flexible approach to the production of children (see the Nazi creation of the Lebensborn).

“...Now at this time most of the wealth at Sparta was in the hands of women (who opposed Agis)...because they saw that they would be deprived of both the respect and the influence which their wealth afforded them...”¹²

Once Sparta was set on its long-term suppression of the helots following the conquest of Messenia, men dedicated themselves to military training. This left women greater freedom and the opportunity to run estates. As Spartiates were not allowed to own more land than they had originally been given, women might have taken over vacant estates as the number of Spartiates fell dramatically by the end of the 5th century BC.

Another explanation might relate to inheritance laws.

- Sparta had quite different inheritance laws regarding women than the rest of Greece.
 - Most Greek women could not own property, could not inherit property and could not pass it on to their heirs.
 - Husbands controlled the dowry that came with marriage and made all the important economic decisions.
- The situation in Sparta was quite different.
 - Daughters inherited the estate when there were no living brothers.
 - They also inherited land even if brothers were alive, though their share was smaller. This was not the case in other parts of Greece.
 - A Spartan wife’s dowry remained hers throughout marriage, and that dowry often comprised land.

For a more detailed account of the above argument, go to:

<http://www.law.virginia.edu/pdf/olin/0708/hanssen.pdf>

What do the historians have to say about women in Sparta?

1. H Michell: *Sparta*

Michell describes various exercises that women practised. He refers to one, already mentioned in the reference above to Lysistrata, where girls jumped up and down and attempted to touch their bottoms with their heels. This was referred to as the bibasis. Women were not taught the traditional skills of weaving and spinning as such occupations were only for slaves.

“...By athleticism they made sure that their children would be up to the standard of physical fitness demanded by the Spartan system.”¹³

2. Aristotle: *Politics*

Aristotle had a poor opinion of Spartan women. He believed that as the condition of Spartan women was bad, it followed that the condition of half the city was bad. He argued that Spartan women lived in a state of intemperance and luxury. Sparta suffered because due to the dominant position of women in the state, wealth was too highly valued. He put much of the blame for this on Spartan property laws. This is his view of Spartan women at the time of the Theban invasion in the early 4th century BC.

¹² Plutarch, *Agis*, 7

¹³ Michell, H, *Sparta*, CUP, London, 1964, p 198

“...Even in regard to courage, which is of no use in daily life, and is needed only in war, the influence of the Lacedaemonian women has been most mischievous. The evil showed itself in the Theban invasion, when, unlike the women of other cities, they were utterly useless and caused more confusion than the enemy...”¹⁴

3. S B Pomeroy: *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves*

Pomeroy relates that at the end of the 7th century BC when Spartan warriors were absent from the city on long campaigns, many Spartan women resorted to having relationships with male helots. Pomeroy suggests that the state encouraged this so that there might be a crop of new warriors in the future if casualties in the current campaign were excessive.

“...The children of these unions were euphemistically termed ‘children of unmarried mothers’, but they were not recognized as Spartan citizens when the army did return home successful from war. They were sent off to the city of Tarentum...”¹⁵

Exercise 9.1

Answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

1	How important was a woman's opinion during the inspection of a baby immediately after birth?	
2	How did most women regard their job as child bearers, if Gorgo is to be believed?	
3	How much time did Spartan girls spend on spinning and weaving?	
4	What was the main difference between the education of Spartan girls and Athenian girls?	
5	What privilege was allowed a Spartan woman who died in child birth?	
6	How important were cosmetics and fine fashion for Spartan women?	
7	How much time did a Spartan spend with his young wife? Why?	

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 2

¹⁵ Pomeroy, S B, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves*, Pimlico, London, 1975, p 37

8	How did Spartans feel about monogamy?	
9	What had happened to Spartan land ownership by about 400 BC?	
10	Why had Spartan women become so wealthy by the start of the 4th century BC?	

Exercise 9.2

Match the writer listed in the box below, with the statement that he or she might have made.

1	Spartan women are among the most beautiful in the world.	
2	Spartan women are buxom and unfeminine.	
3	Spartan women are largely to blame for the decline of Sparta.	
4	Delaying marriage for women meant that they would be more eager for sex and procreation.	
5	We can control men because we give birth to men.	

GORGO HOMER PLUTARCH ARISTOTLE ARISTOPHANES

Section Three ■ The Economy

(aspects of the economy section of the syllabus are covered in other chapters to avoid duplication)

Chapter Ten

Land ownership: agriculture, the kleroi

Introduction

As with many aspects of Spartan life, the system of land tenure is clouded in mystery and historians, both modern and ancient are divided on its operation. Certainly the idealistic system described by Plutarch did not operate in practice and the issue of land ownership was arguably a fundamental factor in the eventual decline of Sparta. Writing in the 4th century BC, Aristotle was scathing about what had happened to land ownership.¹ The modern historian, Michell, destroys any notion of the workability of the Spartan land tenure system.²

In theory, the system of land tenure was absolutely fundamental to the Spartan way of life. Each Spartan male was allotted a plot of land, a kleros. He would be given a certain number of helots who would work this property for him. It is assumed that he would receive the plot of land either from the state or would inherit it from his father.

This system had major implications.

- It meant that the Spartan male, unencumbered by having to grow food and look after livestock, could devote himself totally to his training as a soldier.
- Furthermore, the output from the kleros provided the Spartan not only with enough food to feed his family, but to also provide his share for the mess (syssitia). This was a pre-requisite for citizenship.
- As all Spartan men lived under this system, as allegedly handed down by Lycurgus, it would presumably ensure equality amongst Spartan citizens.

Plutarch's version of land tenure

For something so important, Plutarch does not spend a great deal of time describing the system of land allotments.³ Apparently, Lycurgus had become aware of the poverty of Sparta, with destitute people crowding into the city and wealth becoming concentrated in a few hands. To remove the envy, arrogance and crime that accompanied this situation:

*"...Lycurgus persuaded the citizens to pool all the land and then redistribute it afresh..."*⁴

In Plutarch's version, this had several important results.

- Everyone now lived in equality with the same amount of property to support themselves.
- Men now only sought to outdo each other in merit.
- There was no longer any distinction between men, except *"for what censure of bad conduct and praise of good would determine."*

1 See Chapter 9

2 See Michell, H, *Sparta*, CUP, London, 1964, p 211-213

3 Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, 8

4 Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, 8

Plutarch then discusses the mechanics of the land distribution but does not commit himself to specific figures. Writing rather in the style of Herodotus in his work, he offers up various possibilities and the reader has to make up his or her own mind. However, whatever the system that was put into place, Plutarch believes that Lycurgus was well pleased with his work. On one occasion, returning from abroad, he was travelling through the country just after the grain crop had been harvested.

*“... (he) saw the heaps of grain side by side and all equal in size, he smiled and remarked to the bystanders that the whole of Laconia had the look of a property which many brothers had recently divided between themselves.”*⁵

Plutarch’s idealistic land system almost certainly did not exist. In the 4th century BC, the ephor, Epitadeus introduced a law that allowed land to be disposed of freely. This would certainly have allowed increased concentration of land ownership and thus inequality. However, it is generally agreed that such a practice was in place long before Epitadeus’ law. By the 4th century BC, some Spartans were being employed as mercenary soldiers across the Greek world. This would have provided income for them to buy additional land.

Problems in the Spartan land tenure system

The Spartan male held on to his plot of land during his life in return for his military services. However, what happened then?

- If a man had three sons, who presumably were each given a kleros at birth, what happened to the father’s plot?
 - Did the eldest son take it, a kind of primogeniture?⁶ If this happened, did that son now own his own and his father’s former land?
 - Or was the father’s kleros handed back to the state?
 - Maybe the eldest son took the father’s land and returned his own to the state?
- Michell also raises the issue of the difficulty a man would have living off his kleros.
 - Granting a man a kleros for life did not ensure that it would be run efficiently.
 - As a result, many Spartan men had to mortgage their land and throughout their life accumulated debts.
 - This was a major issue, as the popularity of King Agis’ move to burn mortgages much later in Spartan history proved.
- As the number of peers declined by the end of the 5th century, the ephors would have had more land to dispose of.
 - The corruption of the ephorate by this time, so strongly condemned by Aristotle, might offer another suggestion for gradual accumulation of land.⁷
 - Those rich enough would have been able to bribe the ephors.

The significance of the land problem

Arguably, the land problem in Sparta proved one of the key long term factors in the decline of the state. As inequality increased, as indebtedness grew and as government corruption was rife, unrest would have increased.

⁵ Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, 8

⁶ Primogeniture is a form of inheritance whereby a father’s assets are passed on to the first born son.

⁷ See Chapter Nine for Aristotle’s comments on female land ownership by the 4th century BC.

*“...Social unrest becomes more and more serious and there arises what the Greeks called stasis, that sickness of the State, the quarrelling of rich and poor, the privileged with the unprivileged, that in the end works destruction.”*⁸

(For HSC purposes, the Sparta topic ends in 371 BC. However, the land issue would bedevil Sparta long into the future. In the 3rd Century BC, King Agis IV was murdered on the order of the ephors following his attempt at land reform. It could even be argued that the period of tyranny Sparta experienced under Machanidas and Nabis at the end of the 3rd century/ beginning of the 2nd century BC, can be traced back to the insolubility of Sparta’s land problems.)

Exercise 10.1

Circle either THIS IS TRUE or THIS IS FALSE as it applies to each of the following statements.

1	Lycurgus believed that he had solved the problem of land ownership in Sparta.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
2	Plutarch is impressed with the way in which Lycurgus handled the issue of land ownership.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
3	Aristotle admires the way Sparta had dealt with its land ownership issues and the role of the ephors in this.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
4	Only rich Spartans were ever granted a kleros from the state.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
5	The kleros was fundamental in maintaining the strict training regime of the Spartiates.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
6	Epitadeus’ law prevented land from being disposed of freely.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
7	Indebtedness amongst the Spartiates became a growing problem in Spartan society.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
8	King Agis attempted to destroy all mortgages owed by Spartans.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
9	Women were always denied the right to own land in Sparta.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
10	It would be wrong to argue that the land problem was a key factor in the eventual decline of Sparta.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE

⁸ See Michell, H, *Sparta*, CUP, London, 1964, p 213

Chapter Eleven

Trade

Introduction

As has been discussed earlier, the Spartiates' goal in life was to dedicate themselves to military training. Though given a *kleros* for the production of food, this function was carried out by the *helots*. Any skilled craftsmanship from producing fine pottery such as the *Arcesilas Cup* in the 6th century BC, to the mass production of hoplite weaponry by the 5th century BC to the production of purple dye, was the job of the *perioeci*. A key feature of Spartan economic life was the use of iron as a means of exchange.

The use of iron money has always been seen as another of the oddities of the Spartan way of life. However, it is again necessary to disentangle the myth from the reality. Though Sparta certainly made use of "iron money", they also used gold and silver coins. However, it is true that Sparta did not mint its own coins until the 3rd century BC.

In Homeric times, roughly the early part of the first millennium BC, the use of iron for currency was quite common across the Greek world.

- At this time, iron was fairly scarce and thus highly valued. It was even described as being 'heavenly'.
- Iron was also of great practical use in making everything from domestic items to weaponry.
- However, between the 8th and the 6th centuries BC, most of the Greek world had moved away from what might termed "the iron standard". From now on, Greek city states were using gold and silver coins.
- This did not happen in Sparta. Though gold and silver coins were present in Sparta, the use of iron currency remained predominant.

Plutarch on trade, currency and economic life ¹

Plutarch explains that Lycurgus sought to remove the potential for wealth accumulation, and thus inequality, by removing all gold and silver coinage. Only iron spits or bars would now be used. To ensure that the amassing of wealth would be impractical, Lycurgus decided on the following.

"...he assigned a low value to even a great weight and mass of this, so that a sum of ten minas demanded substantial storage space in a house and a wagon to shift it." ²

This measure was supposed to have had a strongly beneficial effect on Spartan society. All types of crimes disappeared. The logic was that if money could not be hidden, could not be carried easily, could not be divided and *"excited no envy when possessed"*, why would anyone bother trying to steal it?

Plutarch suggests that Lycurgus also ordered the surface of the red-hot iron to be doused with vinegar. The aim here was to reduce the iron's strength, and make it fragile, and so of no use in any other capacity. Michell completely debunks this idea. He argues that the only form of vinegar the ancients had was acetic acid and that all sorts of false special properties were attached to it.

¹ For the complete section, see Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, 9

² Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, 9

“...tempering in this way only gives a thin surface hardness and the iron beneath is unaffected. The whole account (given by Plutarch) is absurd and may be disregarded.”³

As iron money became predominant in Sparta, Plutarch argues that trade with the rest of Greece gradually began to dry up. Foreign goods could not be purchased as the iron money was considered a joke outside of Sparta.

