the chief port of Laconia, being 30 miles distant ; nor was it built with anything like the compactness of an Athens or a Corinth. The houses for the most part stood in spacious gardens, an open-air life being altogether to the Spartan taste, and well suited to the pleasant genial climate of the valley. The olive still grows to great per­fection in the neighbourhood, and the silk is said to be of particularly fine quality. The mountain ranges round the city gave it a very strong defensive position, and for a long period Sparta was without walls or fortifications, trusting exclusively to the prowess of her citizens till she was seriously menaced by the victorious Macedonians in the 4th century b.c. The city was never a very splendid one ; the houses were plain and simple and there seem to have been no public buildings of striking magnificence. There was the so-called Brazen House of Athene on a hill within a large enclosure, with plates of bronze which gave it its name, on which, among other mythological scenes, were represented the labours of Hercules and the exploits of the great twin brethren, Castor and Pollux, who were specially honoured at Sparta. There was the theatre, still to be traced in huge quadrangular blocks of stone, and there were porticos and colonnades, and the chapels and tombs of Spartan heroes, such as Lycurgus, Leonidas, Brasidas. Sparta delighted to honour her worthy citizens, and paid them divine honours after death. The site of the city has not been thoroughly investigated, but it is a question whether much remains worth bringing to light. What has hitherto been discovered is poor and disap­pointing. Sparta’s greatness as a city, as Thucydides (i. 10) clearly implies, fell very far short of her political importance as a state.@@1

Sparta’s history, passing over her share in the prehistoric Trojan War under her king Menelaus, the brother of Agamemnon, begins with the legislation of Lycurgus in the 9th century b.c. It was this, as has been explained in the article Lycurgus, which made Sparta what she was, a state whose aim it was rather to hold her own within the Peloponnesus than to launch out into doubt­ful enterprises far away from home. Sparta was not naturally aggressive or ambitious ; she was not easily roused to action even in great emergencies. She was safe amid her mountains from the perils to which other Greek cities were exposed. It would seem that in early days Argos had been decidedly the first power in the Pelopon­nesus, Sparta being second to her by a long interval. The relative position of the two states was reversed soon after the time of Lycurgus. The spirit and vigour which his discipline infused no doubt enabled Sparta, after two severe wars in the 8th and 7th centuries, to accomplish at last the complete conquest of Messene, the south-western portion of the Peloponnesus, and so to become the undis­puted mistress of at least two-fifths of the whole penin­sula, By the year 600 b.c. Sparta was quite in the first rank of Greek states, and it was generally felt that she had a right to take the lead in Greek politics. In the 6th century she put down the tyrants, the heads of the democratic and popular party, in several Greek cities, and drove, for a time at least, the reforming and innovating Clisthenes from Athens. Sparta was the steady foe of democracy and popular government. The Spartans were themselves a small landowning aristocracy, in the midst of a comparatively numerous population, consisting of so-called Periœci (dwellers round about), the aboriginal inhabitants, in fact, of Laconia, and of Helots or serfs, taken to a great extent from the conquered Messenians.

The government was highly centralized ; it was wholly in the hands of the Spartans, the Periœci having no share in it, though many of them may have themselves been land- owners, or at any rate have held land under Spartan land­lords, and been well-to-do and prosperous. The Helots were farm labourers bound to the soil, slaves in every sense of the word, anything like self-respect being studiously made impossible for them. Spartans could put down a popular rising or a slave insurrection with cold­blooded cruelty, and in a panic following on an earthquake of unusual violence in 464 there was a deliberately- planned massacre of a multitude of Helots for the safety of Sparta, carried out and executed by Spartans in person. A calculating selfishness was a marked trait in Spartan character. Sparta seems always to have put her own interests before those of Greece, though she claimed to be the leading and representative Greek state. She was cautious and even timid, though the courage of her indi­vidual citizens in war was unsurpassed. Every Spartan was a hero on the battlefield, and a Spartan army was long assumed to be invincible. Sparta was not much of a colonizing state, but she could point to the famous city of Tarentum in southern Italy as her offspring, and to Lyctus (*Il*., ii. 647 ; xvii. 611) in Crete, whence came warriors to the Trojan War. In 491, when Greece was threatened with invasion by Persia, we find Athens appealing to Sparta and urging a complaint against the Æginetans as traitors to Greece for having given earth and water, the symbols of submission, to the emissaries of the great king. In 480 a Spartan admiral commanded the Greek fleet off Artemisium against Xerxes, and in the following year a Spartan general, Pausanias, commanded the united forces of Greece in the famous battle of Platæa. All this implies a distinct recognition of Sparta as the head of Greece. The Persian War over, Athens under Cimon and Pericles developed extraordinary energy and took Sparta’s place. Sparta indeed seems to have retired upon her laurels, and it was not without reluctance and much urgent pressure that she embarked in the Pelopon­nesian War, which, after twenty-eight years of hard fighting, ended in the overthrow of the Athenian empire and the capture of Athens by Lysander in 405. Sparta contributed greatly to the final result by despatching an able officer, Gylippus, to the relief of Syracuse in 414, when the city was on the point of surrendering to the Athenian armament. It was the decisive success of Gylippus in Sicily which turned the scale against Athens. The crushing blow of Ægospotami in 405, which annihilated her fleet and left her defenceless, and the subsequent surrender of the city transferred the supremacy of Greece once more to Sparta, but not for much more than thirty years. Sparta’s policy was ungenerous and short-sighted ; it consisted in establishing little oligarchical factions under Spartan control in the Greek cities, and soon degenerated into a tyranny which became utterly odious. All Sparta’s worst qualities came out during this period: “autonomy,” which had been her watchword throughout the war against Athens, became a dead letter under her rule ; and the freedom of city life, so dear to a Greek, was crushed out under her officials and commis­sioners, whom she thrust on a number of Greek cities. Still more did she disgust all the better men of Greece by concluding, after a series of intrigues for her own selfish ends, a peace with Persia in 387, known as the peace of Antalcidas, the Spartan through whom it was negotiated. It was a dishonourable peace for Greece, as its effect was to facilitate Persian intervention in Greek affairs and make the king of Persia the arbiter of Greek disputes and differences. Meanwhile Athens was recovering herself ; the tables were soon turned on Sparta, and her maritime

@@@1 For topographical details we must refer the reader to the elabo­rate works of the German scholar Curtius on the Peloponnesus and works based on them. Mure’s Greece and Leake’s Morea should be consulted.