

ANCIENT GREECE

Background Information 1: Spartan Life

Key background information

- Sparta was one of the strongest city-states in Greece.
- Was ruled by 2 kings at a time and a Council of 30 elders, who were all citizens over the age of 60.
- In the archaic period, Sparta produced fine art and literature.
- Was a military state.
- Had a key role in defeating Persia.
- Defeated Athens in the Peloponnesian War and was then at the height of her power.
- Made a treaty with Persia, the 'King's Peace', in 386 BC.
- Was defeated by Thebes in 371 BC, never regained supremacy.

Life for men

- Spartan boys left their families at 7 to be trained to become part of the full-time professional army.
- Had very strict education and training.
- Boys were not well fed and punished if caught stealing food.
- Boys were encouraged to fight each other but not in anger.
- Cowardice was seen almost as a crime.
- Spartan education put emphasis on physical fitness.

- Boys were taken to the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia to be flogged to show their toughness and endurance.
- The training of males was divided into age groups and called the agôgê (upbringing):
 - Boys 7- 17 learned reading, writing, dancing and singing; also tough physical education
 - Older boys, 18-19, trained for the army and in survival techniques.
 - Youths, 20-29, underwent rigorous military training as part of the standing army.
 - Young adults, 30+, were full citizens and expected to marry.
- A man had to remain in his barracks until he was 30 and if he married (could marry from the age of 20) he had to visit his wife in secrecy.
- All adult men belonged to 'messes'- small groups that met and dined together and were housed in individual 'men's houses'.
- All citizens were hoplites.

Life for women

- Women received an education and physical training.
- Physical training made them fit and strong so they would have healthy babies (to become good soldiers).
- Physical training probably focused on gymnastics, choral song and dance.
- Xenophon says that the legendary law-giver Lycurgus thought wool-working and the related sedentary life found in other states were best left to slave women: the activity was traditionally disdained by Spartan women.

The Perioikoi

(Free, non-Spartans of Laconia and Messenia)

- Had to provide military service to the Spartans
- Did not have the privileges of citizenship (e.g. member of the Spartan assembly, able to be a magistrate).
- Were involved with the management of trade and manufacture, as Spartans not allowed to be engaged in trade.

The Helots

(The 'serf' population)

- Were Greeks of the area around Sparta that were defeated in war by the Spartans.
- Were owned by Spartans as a whole (not by individuals).
- The magistrates (ephors) declared war on them annually as constant fear of revolt.
- They provided most of the agricultural produce for the rest of the population.
- Those of Messenia took part in regular revolts.