“...Thus, gradually cut off from the things that animate and feed it, luxury atrophied of its own accord.”⁴

Plutarch further suggests that there was another positive benefit in Lycurgus' actions. Spartan craftsmen no longer wasted their efforts on superfluous luxury products. Instead, they focused their skills on the production of essential goods, with the result that their production of household furniture, pottery and weapons was of the highest quality.

- This idyllic situation did not last. As Sparta came into increasing contact with the outside world, luxury began to creep in.
- Spartan leaders were not immune from the temptations of wealth as seen with the Spartan general Pausanias after the Battle of Plataea (470s BC).
- Chapter 10 has already explained at length how the land tenure system broke down and caused growing inequality.
- Following the Spartan victory over Athens in the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC), the Spartan king, Lysander brought back much booty from Athens and as a result corruption in Sparta increased enormously.

Exercise 11.1

Use the terms in the box below to complete the following passage.

In the Spartan system, farming was the job of the _____ while _____ and skilled _____ were the work of the perioeci. In early Greek history, _____ had been a normal medium of exchange but by the 6th century BC, it had been largely replaced by _____ and _____. However, in Sparta, _____ ordered the use of iron bars at the exclusion of precious metals. Plutarch suggests that this led to a decline in _____ and a disappearance of the accumulation of _____. However, by the end of the 5th century BC, things had changed. _____ brought back vast booty from defeated Athens, and the _____ tenure system was breaking down which further made possible the accumulation of wealth and growing _____.

crime	trade	inequality	gold	helots	Lycurgus
craftsmanship	iron	Lysander	land	silver	wealth

In the syllabus, reference is made in the section on “the economy” to weapons and armour (see Chapter 7); pottery (see Chapters 6 and 16); the economic roles of the perioeci and the helots (see Chapter 6).

³ See Michell, H, *Sparta*, CUP, London, 1964, p 301

⁴ Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, 9

Section Four ■ Religion, death and burial

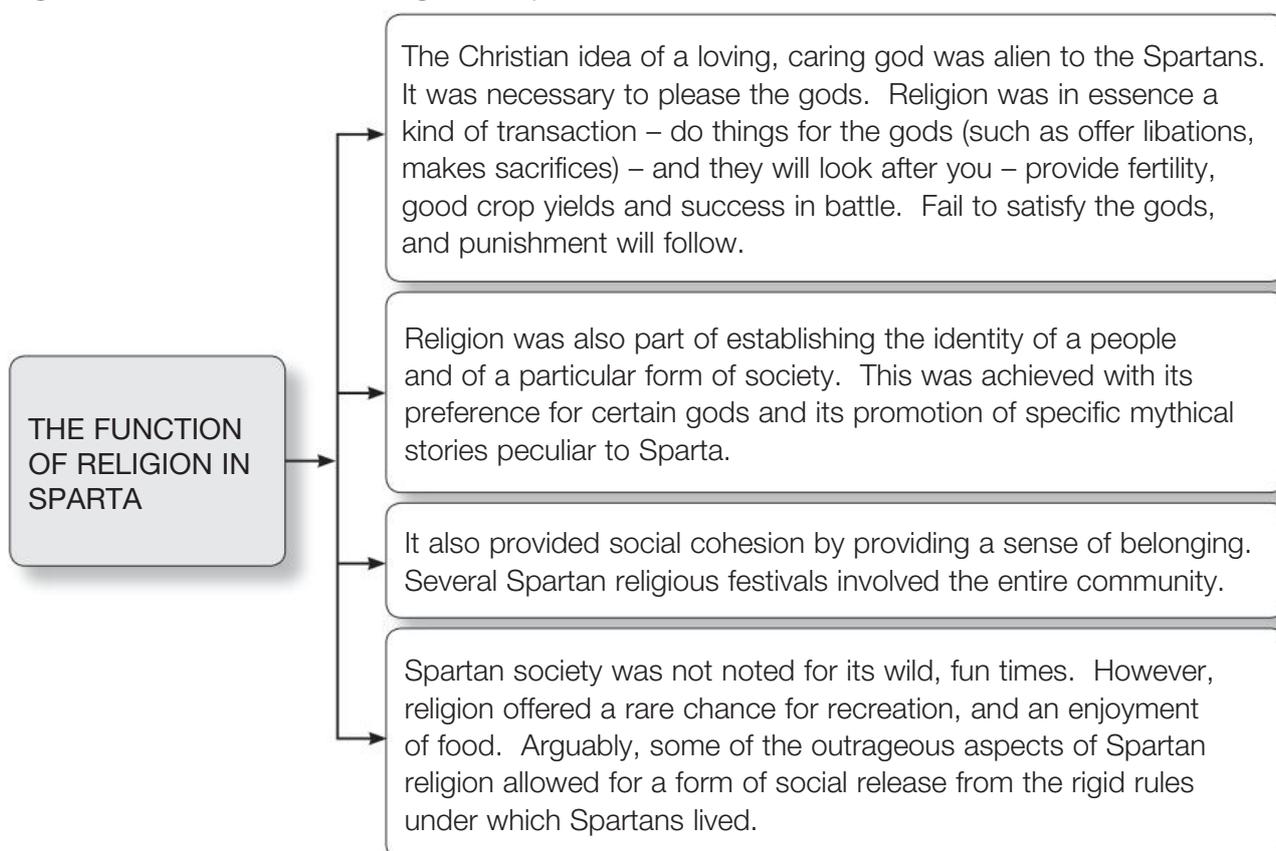
Chapter Twelve

Gods and goddesses

The role of religion in Sparta

Religion served a similar function for the Spartans as it did in most Greek city states. Figure 12.1 summarises these functions.

Figure 12.1 The function of religion in Sparta



Religion in Sparta

The Spartans shared a common culture, language and heritage with their fellow Greeks. Thus, it is not surprising that their beliefs in the gods and reverence for mythical heroes have similarities with other Greek states. However, Greece was a country of independent city states and local variations in religious belief and practice were common, and this was certainly the case with Sparta.

- Athens became a city of fine architecture in which the gods were often honoured with fine buildings that are still visible today. Such was not the case with Sparta. Sparta was more a collection of villages rather than a city and extravagant religious structures were not its way.
- Worship of the various gods often reflected the nature of the society doing the worshipping.
 - Athens revered the god Hephaestus. Hephaestus was allegedly the son of Zeus and Hera. He is seen as the god of craftsmen, artisans and blacksmiths. The Spartans did not hold such activities in high esteem ¹ and so Hephaestus is less honoured in Sparta.

¹ This was the work of the perioeci, see Chapter 6

- The Spartan way of life was noted for its abstemiousness and its focus on discipline and self-control. Consequently, Dionysus – the god of wine-making and associated with drunken celebrations – was not seen as an appropriate figure of worship.
- Archaeological evidence that survives of Spartan religion often shows the gods armed which would match the military nature of Spartan society.²
- Any evidence of the worship of Zeus seems to be lacking but Zeus was worshipped in Sparta. Sparta's kings were priests of Zeus:
 - one was dedicated to Zeus Lakedaimon
 - the other dedicated to Zeus Ouranios.
- The most popular gods in Sparta would seem to have been Apollo Karneios, Artemis Orthia, Helen and Lycurgus.
- The cult of Artemis Orthia was primarily concerned with growth and fertility.
 - Artemis was also associated with wild animals and was a huntress but she also presided over childbirth.

The cult of Artemis Orthia

The cult of Artemis Orthia was primarily concerned with growth and fertility. Excavations carried out by the British School at Athens in the early 20th century suggested that the site of the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia had been used since the 10th century BC. However, there is no written evidence of the goddess being referred to as Artemis Orthia until the 1st century AD.

- Orthia was a local goddess who later became linked to Artemis and was also associated with wild animals and was a huntress. However, Orthia was at first a goddess of fertility who protected vegetation. This goddess also presided over childbirth.
 - This was clearly a popular cult in Sparta as is suggested by the large number of votive offerings that have been found at the site over the years.
 - Between 1906 and 1910, the British School at Athens found 603 'masks'. The school's report in 1929 divided them into seven categories: Old Women, Caricatures, Portraits, Warriors, Youths, Gorgons and Satyrs. The masks cover a period of five centuries from the 7th century BC but the dedication of life-size masks ends in the 5th century BC, and from then on only miniatures appear.
 - There are also hundreds of thousands of miniature votive offerings that have been found. These are very small figures seen dancing, playing music and in hunting attire. These attest to the popularity of the site.

Initiation rites for Spartan boys occurred here where in later Spartan history they were brutally beaten on the goddess' altar.

As with other Greek cults, there were the usual animal sacrifices and libations of water and wine.

² Apollo appears with a spear in his hand at Amyclae, south of Sparta.

The cult of Artemis Orthia and the theft of the cheeses

The ancient sources mention a strange practice whereby young boys would attempt to steal cheeses that had been placed on the altar at the temple of Artemis Orthia. As they did so, the young boys would be whipped. Scholars remain divided on the nature and significance of this. Plutarch, writing in the 2nd century AD, states that:

*“...I have witnessed many of them dying under the lashes they received at the altar of Artemis Orthia.”*³

However, Xenophon, writing in the 4th century BC, provides a different view of the event. His view is that the purpose of the whipping was to demand excellence in all branches of instruction, even thieving.

*“...And after making it a matter of honour for them to snatch just as many cheeses as possible from Orthia, he commanded others to whip them, wishing to demonstrate thereby the point that a short period of pain may be compensated by the enjoyment of long-lasting prestige.”*⁴

Michell suggests that Xenophon confused his description of what happened at the altar with a dance in which hungry boys tried to steal food. The boys were given lengthy preparation for this and the shedding of their blood on the altar was the final part of their initiation.

*“...the sprinkling of the blood of the participants in this ceremony was of the nature of a ‘blood-bond’ between gods and human beings...they became united with the divinity in a bond sealed with their own blood...”*⁵

Stories have been passed down regarding really severe beatings that occurred annually at the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia, sometimes even leading to death. However, the first account we have of such things comes from Cicero in the 1st century BC. Such extreme activities, which could lead to death, were almost certainly something that occurred during the Roman period and not during Sparta's heyday.

Poseidon

Poseidon was the god of the sea (known as Neptune in Roman mythology). He was also associated with fresh water, horses and earthquakes. Earthquakes were often put down to Poseidon's changes of mood.

He was worshipped across all of Greece and there were several sanctuaries of Poseidon in Laconia. These include a major temple near Cape Taenaron in the far south. The Spartan general, Lysander, is said to have dedicated a military victory to Poseidon. Pausanias refers to a 'Horse-breeding Poseidon' at Theomelida in Laconia. It is possible that the Spartans keen worship of Poseidon was carried out to limit his anger and so prevent the earthquakes which sometimes afflicted the Peloponnese.

Apollo

Apollo was traditionally seen as the god of the sky. Widely worshipped across the Greek world, Apollo was associated with the muses, oracles and archery. His association with light, power, and harmony partly explain his popularity. The worship of Apollo was associated with several Spartan festivals (see Chapter fourteen).

³ Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, 18

⁴ Xenophon, *Spartan Society*, 2

⁵ Michell, H, *Sparta*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1964, pp 176, 177

Herodotus on Sparta and religion

The Spartans took their religion very seriously. So seriously in fact that on three occasions when Greece faced the danger of Persian invasion, they refused to take military action until certain religious ceremonies had taken place. It can be imagined how other Greek states reacted to these displays of Spartan piety!

In 490 BC, Athens faced the might of Persia at the Battle of Marathon. It sought the assistance of Sparta and sent a runner, Pheidippides, to Sparta persuade the Spartans to join them against King Darius' forces.

*"...the Athenians ask you to help them, and not to stand by while the most ancient city of Greece is crushed and enslaved by a foreign invader..."*⁶

Herodotus tells us that the Spartans were indeed moved by the appeal and were happy to send help to Athenians but that they were:

*"...unable to send it promptly because they did not wish to break their law. It was the ninth day of the month, and they said they could not take the field until the moon was full. So they waited for the full moon..."*⁷

By the time the Spartans reached Athens, the Battle of Marathon had been fought and won. The Spartans then marched to Marathon and complimented the Athenians on their good work.

In 480 BC, a similar situation presented itself. The forces of the Persian King, Xerxes, were moving into northern Greece. Leonidas went to Thermopylae with only a force of 300 personally selected by him.

*"...the intention was, when the Karneia was over (for it was that festival which prevented the Spartans from taking the field in the ordinary way), to leave a garrison in the city and march with all the troops at their disposal..."*⁸

The Athenians again suspected the Spartans of preferring religious observance rather than facing the Persians the following year, in 479 BC. With large Persian forces in central Greece, Athenian delegates were in Sparta to encourage Sparta to send its troops north. The Ephors had in fact done this without informing the delegates, sending a force of 5000 under the command of Pausanias. However, before they learned of the Spartan action, the Athenian delegates in Sparta offered this rebuke.

