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Greek History

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Political Authority and State Formation

### Bias of Archaic Spartan Government

HOOK: Hollywood and the Spartan mirage portrays Sparta as a ruthless and lawless place. Archaic Sparta had many laws and a strict government. A man names Lykourgos is credited with instilling the government system and many of the laws in Sparta. WORKING THESIS: Although Lykourgos instated an assembly government and strict laws in Sparta, they only helped with equality for the minority Spartiates.

LYKOURGOS: Who was he? What evidence do we have that he was a real person? Discuss contradictions from Herodotus and DG about him being Spartan born. Why is his background important? The lawmaker coming from the upper class leads towards the laws having a bias towards the upper class.

PEOPLE OF SPARTA: Where was Sparta and who lived there? The Spartanas, also called Lacedaemons, originated from Laconia and controlled Messenia and Kynouria. Relate to modern places. Why did the Spartans conquer neighboring lands? Describe who lived and in each region and the difference between helots, perioikoi, and Spartiates.

ASSEMBLY: Who could vote and propose laws and how did it reflect the Sparatan population? “When the populace was assembled, Lykourgos allowed no one except the

elders and the kings to put forward a proposal but the people had the supreme authority to decide upon one which these laid before them” (Dillon et al., 2010, 6.3). Explain the difference between kings, ephors, and Gerousia. Describe the election process to being an ephor (shouting assembly). Americans are often biased to assembly governments as fairer but Sparta’s government was not fair. Discuss how Sparta is similar to a democracy and how it is similar to an oligarchy.

LAND DISTRIBUTION POLICY: Why was this policy needed? Who did it benefit and how was it unfair to the perioikoi? Compare to Solon’s wealth redistribution policy in Athens and modern problems.

MILITARY: How did Sparta treat cowards? How was honor gained through combat? “But let each man plant himself stoutly and stay with both feet” (Dillon et al., 2010, 6.7) Discuss the roles of kings, ephors, and perioikoi in combat. Yearly killings of helots to control population and instill fear.

TREATMENT OF YOUTH: How did young men contribute to Spartan society? “he wanted to make the boys more resourceful in their efforts to procure food, and at the same time he managed to fit them better for war” (Dillon et al., 2010, 6.41) How were they treated and how were they expected to treat honored elders?

CONCLUSION: Restate thesis; Lycurgus’s laws may have helped control Sparta but they only really benefited the Spartiates. Compare to bias in modern law and society.

### **Works Cited**

Dillon, Matthew, and Lynda Garland. *Ancient Greece*. London, Routledge, 2010.

Herodotus, *Histories*, translated by Robin Waterfield (Oxford University Press, 1998).

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Note: I don't have the correct translation of Herodotus yet so all the quotes are from the other primary documents.