*"... 'Then stay here if you want to,' they exclaimed; 'keep your Hyacinthia⁹ and amuse yourselves – and betray your friends. But we warn you: the Athenians will resent this injustice and, for lack of other allies, will make such an arrangement with the Persians as they can..."*¹⁰

Religious sites in Sparta

Though Sparta is not as blessed as other Greek cities with temples and great public buildings, archaeologists have been able to discover a series of temples around Sparta.

Figure 12.2 summarises the main archaeological evidence of religious shrines.

⁶ Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 6, 106

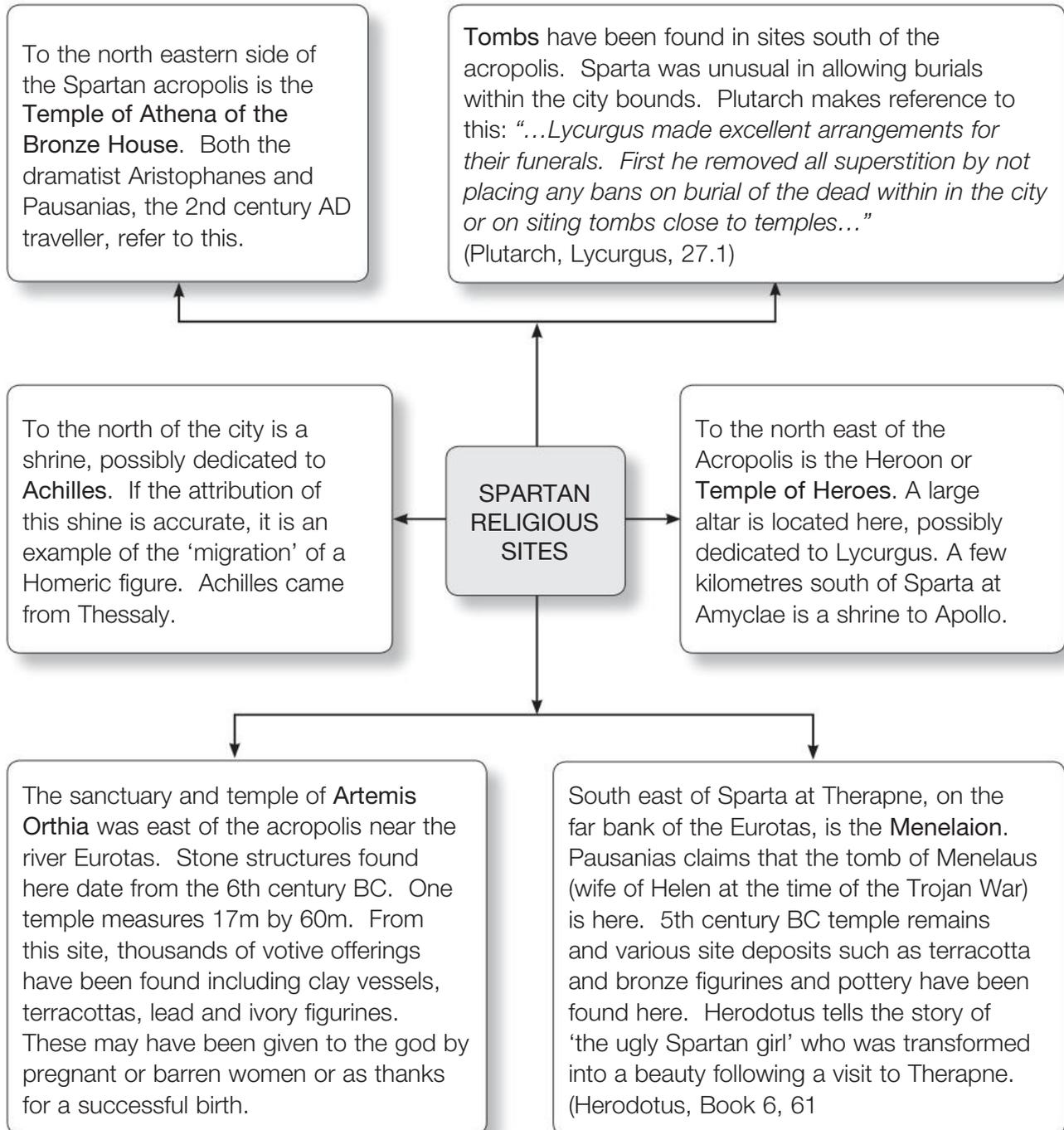
⁷ Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 6, 106

⁸ Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 7, 206

⁹ See Chapter 14

¹⁰ Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 9, 11

Figure 12.2 Archaeological evidence of Spartan religious sites



Exercise 12.1

Match the term on the right with the description given on the left.

1	A god honoured in Athens but not so in Sparta.		Zeus
2	A god closely associated with growth and fertility		Apollo
3	A shrine to this god is located at Amyclae.		Karneia
4	God of wine honoured in Athens but not so in Sparta.		Therapne
5	The festival being celebrated before the Battle Plataea in 479 BC.		Temple of Artemis Orthia
6	Referred to by both Aristophanes and Pausanias.		Hephaestus
7	Spartan kings were priests of this god.		Artemis Orthia
8	The festival that interrupted the sending of troops to Thermopylae in 480 BC.		Hyacinthia
9	Where the ugly Spartan girl was transformed into a beauty.		Temple of Athena of the Bronze House
10	Thousands of votive offerings have been discovered here.		Dionysus

Chapter Thirteen

Myths and legends

The previous chapter focused on the gods and goddesses which the Spartans revered. Chapter 14 examines some of the festivals which were so important to Sparta while Chapter 15 takes a look at funerary customs. This chapter examines the mythical twin Spartan heroes known as the Dioscuri or Dios kouroi, youths of Zeus. Their names were Castor and Polydeuces (or Pollux).

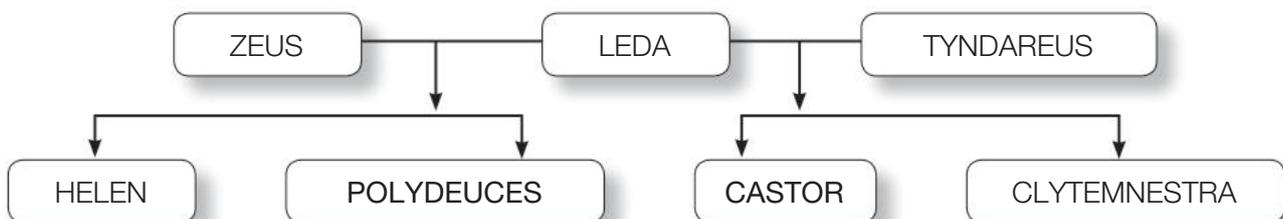
The dioscuroi were clearly important in Spartan thinking. At Amyclae, south of Sparta, thousands of offerings to the dioscuroi (votive offerings) have been discovered over the years. There is also a clear connection between these youths and the Spartan emphasis on athletic pursuits and the strict training associated with the agoge.

The legend of the Dioscuri

There are different versions of the birth of Castor and Polydeuces.

- Version 1: the two boys born of the Spartan king, Tyndareus, and his mortal wife Leda.
- Version 2: they were born of Leda and the god, Zeus.
- Version 3: (see Figure 13.1 below)
 - Castor (and his sister Clytemnestra) were the offspring of Tyndareus and Leda;
 - Polydeuces (and his sister, Helen) were the offspring of Leda and Zeus, who seduced her in the form of a swan (some versions of this story have them hatching from an egg);
 - thus, Castor was mortal, while Polydeuces was immortal.
- Castor became known as a great horseman while Polydeuces was renowned for his boxing skills. They were often seen as the patrons of athletic contests. It is clear why they would be special to Sparta.
- The two were figures in great adventures such as the voyage of the Argonauts and the Calydonian Bear Hunt.

Figure 13.1: The parentage of Castor and Polydeuces



Life and death of the Dioscuri

The main rivals of the Dioscuri were their cousins, Idas and Lynceus. Idas and Lynceus were planning to marry their cousins, Phoebe and Hilaera. However, Castor and Polydeuces kidnapped them and married the two young girls themselves. ¹

- Castor and Hilaera had a child, Anogon.
- Polydeuces and Phoebe had a child, Mnesilus.

¹ In 1618, the Flemish artist, Rubens, produced a famous painting of this episode, *The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus*.

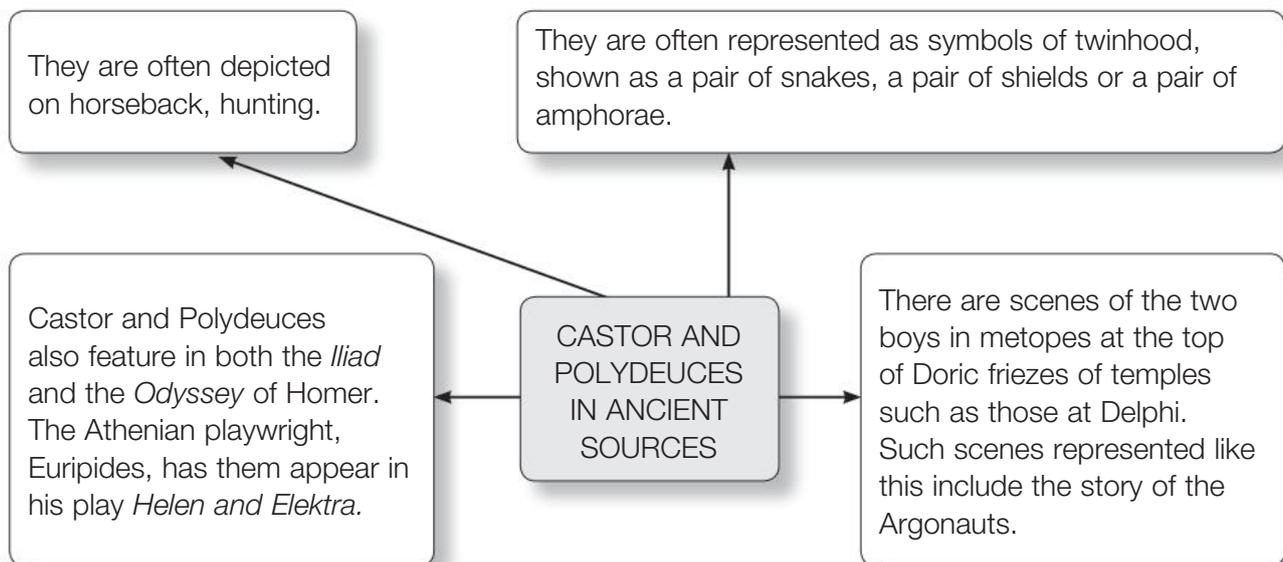
The Dioscuri worked with Idas and Lynceus in stealing some cattle. The four of them then had a contest to see who should have all the cattle. Idas and Lynceus won. Not happy with this, Castor and Polydeuces attempted to steal back the cattle. Incensed, Idas and Lynceus ambushed Castor and Polydeuces to hold on to what they believed was theirs. In the ensuing violence, Polydeuces killed Lynceus but Idas managed to mortally wound Castor. In anger at the loss of his son, Zeus struck Idas with a thunderbolt.

Polydeuces was grief-stricken at the death of his (mortal) brother and wanted to die with him. Zeus took pity on his son and allowed Castor and Polydeuces to share immortality, spending their days alternately living in Olympus and the underworld.²

The Dioscuri remembered

The Dioscuri appear often in the ancient sources, as Figure 13.2 summarises.

Figure 13.2: Castor and Polydeuces in ancient sources



The dioscuroi also became known as the protectors of sailors. Hence Shelley's poem, "Homer's Hymn to Castor and Pollux".³

Ye wild-eyed Muses, sing the Twins of Jove,
Whom the fair-ankled Leda, mixed in love
With mighty Saturn's Heaven-obscuring Child,
On Taygetus, that lofty mountain wild,
Brought forth in joy: mild Pollux, void of blame,
And steed-subduing Castor, heirs of fame.
These are the Powers who earth-born mortals save
And ships, whose flight is swift along the wave.
When wintry tempests o'er the savage sea
Are raging, and the sailors tremblingly
Call on the Twins of Jove with prayer and vow,
Gathered in fear upon the lofty prow,
And sacrifice with snow-white lambs,--the wind
And the huge billow bursting close behind,
Even then beneath the weltering waters bear

² Castor and Pollux are the two brightest stars in the constellation, Gemini.

³ English romantic poet, 1792-1822

The staggering ship--they suddenly appear,
 On yellow wings rushing athwart the sky,
 And lull the blasts in mute tranquility,
 And strew the waves on the white Ocean's bed,
 Fair omen of the voyage; from toil and dread
 The sailors rest, rejoicing in the sight,
 And plough the quiet sea in safe delight.

Exercise 13.1

Answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

1	Who was the alleged mortal father of the Dioscuri?	
2	Who was the alleged divine father of the Dioscuri?	
3	Name the mother of Castor and Polydeuces.	
4	Whose enmity did the Dioscuri incur by stealing their prospective wives?	
5	Whom did Castor and Polydeuces marry?	
6	What was the eventual fate of Castor and Polydeuces?	
7	Name two ancient writers who mention the Dioscuri in their work.	
8	Of which activity did the Dioscuri become patrons?	
9	In more modern times, what did the Dioscuri become known as?	
10	In which constellation in the night sky can one find Castor and Polydeuces (Pollux)?	

The bones of Orestes

Herodotus relates a story about the “bones of Orestes”.⁴ Orestes was the son of Agamemnon, the Greek commander during the Trojan War. On his return from Troy, Agamemnon was murdered by his wife, Clytemnestra in retribution for his sacrifice to the gods for “good winds”, of their daughter, Iphigenia. Orestes returned several years later and killed his mother, and her lover, Aegisthus.

Sparta had been involved in a long conflict with a neighbouring state, Tegea. Things were not going well and so delegates were sent to Delphi seeking advice on which gods should be worshipped in order to achieve victory. The priestess told them that victory would come once the bones of Orestes had been brought home. A Spartan, named Lichas, claimed to have found the bones but he was not believed and thrown out. Lichas returned to Tegea, excavated the tomb, took the bones and returned to Sparta.

*“...and ever since that day the Lacedaemonians in any trial of strength had by far the better of it. They had now subdued the greater part of the Peloponnese.”*⁵

⁴ For the full version of this story see: Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 1, 67-68

⁵ Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 1, 68

Chapter Fourteen

Festivals

Religious festivals played a major part in Spartan life. So important were they that the Spartans would not interrupt them, even when foreign invasion threatened. This was the case in the early 5th century BC when the armies of Darius (490 BC) and Xerxes (480-79 BC) descended upon Greece during the Persian Wars.¹

The three main religious festivals in the Spartan calendar were:

- the Karneia
- the Gymnopaïdai
- the Hyakinthia.

The Karneia

The origin of the Karneia is unclear. It might have been celebrated to honour the origins of Sparta, and it was certainly part of Spartan life by the early 7th century BC. The Karneia was a festival which linked the worship of Apollo with that of a cult of an older god called Karneios. The word Karnos means ram and this might explain why Apollo is sometimes depicted with the horns of a ram. Myth has it that Karnos had been a seer known for his ability to tell the future. He was allegedly killed by one of the Herakleidai, descendants of Heracles. This brought grief to the Dorians and the killer was forced into exile. The purpose of the cult of Karnos is unclear but it could be:

- either a form of divination, foreseeing the future
- or a ritual to atone for the crime committed against Karnos.

The Karneia was celebrated in August/September, marking the harvest of the grape crop. It contained several unique features.

- Music became a key part of the festival in which Spartan deeds of heroism and other notable occasions were celebrated.
 - There was a musical contest, the 'agon'.
 - The musical aspect of the festival was probably begun by Terpander of Lesbos.
- A ram was sacrificed.
- Young men called 'staphylodromoi', or 'grape-cluster runners', would chase a selected young man who would wear a woollen headband.
 - If the young man was caught, it was believed that the god would show favour to Sparta and bring good luck for the coming year.
 - Failure to catch him was considered a bad omen.
 - It would come as little surprise that the young man did not try too hard to avoid being caught.

¹ See Chapter 12, the section on 'Herodotus on Sparta and Religion'

The Gymnopaïdai

One of the main Spartan festivals was the annual five day Gymnopaïdai, “festival of the naked boys”, although the correct meaning might be “festival of the unarmed boys”. It took place in late July and all Spartiates were expected to take part in this.

It involved displays of singing, dancing and gymnastic displays and was closely linked to the training undertaken by Spartan males.

This festival was connected with Apollo and might have been a thanks offering to the god for military success.

More specifically it might have been held to celebrate The Battle of Thyrea, or ‘The Battle of the Champions’.²

Plutarch relates that if a Spartan male refused to marry, he was denied the chance to participate in the Gymnopaïdai. Furthermore, such a man was denied the due deference which was always given to one’s elders.³ Plutarch also tells the story that as a young man, King Agesilaus (400-360 BC) was denied a privileged place in the Gymnopaïdai, even though he was in line to become king. Agesilaus is alleged to have said:

*“...That’s fine, for I shall show that it isn’t positions which lend men distinction, but men who enhance positions...”*⁴

Michell suggests that the festival was a tremendous affair which did much to “sweeten the austerity of Spartan life”. All Spartans took part, young boys in the morning, the able-bodied during the heat of the afternoon sun and the older men when the field was in shade.

*“...Troops of boys, young men and old men sang one after the other, the children singing of what they would do when they were grown up, the young men boasting of their strength and prowess, and the old men telling of their deeds in their prime...”*⁵

Figure 14.1 explains what some of the specific parts of the Gymnopaïdai involved.

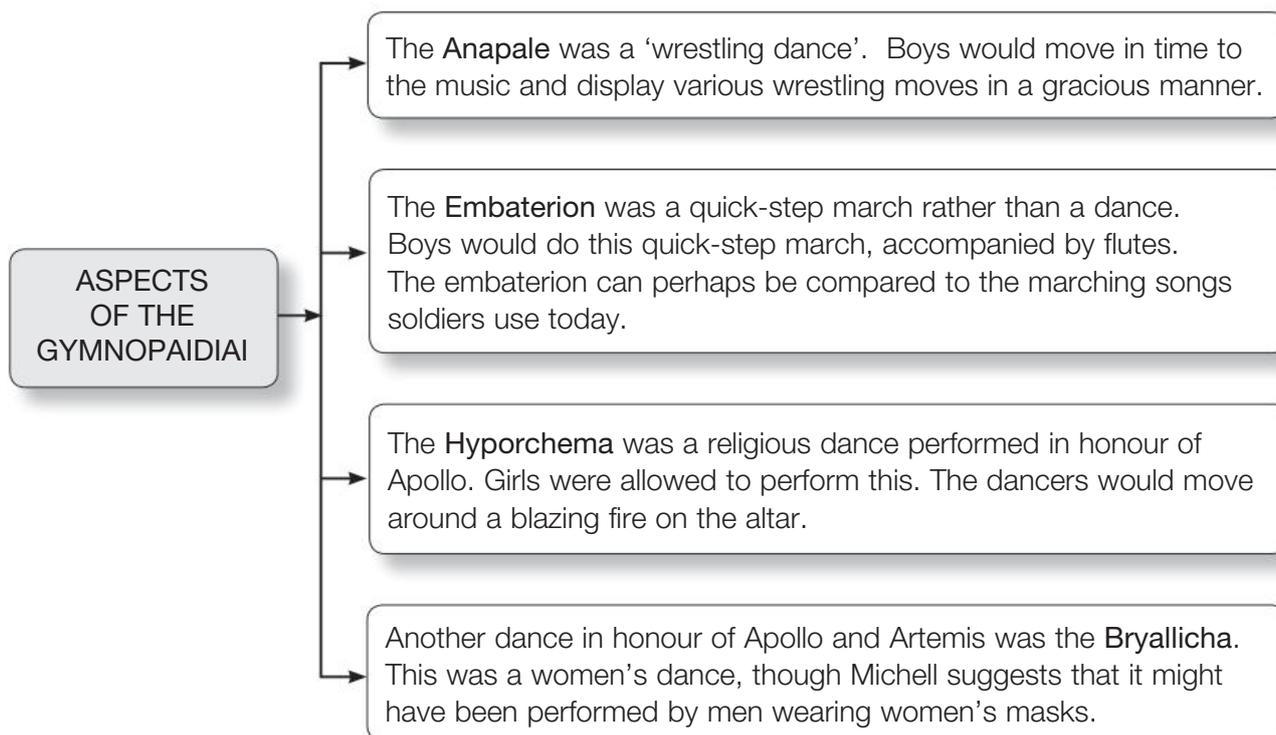
2 This was the occasion when 300 Spartan and 300 men of Argos fought to almost the last man for the territory of Thyrea. For a more detailed account of this, see Herodotus, Book 1, 82

3 See Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, 15

4 Plutarch, *Sayings of Spartans*, Agesilaus, 6

5 Michell, H, *Sparta*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1964, p 186

Figure 14.1: Aspects of the Gymnopaïdai



The Hyakinthia

The Hyakinthia was named after Hyakinthos who was a young man loved by Apollo. Legend has it that Apollo and Zephyr, god of the west wind, competed for the boy's attention. One day, as Apollo was teaching the boy to throw the discus, Zephyr blew the discus back at Hyakinthos in a jealous rage, killing him with a blow to the head.⁶

The festival took place over three days in early summer and was held at Apollo's shrine at Amyclae. The festival had two very distinct stages.

- Stage One was a sorrowful affair, a day of grief concerned with mourning for the death of Hyakinthos. There was rhythmic wailing and chanting.
 - Wreaths were not to be worn.
 - There was to be no singing of the paeon (a song of joyful praise and exultation).
 - There was a ban on eating bread and cakes, only a special funeral meal was allowed.
- Stage Two was quite different. There was now rejoicing, processions, choral singing, dancing and feasting.
 - Wreaths could be worn and the paeon could be sung.
 - A sacrifice was made to Apollo and there was a great procession to Amyclae.
 - A festive meal was taken.

The hyakinthia contained some even more interesting elements. Sausages were attached to a wall which old men gnawed upon. In this festival, Spartiates actually entertained the helots. In his play, *Lysistrata*, the Athenian playwright, Aristophanes, refers to the hyakinthia.⁷

⁶ Legend has it that Apollo named the flower that grew from Hyakinthos' blood 'the hyacinth' – perhaps.

⁷ Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, 1296-1315

Exercise 14.1

The three main Spartan festivals were the Karneia, the Gymnopaïdai and the Hyakinthia. Indicate in the space provided on the right, which festival would be involved in each of the following activities.

1	This festival is sometimes mistakenly referred to as the 'festival of the naked boys'.	
2	The first stage of the festival was deeply mournful but the second stage was joyous.	
3	Apollo is sometimes depicted with horns during this festival.	
4	Music was a major part of this festival, possibly introduced by Terpander of Lesbos.	
5	Sausages were fixed to a wall and old men would try to gnaw them where they were.	
6	This festival was connected with celebrating the Battle of the Champions.	
7	One feature of this festival involved young boys seeking to capture one of their peers.	
8	Spartiates entertained the helots.	
9	This festival marked the harvest of the grape crop.	
10	The dance, the hyporchema, was performed during this festival.	

Chapter Fifteen

Funerary customs and rituals

Information regarding Spartan funerary customs and rituals is limited. This is probably not surprising given the limited and often conflicting information we have regarding many aspects of Spartan life. Importantly, death was viewed differently in Sparta to other societies and certainly our own. As a warrior society, death really was an occupational hazard, and it was seen as being quite normal. Spartans were taught to accept death and certainly not fear it. It was acceptable to touch dead bodies and walk through graveyards.

Our two main written sources for funerary customs and rituals are Plutarch and Herodotus.

Plutarch ¹

As has already been mentioned, Lycurgus sought to remove superstition from burial of the dead by allowing the practice to occur within the city bounds. ² Plutarch describes some of the main elements of burial in Sparta.

- No personal goods were allowed to be buried with the body.
 - All that was allowed was a man's red cloak – part of his battle dress – and olive leaves.
- A man's name was not allowed to be inscribed on a grave. This no doubt reflects the Spartan ideal of the state being more important than the individual. There were two exceptions to this rule:
 - for a man who was killed on a campaign;
 - for a woman who had died in childbirth.
- Grieving for the dead was to be limited. Lycurgus allowed an eleven day period of grieving, after which mourners had to make a sacrifice to Demeter and then end their grief.

Herodotus ³

Herodotus provides us with a detailed description of a king's funerary rites.

- The king's death is announced by riders across the country and in Sparta itself by women beating cauldrons.
- A man and a woman from each household then must don mourning clothes. Heavy fines follow if this is not done.
- Large numbers of people from across the Peloponnese, not only Spartans, are forced to attend the funeral. The crowd of thousands at the funeral even includes helots.
- At the funeral, men and women strike their foreheads to show their grief.
 - They wail without control
 - "...continually declaring that the king who has just died was the best they ever had." ⁴

¹ For the full text see: Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, 27

² See Chapter 12

³ For the full text see: Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 6, 58-59

⁴ Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 6, 58

Herodotus tells us further that if the king is killed in battle, a statue is made of him and is carried “to burial on a richly draped bier”. For the next ten days there were to be no meetings or elections, only mourning. The new king then lays aside any debts owing to the late king or to the treasury. Herodotus states that this copied a similar practice carried out by Persian kings.

Xenophon makes the point that:

*“...As to the honours shown a king after his death, the aim of the laws of Lycurgus here is to demonstrate that they have given special honour to Spartan kings not as humans but as heroes.”*⁵

Exercise 15.1

Complete the following passage using the terms below.

_____ tried to remove superstition from death by allowing burials within the _____. Burials were kept _____, no _____ goods were allowed to be placed with the boy except a man’s _____. Inscriptions were _____ though if a woman died in _____ it was allowed. The grieving period was limited to _____ days. Rules for the mourning for a dead king were strictly _____. Even _____ were included in the crowds for a king’s funeral which always very large. A new king would _____ the debts of any who previously owed money to the old king or the treasury, similar to _____ kings.

simple	eleven	helots	Lycurgus	Persian	forbidden
enforced	city	personal	childbirth	cancel	cloak

The religious roles of the “Kings” is explained in Chapter Four.

⁵ Xenophon, *Spartan Society*, 14

Section Five ■ Cultural life and everyday life

Chapter Sixteen

Art and architecture

The debate over Spartan culture

The traditional view of Spartan society that has been handed down through the ages is very much that of “barrack Sparta”. As Fitzhardinge puts it:

*“...According to one’s point of view Sparta was a model of stability, order and discipline or of reaction, regimentation and repression.”*¹

One does not tend to associate the high arts with Sparta. The architectural treasures of Periclean Athens of the 5th century BC, of Delphi and a host of other classical Greek sites are missing from Sparta. Modern visitors are struck by this today. This aspect of Sparta was noted even as early as the late 5th century BC. Thucydides described Sparta as lacking temples and monuments, and as consisting of just a few villages. He suggested that if Athens were to be suddenly deserted, future generations would believe the city had been twice as powerful as it actually had been, such was Athens’ architectural legacy. However, if such a fate happened to Sparta:

*“...I think that future generations would, as time passed, find it difficult to believe that the place had really been as powerful as it was represented to be.”*²

How can this be explained? Indeed, is it totally accurate? Certainly, Sparta lacked a Parthenon and similar Athenian-style treasures, but was it completely bereft of artistic achievement? This was certainly the long-held view. However, from the early 19th century onwards, archaeological discoveries in and around Sparta presented a rather more complex view of Sparta. Between 1906 and 1910 the British School discovered thousands of “ivory carvings, bronzes and terracottas and painted pottery”. In the 1920s, the British School found more in additional excavations as did the German School working at Amyclae.

Clearly Sparta had not always been the austere society of legend passed down to us by the likes of Plutarch and Xenophon. Fitzhardinge refers to “swinging Sparta” and “barrack Sparta”. The possible explanations for this phenomenon have been examined throughout this book.

- The traditional view is that following the shock of the Second Messenian War, Sparta decided to alter its society to ensure the supremacy of the Spartiates over the vastly larger Helot population.
 - Lycurgus, historical figure or myth, handed down The Great Rhetra which transformed Sparta into the military society of legend.
 - Hence, there was no need or desire for artistic or architectural distractions. Life was about military training and maintaining control of the Helots.

This is the view that followed the British archaeological work on Sparta in the 1920s. It concluded:

*“...there was a sharp break and a decline into austerity c 550 BC of the rich material culture of high art forms that had flourished in Sparta for the previous 150 years or so.”*³

1 Fitzhardinge, L F, *The Spartans*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1985, p 9

2 Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Book 1, 10

3 Kelly, D, *Sparta: History and archaeology*, Teaching History, HTA of NSW, July 1984, p 13

- However, Fitzhardinge has proven that this interpretation does not fit neatly with the evidence. Evidence of fine artistic work continued into the 5th century BC, even if not on the scale of Athens.
- Perhaps the explanation for Sparta's artistic demise was more economic than political.
- As Sparta turned inwards, trade declined and the use of iron spits meant other Greek states had less incentive to trade with Sparta.
- As Chapter 11 pointed out, Sparta's craftsmen did not cease their labours but rather focused on things of greater need in Sparta.
- Fitzhardinge argued that the decline in Spartan artistic craftsmanship proceeded at different rates.

*"...the break turned out to be a misconception and the decline of the higher arts at Sparta was seen to be not a sudden sharp decline c 550 BC but a long-drawn out process, almost a slow strangulation..."*⁴

The Spartan arts⁵

Thousands of works of **pottery** have been uncovered in Sparta. As in the rest of Greece different styles developed over time.

- Early designs were fairly simple and showed geometric patterns, wildlife and warriors.
- Later pottery does not feature the gods a great deal though Zeus appears on some vases and Heracles is a clear favourite.
- Some fine examples of Spartan pottery can be dated to the 6th century BC including the 'Arcesilas Cup', 'Odysseus binding Polyphemus', and 'Achilles in ambush'.
 - The Arcesilas Cup depicts King Arcesilas of Cyrene (North Africa) and shows a market scene with goods being weighed, perhaps sylphium (a plant used for seasoning or medicine).
 - Syphium was presumably quite valuable to have been shown on such an expensive piece of pottery.
- Nothing is known of individual craftsmen but Fitzhardinge suggests that some of the work might even have been done by poor Spartiates.
- Spartan pottery works have been found across the Mediterranean world stretching from Ampurias (Spain) to Sinope (on the Black Sea).

As in most Greek cities, the production of **terracottas** was widespread in Sparta.

- The earliest terracottas date from the mid-8th century BC and change little in style and form into the 6th century BC.
- In the 7th century BC, new moulds appeared in Greece from Syria which led to the human head being modeled face on rather than in profile.
- Most of Sparta's terracottas have been found in the area of the Temple of Artemis Orthia. Many of these were of female figures representing goddesses, sometimes with animals such as lions or horses.

⁴ Kelly, p 13

⁵ The best book for an examination of the arts in Sparta is still probably: Fitzhardinge, L F, *The Spartans*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1985. It is crammed full of illustrations of pottery, ivory, terracottas and bronze works.

- Discoveries made in 1960 revealed more elaborate works with earthen ware jars given complex designs showing processions of chariots and soldiers.

The British discoveries at the Temple of Artemis Orthia revealed over two hundred ivory carvings.

- Though perhaps not of as high a standard as other finds in places like Ephesus and Samos, the Spartan finds suggest skilled craftsmen working in ivory over at least three generations.
- Ivory designs were not particularly Spartan though ‘the Goddess of Wild Things’ came to be associated with the cult of Orthia. Most of the ivories found represented crouching animals.
- Their use is unclear. The carvings were unsuited to being seals but the presence of a hole in their base suggests they might have been used as pendants.
- By the 6th century BC, the import and use of ivory had more or less come to an end.

During the 6th century and into the early 5th century BC, Sparta was a significant producer of artistic **bronze** works.

- One such work was the Grachwil Hydra (water vessel) dating from the early 6th century BC. It was found in a grave near Berne in Switzerland and may have been produced in Sparta’s colony, Tarentum.
- Perhaps the finest work was the Vix Bowl, discovered in Gaul (France). It was 1.6m high and its greatest diameter was 1.7m. Its frieze contains a detailed procession of chariots and warriors, and no two figures are quite alike.
 - Fitzhardinge suggests: “...the Vix bowl is one of the most impressive works of the Archaic (roughly 800-500 BC), or perhaps any other period.”⁶
- However, during the 5th century, though some bronzes were produced they remained of much poorer artistic quality. Later bronze works found in Sparta were mostly imported.
- At Orthia over 100 000 small **lead** figurines were found. These appear to have been mass-produced. These represented among other things animals, soldiers and the goddess Orthia.

Figure 16.1 The Vix Bowl



⁶ Fitzhardinge, L F, *The Spartans*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1985, p 112

As was mentioned at the start of this chapter, Sparta is not rich in archaeological remains. Chapters 12-15 deal with aspects of Spartan religious practice and in these are some details re-Spartan temples, funerary practice and remains. Figure 12.2 provides details of some of Sparta's architectural remains.

Exercise 16.1

Circle either THIS IS TRUE or THIS IS FALSE as it applies to each of the following statements.

1	Spartan artistic endeavour was the equal of any of its contemporary neighbours.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
2	Thucydides commented on the richness of Spartan architectural achievement.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
3	Fitzhardinge discounts the view that Spartan artistic endeavour came to a sudden and abrupt end.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
4	The decline in Spartan artistic work was probably the result of economic as much as political factors.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
5	The Arcesilas Cup was imported from Athens and Spartan craftsmen tried to copy it.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
6	It is possible that even some Spartiates were involved in producing pottery.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
7	By the end of the 6th century BC, the production of works of ivory had more or less come to an end.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
8	Sparta had been a producer of fine bronze works in the 7th century BC.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
9	The Vix Bowl was a superb piece of bronze work imported into Sparta from Gaul (France).	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
10	The production of fine bronze works in Sparta reached its pinnacle in the late 5th century BC.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE

Chapter Seventeen

Writing and literature

Sparta was not renowned for its literary output. This is hardly surprising with the Spartan emphasis on military training and discipline. Spartan men were literate, as were Spartan women. However, the literary arts were not fostered. Athens' rich literary heritage could boast Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristotle, Plato and Thucydides. Sparta's could not. However, two literary names stand out in the Spartan canon: Tyrtaeus and Alcman.

Tyrtaeus

Tyrtaeus wrote during the 7th century BC, during and after the Second Messenian War. It is not certain whether he was even born in Sparta. Plato suggests he was originally an Athenian who later became a Spartan citizen. There is also a story that during the Messenian War, the oracle had instructed Sparta to seek an Athenian general and that this was Tyrtaeus. Fitzhardinge, however, suggests it is more likely that Tyrtaeus was Spartan.

Tyrtaeus' work is closely associated with the development of the Spartan army and its use of the phalanx in fighting.¹ For the phalanx to be successful, it required teamwork, cooperation and each man to know exactly what was expected of him. Each man in the phalanx needed to know that he could totally rely upon his comrades. It is against this background that the work of Tyrtaeus needs to be considered.

Tyrtaeus is the poet of "barrack Sparta". He is the exponent of the values and practice of hoplite warfare. His poems promote courage:

*"...Fear not the number of the enemy, nor be afraid, but let each man hold his shield straight towards the front..."*²

They also promote cooperation:

*"...Of those who are bold enough to advance shoulder to shoulder to close quarters against the van of the enemy fewer are killed, and they save the fold behind..."*³

Tyrtaeus rejected the previously glamorous view of the aristocratic warrior. He states that he does not celebrate the aristocratic individual blessed with physique and outstanding skills such as speed or wrestling. For him, what matters is a man standing side by side a comrade giving everything he has, a man who is:

*"...unyielding, putting shameful flight right out of his mind, staking his life and his enduring heart, and standing by the next man encourages him with words..."*⁴

Though Tyrtaeus is writing about war and exhorts the men to show courage, he does not glamorise warfare. War is not about glory, it is about necessity. It is cruel, bloody and painful. He also has no time for divine intervention. This is not Homer. Courage and reliance on one's comrades are what matter.

In his *Eunomia* he shows a conservative side in his thinking with his strong support for the monarchy and the elders, though he is willing to accept that ultimate power rests with the people. When Plutarch is discussing the 'rider' to the great Rhetra,⁵ he quotes Tyrtaeus' admiration of the monarchy.

*"...To rule in council is for the kings (who are esteemed by the gods and whose care is the lovely city of Sparta)..."*⁶

¹ See Chapter 7.

² Tyrtaeus, 11, 3-4

³ Tyrtaeus, 11, 11-13

⁴ Tyrtaeus, 12

⁵ See Chapter 5.

⁶ Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, 6

Alcman

In contrast to Tyrtaeus, is Sparta's other great poet, Alcman. Alcman's work suggests a care-free approach to life, a love of beauty and intellectual interests. Alcman is the poet of "swinging Sparta". It was assumed that this lighter approach to life meant that Alcman must have pre-dated Tyrtaeus and that he was writing before the Second Messenian War. However, Fitzhardinge has shown that in fact Alcman was Tyrtaeus' contemporary.

Alcman's work was written for public performance. He wrote drinking songs, hymns for male choirs and preludes for readings of Homer. However, he is best known for his *Maiden Songs*, chorus work to be sung and danced by young girls at Spartan festivals. Unlike Tyrtaeus, Alcman wrote in the local Dorian dialect. His subject matter varied:

- he used local Laconian legends;
- he used stories from Homer;
- he often tried to end a story with a moral message.

Alcman also enjoyed describing the world around him and included much of nature in his poems, such as flowers and birds. The following extracts come from the *Maiden Songs*. The contrast to Tyrtaeus is clear.

"...Would, ah would I were a kingfisher, who skims over the flower of a wave with the halycons, keeping a dauntless heart, the sea-blue sacred bird..."

*"...Now sleep the mountain peaks and the ravines, ridges and torrent streams, all creeping things that black night nourishes, wild upland beasts and the race of bees and monsters in the gulf of the dark-gleaming sea; now sleep the tribes of long-winged birds..."*⁷

Alcman's subject matter also covers the delights of food, fine wine and passionate love. There are few, if any, specific references to the Spartan way of life and style of government.

There were other poets in Sparta after Tyrtaeus and Alcman, though none of their work remains. These include Dionysodotus and Gitiadas. Singing remained a feature of Spartan life right to the end of the 5th century BC. In *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes has the Spartan delegates singing the final chorus of his play.

Exercise 17.1

In the spaces provided, list the main features of the poetry of Tyrtaeus and Alcman.

Tyrtaeus	Alcman

⁷ Quoted in: Fitzhardinge, L F, *The Spartans*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1985, p 131

Chapter Eighteen

Greek writers' views of Sparta

Though Sparta was not blessed with a wide range of its own writers, there seemed to be no shortage of Greek writers over time that were prepared to give their opinions of the Spartan way of life. Figure 18.1 summarises the background of each of the main writers.

Figure 18.1 Who were the main Greek writers on Spartan Society?

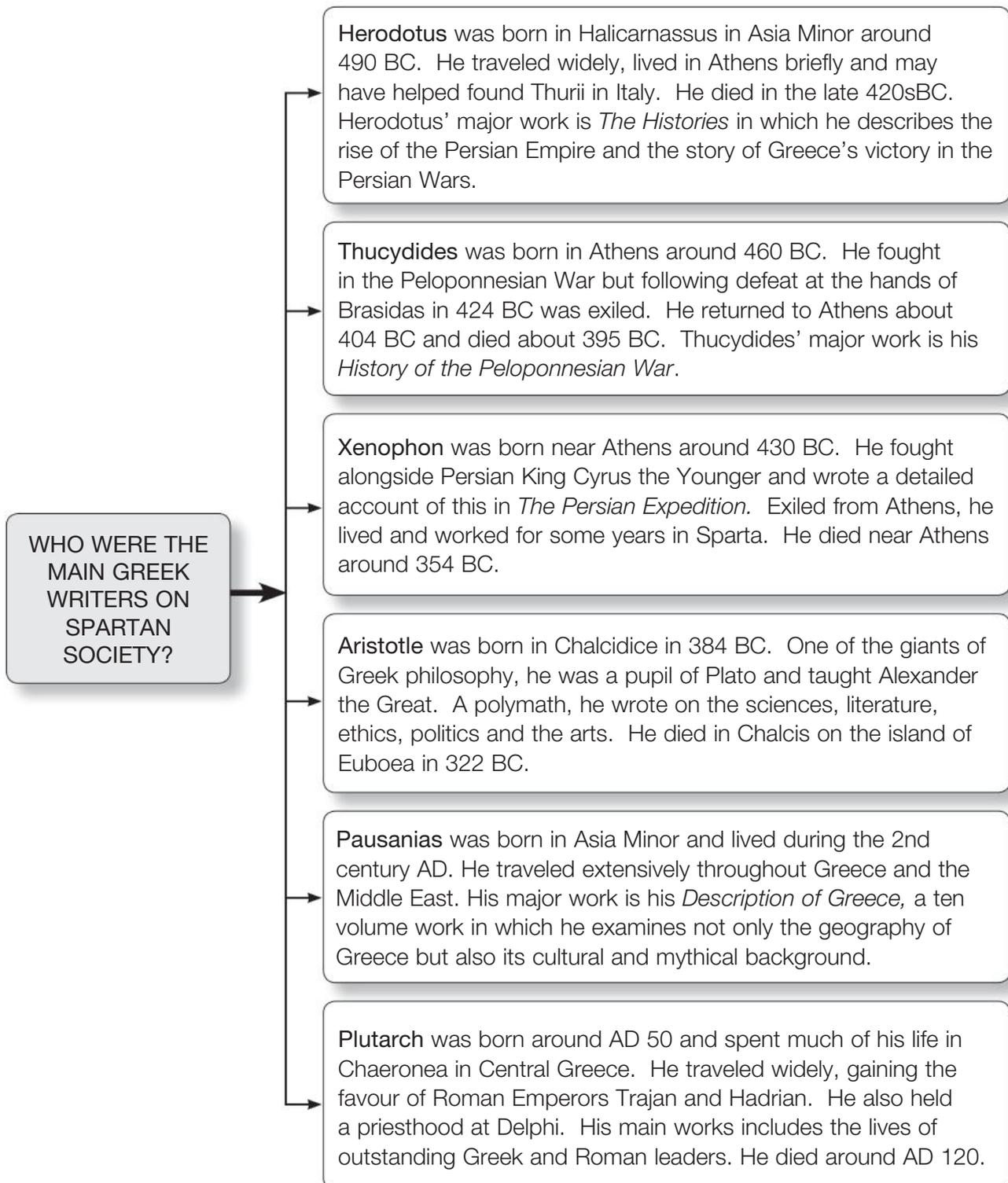
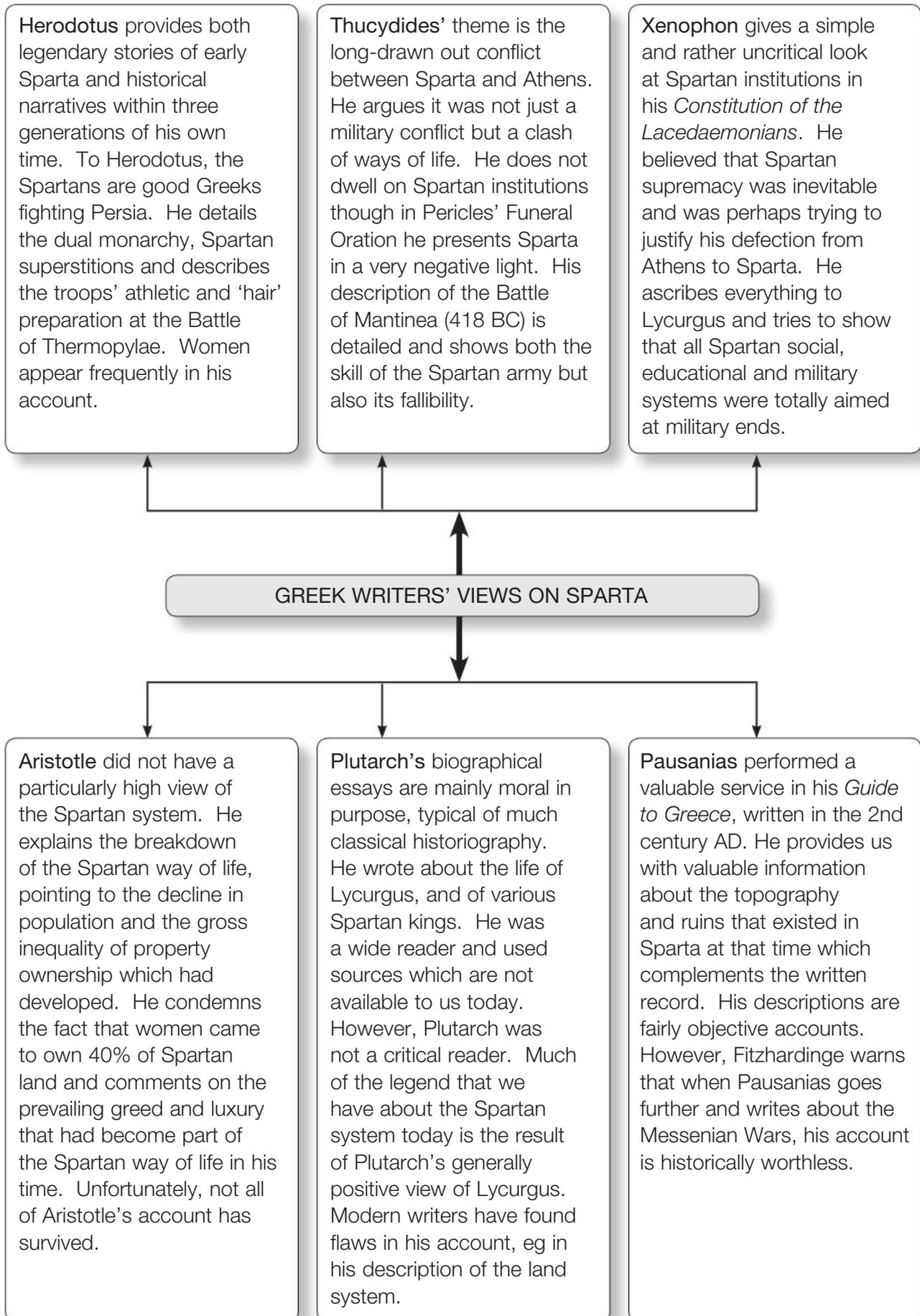


Figure 18.2: Greek writers' views on Sparta



There is much myth and legend connected with Sparta and its way of life. However, we have little choice but to work with the historical sources that we have. What follows are a few brief points for students to think critically about how they might use some of the ancient sources which have been referred to frequently throughout this book.

Herodotus is known to us as “the father of history”. However, his detractors have preferred to refer to him as the “father of lies”. Certainly Herodotus’ work would not stand the rigorous test of empiricist historians of the modern era.

- However, he did travel widely, much of what he says is substantiated by other sources and he would have been able to interview eye-witnesses.
- Divine influence appears in his work but we must remember he was a product of his times. His society accepted such things and for us to condemn Herodotus for this is perhaps to be anachronistic.
- Herodotus is Atheno-centric in his approach. Though he marvels at Greek unity, it is Athens that is central to the defeat of Persia. He was writing at a time of worsening Spartan-Athens relations and this might be a factor in his playing up the role of Athens and not Sparta.

Thucydides is rather different to Herodotus. He believed he was writing for posterity and expected his work to last through the ages. Thucydides is sometimes seen as the “the father of scientific history” and prided himself on his rigorous checking of his sources.

- He aims at objectivity but at times he cannot prevent his admiration for Pericles and Athens from coming through.
- He does heap praise upon the Spartan commander, Brasidas, at the Battle of Amphipolis. However, this might be to lessen Thucydides’ responsibility for the Athenian defeat there.
- Early in his work, Thucydides gives Pericles a major speech – The Funeral Oration – in which he compares Athens and Sparta. This is a clear piece of Athenian propaganda aimed at denigrating the Spartan way of life.¹

Xenophon’s account is extremely glowing of the Spartan system and he furthers the myth that the whole system was handed down to the Spartan people by the great lawmaker, Lycurgus.

- Xenophon spent much time with the Spartans after his defection from Athens and it is quite likely that his personal context affected the view that he presents of Sparta.
- When Xenophon was in Asia he mixed with various expatriate Spartans, and with some of the supporters of Agesilaus, who wanted a return to what were seen as the traditional ways. This might also have affected the positive view that he presents of Sparta in his work.

Later accounts by men such as **Plutarch** and **Pausanias** had the benefit of the use of sources which are no longer in existence. However, again we must be very careful when using sources such as Plutarch. He was writing about a society that was in existence six to eight hundred years before his own.

¹ See Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Book 2, 37-41

Exercise 18.1

Read each of the following statements and indicate which of the writers listed below would probably have written these statements.

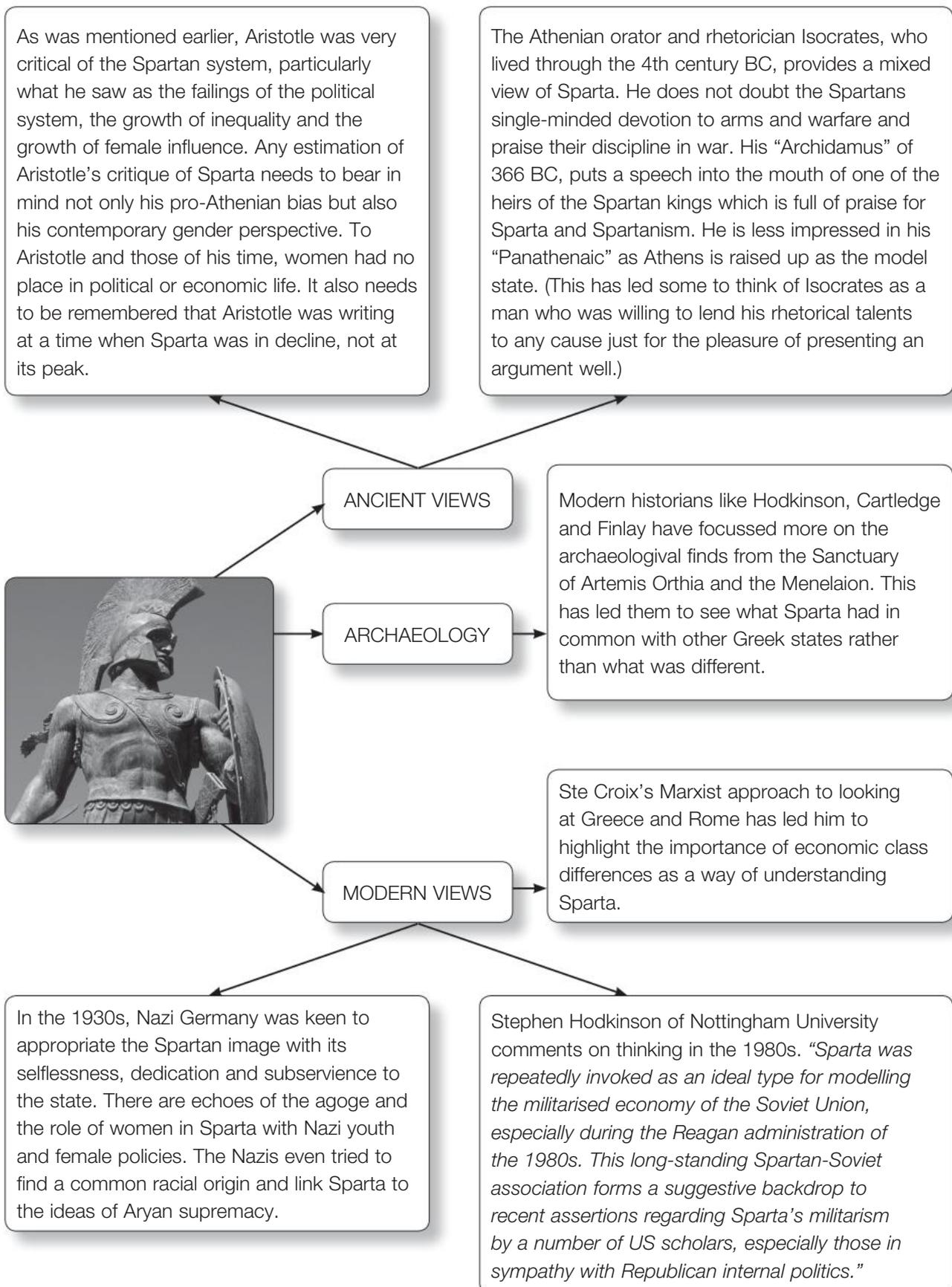
1	When women are allowed to play such a major role in society, it is no wonder that that society is likely to decline.	
2	Before they went into battle, the Spartans exercised and spent much time combing their long hair.	
3	Athens does not need to make its citizens spend their entire life training for the army to stand up and defend their land.	
4	Lycurgus is one of the wisest men in history and it is to him that Spartans should thank for giving them such fine institutions.	
5	Sparta's decline is not surprising considering the decline in population and the gross inequality of land ownership that developed.	
6	There is a place established here for Athena of the City. It is also known as the Bronze House Athena.	
7	Lycurgus successfully persuaded the Spartans to pool their land and then redistribute it in a fairer manner.	
8	I realise that Sparta might not be what it was and that is why it is necessary to return to the fundamental ideas of Lycurgus.	
9	The Spartans did not rush to Athens' assistance at the Battle of Marathon because they had a religious ceremony to complete.	
10	Sparta's military organisation at the Battle of Mantinea was almost ruined by the disobedience of one of the officers.	

THUCYDIDES	PAUSANIAS	PLUTARCH
HERODOTUS	ARISTOTLE	XENOPHON

(A useful revision exercise would be to draw up a chart with the historians listed on the left, aspects of Spartan society listed across the top. Check the various references made to the historians throughout this book and gradually fill up as many of the boxes as you can. This will assist students in their understanding of the Greek writers' views of the Spartans.)

Figure 18.3

Some further thoughts about Sparta from Ancient and Modern thinkers



Chapter Nineteen

Leisure activities

At first glance, it might appear that the Spartans had little time for fun and leisure activities. A barracks-style life dedicated to the development of military skills and discipline with the aim of keeping down a repressed helot population does not present Sparta as a fun place to be. However, in reality, it might be argued that Spartans in fact had more leisure time than other Greek city states of the time.

- The Spartans did not have to worry about the production of food, the tilling of the land or the care of livestock.
 - This was all done for them by Sparta's large helot population.
- Neither did the Spartans have to develop craft skills or be concerned about producing anything, whether it be weapons or pots or furniture.
 - This was the preserve of the perioeci.
- Women too would seem to have had a much better time than women in other city states.
 - They only had to look after their boys until the age of seven, and even during this period many Spartan women would have had helot nurses.
 - They were not expected to learn to spin and weave.
 - Household chores would be carried out by helot servants.

This should not be taken too far. At its height, Sparta was a disciplined place to live and both Spartan men and women would have been fully aware of what was expected of them, and of their need to maintain a strict physical regimen.

What leisure activities the Spartans had were often connected with their military way of life.

- There was a great emphasis on athletic and various physical games. This obviously reinforced the formal training and values of the system. Such activities would include:
 - hunting – a man could even miss a mess meal if he was away hunting;
 - there were various horse-related activities, such as chariot racing – these have been illustrated on Spartan pottery, eg the Vix Bowl;
 - various athletic competitions took place, covering the range of what we today would see as Olympic sports, eg discus, javelin, wrestling, running.
- For the men, it can only be assumed that the camaraderie of the mess meals would have provided a major social outlet at the end of the day.
- Sparta's religious life also provided a major outlet for fun and leisure.
 - Most of the major festivals – the *hyakinthia*, the *gymnopaedia* and the *Karneia* – contained not only religious elements, but also provided for singing, music and dancing.¹

¹ See Chapter 14.

The region of Laconia and Messenia was highly productive. Chapter 1 details the geography of the region and lists the resources which were available to the people of Sparta.

- The **food** Spartans would have eaten would be commonplace in a Mediterranean environment today.
 - There were the usual fruits such as oranges, figs and grapes.
 - The grapes would be turned into wine.
 - Olives were grown extensively.
 - Grain crops included wheat and barley.
 - Spartans ate mutton, lamb and goat's meat.
 - Dairy foods were available.²
- Spartans were expected to be moderate in their consumption of food and drink. Excessive drinking and eating did not fit well with the Spartan disciplined lifestyle.

Spartan **clothing** was as sparse and simple as the way of life. There was no sartorial ostentation that might exist in Athens (and indeed later in Rome).

- Men would usually be attired in their hoplite dress as described in Chapter 7. The only concession to extravagance would be the red cloak a Spartan soldier was allowed to wear.
- When boys were growing up, they were expected to cope with the elements, as explained in Chapter 8. Even in winter, they were not given much more than a light garment to wear.
- Women too avoided ostentation, at least during the earlier part of Spartan history. Young women were expected to exercise and to this end the brief, revealing peplos was worn (see Figure 9.1), a style of attire that often used to scandalise people in other Greek cities. They might have dressed more elaborately during religious ceremonies.

As the earlier chapters explained, everyone in Sparta had his or own particular role to play. One's occupation was largely determined by one's position in the social hierarchy – Spartiate, perioeci or helot.

- The occupation of the Spartiates was clear:
 - the men were soldiers, an occupation for which they trained all their lives;
 - as citizens, Spartiates would be expected to fulfill roles in government as perhaps an ephor, a member of the Gerousia (from age 60) and to be involved in the Spartan assembly.
 - Spartan women were expected to bear children, though as Aristotle has shown, they later became increasingly influential and owned land.
- The occupations of the perioeci involved trade, commerce and craft:
 - they were the city's blacksmiths, potters, painters and textile workers;
 - they worked in the maritime area, eg fishing, shipbuilding;
 - they were Sparta's traders
 - the perioeci could also be expected to fight.

² The stealing of the cheeses was associated with the cult of Artemis Orthia (see Chapter 12).

- The occupation of the helots was straightforward:
 - they were Sparta's farmers;
 - they might also carry out domestic duties, especially helot women;
 - helots could also be called upon to fight.

(Marriage customs which appear in the final section of the syllabus are covered in Chapter Nine.)

Exercise 19.1

Circle either THIS IS TRUE or THIS IS FALSE as it applies to each of the following statements.

1	Spartans had far less time for leisure activities than did most people in other Greek states.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
2	Spartans could miss a mess meal with their comrades if they were away hunting.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
3	Religious festivals were not of any great importance in the leisure life of the Spartans.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
4	Spartans were expected to be fairly abstemious in their eating and drinking habits.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
5	Spartan girls wore the revealing peplos which often scandalised people from other Greek cities.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
6	Spartan grown-ups ensured that young boys did not get too cold during a Spartan winter.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
7	Spartan men often took time off from their military training to work on their farms.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
8	Spartan women were keenly involved in economic activities while their husbands focused on military training.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
9	The perioeci provided the mainstay of Sparta's maritime interests.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE
10	Helots provided Sparta's farming class though they might also have to fulfill domestic duties.	THIS IS TRUE / THIS IS FALSE

Chapter Twenty

Responding to HSC questions on Spartan society to the Battle of Leuctra 371 BC

The basics of the Ancient History examination

The HSC examination in Ancient History is a three hour paper and students are allowed a five minute reading time before the examination commences.

The paper is divided into four sections.

Section I is the core: Cities of Vesuvius – Pompeii and Herculaneum.

- Do this question first. Students will have had five minutes reading time to study the sources and so they will be fresh in the mind. In the reading time, focus only on the Core.
- ALL questions in this section must be answered.
- Some questions will be straightforward and ask you to use both a source (or sources) and your own information to provide an answer
 - Such a question might be a simple description style question
 - Or it might ask you to provide some form of assessment which requires a judgment and for which a straight description is inadequate
- Longer answers might be in the form “To what extent...” Such questions require an argument and could expect you to make a judgment about how useful a source(s) is (are) in discovering an aspect of Pompeii
- Simpler questions might relate to the survey area – these may or may not also involve a reference to a source – these will be of a lower mark value
- The mark allocation can change from year to year. Thus, students need to be aware of the mark value of each question and allocate time accordingly.
 - Do not spend too long on low mark questions.
 - Be sure to spend adequate time on greater mark questions.
- Be careful to have revised both Pompeii and Herculaneum
- Spend only 45 minutes on this section. Once the clock has ticked around to 45 minutes, move on to the next. Do not write beyond 45 minutes under any circumstances – even though you think you have a wealth of things to say.

Section II of the paper comprises the Ancient Societies.

- There are 8 questions in this section.
- Students answer only one question from this section, obviously Sparta (see below).
- Spend ONLY 45 minutes on Sparta. Once 45 minutes is up, move on!

Section III of the paper comprises the Personalities in Their Times.

- There are 10 questions in this section.
- Students answer only one question from this section.
- This is a structured question with different parts. Students must allocate their time accordingly. If a part is worth 15 marks, you would probably spend about 27 minutes on this; if it is worth ten marks about 18 minutes. For much lower mark parts, much less time.
- Ensure that if a part refers to a specific given source, or asks for additional sources, that these are included. Higher value parts would expect not only a use of sources but also some attempt at evaluation of the source.
- Spend ONLY 45 minutes on the Personalities questions. Once 45 minutes is up, move on!

Section IV of the paper comprises the Historical Periods.

- There are 10 questions in this section.
- Students answer only one question from this section.
- This question is a full essay. It is a good idea to leave this question till last. If a student has made errors on timing throughout the examination, it is better to have a single essay question to do at the end rather than a structured question with several parts. It is still possible to write a reasonable essay response in 35 minutes.
- However, timing is everything. Spend 45 minutes on this question.

Time allocation is crucial. Be obsessive about it. 45 minutes for each section!

Answering the Sparta question in Section II.

Do this question second or third and, of course, spend only 45 minutes doing it.

The Sparta question will (usually) have three or four separate questions within it. Each question expects a different type of response and consequently the mark value for each question will vary.

Allocate time appropriately – do not spend twenty minutes on a three mark question; do not spend five minutes on a fifteen mark question! Time allocation is the essence of exam technique.

Over the years, the mark value of each part of this question will vary.

One type of question might be a simple definitional/ factual question.

- It will probably be worth about three or four marks.
- Such questions might include:
 - “Explain the role of the krypteia.”
 - “What was the syssition?”
- A four mark question needs about seven minutes. You would probably be writing a paragraph. Be sure to use the source if the question is seeking “use of the source and your own knowledge”.

Another type of questions could ask for a longer descriptive response.

- These questions will expect more detail. Check the mark value; such questions might be worth 6-8 marks.

Such questions might include:

- “Discuss the role of the ephors in Sparta. Support your answer with reference to relevant sources.”
- “Describe the main religious festivals that took place in Sparta.”
- As well as greater detail, these questions expect students to be able to back up their factual detail with specific reference to either/ or both the ancient writers and archaeological evidence.

The ten or fifteen mark question is a much more complex question and therefore demands a longer and more detailed response.

- Students should try to spend about 28 minutes on this question (if it is a 15 mark question) Allocate less time if the question has a lower mark value.
- Sometimes it may ask students to use both a given source and their own knowledge to answer a question, similar to the Core questions. ¹
- As this is a much longer response, students need to treat this question as a mini-essay and employ the usual techniques of writing an essay.
 - An introduction is required which outlines the argument to be developed.
 - The answer needs to be structured into logical paragraphs.
 - Ensure a thread through the answer, link the paragraphs.
 - There must be a conclusion to sum up the argument.
- If the question seeks reference to a given source, be sure that specific reference is given.
 - Make it easy for the marker, refer specifically to “Source R”, do not infer.
 - Equally, refer to the source sparingly. It is meant to act as a springboard for your discussion. Twenty references to Source R would be foolish.
- This question expects students to be able to support their ideas with specific reference to the ancient writers and archaeological evidence. Ensure that your revision is thorough enough to make this possible.
- However, simply dropping in “Plutarch” or “Xenophon” is not enough. Students will gain credit if they can use the sources critically.
 - Is Herodotus reliable?
 - Is Thucydides subject to any pro-Athenian bias?
 - Can we trust Xenophon given his personal situation?
 - Is Plutarch too willing to laud Lycurgus?

¹ This can also be the format for question 2 or 3.

- Also be willing to bring in modern scholars if appropriate. Fitzhardinge's work in the 1980s can be valuable in discussing certain aspects of Spartan society.

A possible HSC question on “Spartan society to the Battle of Leuctra 371 BC”

Answer all parts of the question:

- (a) What was the krypteia? 4
- (b) Discuss the role of the helots in Spartan society. Support your answer with reference to relevant sources. 6
- (c) What does the evidence reveal about the role of women in Spartan society? Support your answer with reference to Source A and other relevant sources. 15

Source A: Bronze statue of a Spartan girl running.



Glossary

acropolis	high defence area of a city
agoge	system of Spartan education
Arcesilas Cup	very fine piece of Spartan pottery 6th century BC
eirene	teenage boy who supervised younger boys
ekklesia	Spartan assembly
ephor	Spartan annual magistrate
eunomia	concept of order and good government
Eurotas	river flowing through Sparta
gerousia	Spartan council of elders
Great Rhetra	set of laws allegedly handed down by Lycurgus
gymnopaedia	religious festival, "festival of the unarmed boys"
helot	enslaved farming class of Sparta
hoplite	Spartan infantry soldier
hoplon	shield
hyakinthia	religious festival, named after Hyakinthos
Iliad	epic poem of Homer telling the story of the Trojan War
isthmus	narrow stretch of land connecting two larger areas of land, eg Corinthian Isthmus
karneia	religious festival, linking worship of Apollo with older god Karneios
kleros	allotment of land given to each Spartiate
krypteia	secret police used to keep helots under control
Lacedaemonians	term used to indicate the Spartans
Laconia	region of the Peloponnese
mora	largest unit of the Spartan army
Odyssey	epic poem of Homer telling the story of Odysseus
paidonomos	city appointed warden with authority over young boys
peplos	short skirt worn by Spartan girls
perioeci	craftsmen, maritime workers of Sparta
phalanx	Spartan fighting technique
polemarch	commander of a mora
porphyry	a green stone
Spartiate	upper class of Spartans, also called peers or equals
syssition	dining group crucial to a Spartiate's role in society
Vix bowl	6th century bronze work from Sparta

Timeline

The dates given below have been taken from a variety of sources. Fitzhardinge¹ has a very detailed chronology of Spartan political and cultural history. However, as much of early Spartan history is shrouded in doubt, some of the early dates can be only approximations at best.

BC

1000	Foundation of Sparta
800	Reforms of Lycurgus
c730s-c710s	First Messenian War
669	Sparta is defeated at Hysiae by Argos
640-620	Second Messenian War
575-550	Sparta at war with Tegea
c550	Establishment of the Peloponnesian League
490	Athens defeats Persia at the Battle of Marathon Sparta fails to assist Sparta due to a religious ceremony
481	Sparta is chosen to lead the Greeks against Persia
480	Battle of Thermopylae. King Leonidas dies with the 300 against a vastly superior Persian force
479	Led by Pausanias, Sparta defeats Persia at the Battle of Plataea
464	Following an earthquake, Sparta faces a major helot revolt
431-404	Sparta defeats Athens in the Peloponnesian War. This is followed by a brief period of Spartan supremacy.
371	Sparta is defeated by Thebes at the Battle of Leuctra. The glory days of Sparta are over.

¹ Fitzhardinge, L F, *The Spartans*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1985, pp 165-7

Dramatis Personae

Agesilaus	Spartan King 400-360 BC
Agiad	one of the Spartan royal families
Agis	Spartan king during the Peloponnesian War
Alcman	Spartan writer 7th century BC
Aristophanes	Athenian playwright, author of <i>Lysistrata</i>
Aristotle	Greek philosopher, critical of Sparta
Artemis Orthia	main cult in Sparta
Brasidas	Spartan general during the Peloponnesian War
Castor	one of the Dioscuri, brother of Polydeuces
Cleomenes	Spartan king c 520-c 490 BC
Demaratus	Spartan king 515-491 BC
Dionysus	god of wine-making
Dioscuri	mythical Spartan heroes, Castor and Polydeuces
Epaminondas	Theban leader at the Battle of Leuctra
Epitadeus	ephor, author of liberal 4th century BC land law
Eurypontid	one of the Spartan royal families
Hephaestus	god of craftsmen
Herodotus	Greek historian, author of <i>The Histories</i>
Homer	Greek epic poet
Leonidas	Spartan king, fought and died at Thermopylae 480 BC
Leotychidas	Spartan king 491-476 BC
Lycurgus	mythical Spartan lawgiver
Lysander	Spartan general during the Peloponnesian War
Lysistrata	satirical play written by Aristophanes
Orestes	son of Agamemnon
Pausanias (1)	Spartan general at the Battle of Plataea 479 BC
Pausanias (2)	Greece travel writer 2nd century AD
Pausanias (3)	Spartan king 409-394 BC
Pericles	Athenian leader at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War
Pheidippides	Athenian runner sent to seek Spartan help against Persia 490 BC
Pleistoanax	Spartan king 458-409 BC
Plutarch	Greek writer, 2nd century AD, author <i>Lycurgus</i>
Polydeuces	one of the Dioscuri, brother of Castor
Thucydides	author of <i>History of the Peloponnesian War</i>
Tyrtaeus	Spartan writer 7th century BC
Xenophon	author of <i>Spartan Society</i>
Xerxes	Persian king 485-465 BC

Further reading

There is a mass of literature available on Sparta. However, HSC students (and their teachers) have only a certain amount of time. This book has attempted to synthesise some of the main sources within the text and should go a long way to providing students with the specific source references they require.

However, wider reading, and more in depth reading of the sources, is always of enormous value. What follows are some of the references that the author has found of use over time. The list has been kept sensibly brief.

Ancient sources

Plutarch: his work on Lycurgus, Agis, Cleomenes and the Sayings of Spartan Women

Xenophon: Spartan Society

Thucydides: History of the Peloponnesian War (dip into this)

Herodotus: The Histories (dip into this)

Aristotle: Politics (dip into this)

Modern Sources

Fitzhardinge, L F, *The Spartans*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1985
(mainly concerned with cultural evidence)

Michell, H, *Sparta*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1964
(difficult)

Sealey, R, *A History of the Greek States 700-338 BC*, University of California Press, London, 1976
(narrative)

Kelly, D, *Sparta: History and archaeology*, Teaching History, HTA of NSW, July 1984
(great overview of debates)

More straightforward texts

Barrow, R, *Sparta*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1975
(simple)

Bradley, P, *Ancient Greece*, Edward Arnold, Melbourne, 1988, Chapter 4
(simple but still of use)

Hurley, T et alia, *Antiquity 2*, Oxford, Melbourne, 2009, Chapter 3
(text backed up with good illustrations)

Websites

<http://www.pausanias-footsteps.nl/english/sparta%20museum-eng.html>

<http://thevotivesproject.org/2017/01/27/masks/>

Answers to Revision Exercises

Exercise 1.1

1 – It comprised a number of independent city states; 2 – By the Corinthian isthmus; 3 – Elis, Arcadia, Argolis, Achaea, Messenia and Laconia; 4 – The Eurotas; 5 – Taygetus range, Parnon range, Arcadian range; 6 – Messenia; 7 – Hot in summer, cold in winter; its climate was more extreme; 8 – Copper, iron, lead; 9 – For the dye which was used to dye their clothing; 10 – Sparta is in Laconia.

Exercise 2.1

east – north – acropolis – winter – Artemis Orthia – Athens – villages – city – fruit trees – vines – fourteen – five

Exercise 3.1

1 – strict/ disciplined/ militaristic/ lacking luxury and culture/ isolated; 2 – he argues that Athenians are just as brave and patriotic as Spartans without the strict, military way of life; 3 – he says Sparta continued like other Greek states for far longer and enjoyed a degree of luxury; 4 – food and population problems; 5 – late 8th century BC; 6 – it led to the creation of a new strict/ military based society; 7 – Lycurgus

Exercise 3.2

1 – Athenian historian, author of the *History of the Peloponnesian War*; 2 – Greek historian of the early 2nd century AD; 3 – legendary lawgiver of Sparta; 4 – man who attacked Lycurgus but became his devoted servant; 5 – Lycurgus' laws and enactments; 6 – the qualification made to the rhetra regarding popular power; 7 – order and good government

Exercise 4.1

1 – true; 2 – false; 3 – false; 4 – false; 5 – true; 6 – true; 7 – true; 8 – false; 9 – false; 10 – true

Exercise 5.1

1 – ekklesia; 2 – gerousia; 3 – gerousia; 4 – ephors; 5 – ekklesia; 6 – ephors; 7 – gerousia; 8 – ekklesia; 9 – ephors; 10 – ephors; 11 – gerousia; 12 – ekklesia; 13 – ekklesia; 14 – gerousia; 15 – ephors; 16 – ephors; 17 – ekklesia; 18 – gerousia; 19 – ephors; 20 – gerousia

Exercise 6.1

1 – 10000 to c 200000; 2 – Dorian heritage, to have gone through the agoge, be a syssition member; 3 – to promote comradeship amongst the Spartans; 4 – the state was all, the individual nothing; 5 – dwellers round about; 6 – higher status than the helots, they were left alone, played a key role in society; 7 – need for security against a helot revolt; 8 – owned by the state not by individuals; 9 – krypteia; 10 – could lead to freedom or death.

Exercise 7.1

phalanx – hoplite – hoplon – Corinthian – cuirass – greaves – enomotia – pentekonter – lochos – mora – polemarch – hippeis – helots

Exercise 8.1

1 – true; 2 – false; 3 – true; 4 – true; 5 – false; 6 – false; 7 – true; 8 – true; 9 – false;
10 – false

Exercise 9.1

1 – she was not consulted; 2 – pride, devotion; 3 – none; 4 – importance of athletic exercise for Spartan girls; 5 – tombstone inscription; 6 – very little; 7 – little, to maintain sexual interest and so likely create babies; 8 – relaxed, allowed men to sleep with other men's wives; 9 – about 40% of land owned by women; 10 – inheritance and dowry laws, falling numbers of equals.

Exercise 9.2

1 – Homer; 2 – Aristophanes; 3 – Aristotle; 4 – Plutarch; 5 – Gorgo.

Exercise 10.1

1 – true; 2 – true; 3 – false; 4 – false; 5 – true; 6 – false; 7 – true; 8 – true; 9 – false;
10 – false.

Exercise 11.1

Helots – trade – craftsmanship – iron – gold – silver – Lycurgus – crime – wealth – Lysander – land – inequality.

Exercise 12.1

1 – Hephaestus; 2 – Artemis Orthia; 3 – Apollo; 4 – Dionysus; 5 – Hyacinthia; 6 – Temple of Athena of the Bronze House; 7 – Zeus; 8 – Karneia; 9 – Therapne; 10 – Temple of Artemis Orthia.

Exercise 13.1

1 – Tyndareus; 2 – Zeus; 3 – Leda; 4 – Lynceus, Idas; 5 – Hilaera, Phoebe; 6 – To alternate their time between Olympus and the underworld; 7 – Homer, Euripides; 8 – athletic competition; 9 – protectors of sailors; 10 – Gemini.

Exercise 14.1

1 – gymnopaidiai; 2 – hyakinthia; 3 – karneia; 4 – karneia; 5 – hyakinthia; 6 – gymnopaidiai;
7 – karneia; 8 – hyakinthia; 9 – karneia; 10 – gymnopaidiai;

Exercise 15.1

Lycurgus – city – simple – personal – cloak – forbidden – childbirth – eleven – enforced – helots – cancel – Persian.

Exercise 16.1

1 – false; 2 – false; 3 – true; 4 – true; 5 – false; 6 – true; 7 – true; 8 – true; 9 – false;
10 – false.

Exercise 17.1

Tyrtaeus	Alcman
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ promotes courage and the values of hoplite warfare ■ believes in comradeship and cooperation ■ rejects the old aristocratic notion of the great warrior ■ does not glamorise warfare ■ has a conservative outlook 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ a focus on local legends ■ great emphasis on the beauty of nature, animals and flowers ■ refers to the enjoyment of good food, wine and passionate love ■ sometimes provides a moral message ■ little to say about Sparta's martial way of life.

Exercise 18.1

1 – Aristotle; 2 – Herodotus; 3 – Thucydides; 4 – Xenophon; 5 – Aristotle; 6 – Pausanias; 7 – Plutarch; 8 – Xenophon; 9 – Herodotus; 10 – Thucydides.

Exercise 19.1

1 – false; 2 – true; 3 – false; 4 – true; 5 – true; 6 – false; 7 – false; 8 – false; 9 – true; 10 – true.

