[Template:About](/wiki/Template:About" \o "Template:About) [Template:Pp-semi](/wiki/Template:Pp-semi) [Template:Pp-move-indef](/wiki/Template:Pp-move-indef) [Template:Coord](/wiki/Template:Coord) [Template:Infobox former country](/wiki/Template:Infobox_former_country) [Template:Special characters](/wiki/Template:Special_characters) [thumb|280px|Hollow Lacedaemon. Site of the Menelaion, the ancient shrine to Helen and Menelaus constructed in the Bronze Age city that stood on the hill of](/wiki/File:Menelaion.jpg) [Therapne](/wiki/Therapnes) on the left bank of the [Eurotas River](/wiki/Eurotas_(river)) overlooking the future site of Dorian Sparta. Across the valley the successive ridges of Mount [Taygetus](/wiki/Taygetus) are in evidence. **Sparta** ([Doric Greek](/wiki/Doric_Greek): [Template:Lang](/wiki/Template:Lang); [Attic Greek](/wiki/Attic_Greek): [Template:Lang](/wiki/Template:Lang)) was a prominent [city-state](/wiki/City-state) in [ancient Greece](/wiki/Ancient_Greece). In antiquity the city-state was known as **Lacedaemon** ([Template:IPAc-en](/wiki/Template:IPAc-en); [Template:Lang](/wiki/Template:Lang)), while the name Sparta referred to its main settlement on the banks of the [Eurotas River](/wiki/Eurotas_(river)) in [Laconia](/wiki/Laconia), in south-eastern [Peloponnese](/wiki/Peloponnese).[[1]](#cite_note-1) Around 650 BC, it rose to become the dominant military land-power in ancient Greece.

Given its military pre-eminence, Sparta was recognized as the overall leader of the combined Greek forces during the [Greco-Persian Wars](/wiki/Greco-Persian_Wars).[[2]](#cite_note-2) Between 431 and 404 BC, Sparta was the principal enemy of [Athens](/wiki/Classical_Athens) during the [Peloponnesian War](/wiki/Peloponnesian_War),[[3]](#cite_note-3) from which it emerged victorious, though at great cost of lives lost. Sparta's defeat by [Thebes](/wiki/Thebes,_Greece) in the [Battle of Leuctra](/wiki/Battle_of_Leuctra) in 371 BC ended Sparta's prominent role in Greece. However, it maintained its political independence until the [Roman conquest of Greece](/wiki/Roman_Greece) in [146 BC](/wiki/Battle_of_Corinth_(146_BC)). It then underwent a long period of decline, especially in the [Middle Ages](/wiki/Middle_Ages), when many Spartans moved to live in [Mystras](/wiki/Mystras). [Modern Sparta](/wiki/Sparti) is the capital of the Greek regional unit of [Laconia](/wiki/Laconia) and a center for the processing of goods such as citrus and olives.

Sparta was unique in [ancient Greece](/wiki/Ancient_Greece) for its social system and constitution, which completely focused on military training and excellence. Its inhabitants were classified as [Spartiates](/wiki/Spartiate) (Spartan citizens, who enjoyed full rights), [mothakes](/wiki/Mothax) (non-Spartan free men raised as Spartans), [perioikoi](/wiki/Perioeci) (freedmen), and [helots](/wiki/Helots) (state-owned serfs, enslaved non-Spartan local population). Spartiates underwent the rigorous [*agoge*](/wiki/Agoge) training and education regimen, and Spartan [phalanges](/wiki/Phalanx_formation) were widely considered to be among the best in battle. Spartan women enjoyed considerably more rights and equality to men than elsewhere in the classical world.

Sparta was the subject of fascination in its own day, as well as in the West following the revival of classical learning.[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) This love or admiration of Sparta is known as [Laconism or Laconophilia](/wiki/Laconophilia). At its peak around 500 BC the size of the city would have been some 20,000 – 35,000 free residents, plus numerous helots and perioikoi (“dwellers around”). At 40,000 – 50,000 it was one of the largest Greek cities;[[4]](#cite_note-4)[[5]](#cite_note-5)[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) being the equivalent of the written in the Greek alphabet, latter Greek, [Template:Lang](/wiki/Template:Lang), *Lakedaimonios* ([Latin](/wiki/Latin): *Lacedaemonius*).[[7]](#cite_note-7)<ref name=L&S-Lacedaemon>[Template:L&S](/wiki/Template:L&S)</ref>

[thumb|left|280px|Eurotas River](/wiki/File:Eurotas.JPG)

The ancient Greeks used one of three words to refer to the home location of the Spartans. The first refers primarily to the main cluster of settlements in the valley of the [Eurotas River](/wiki/Eurotas_River): Sparta.[[8]](#cite_note-8) The second word was Lacedaemon ([Template:Lang](/wiki/Template:Lang));[[9]](#cite_note-9) this was also used sometimes as an adjective and is the name commonly used in the works of [Homer](/wiki/Homer) and the Athenian historians [Herodotus](/wiki/Herodotus) and [Thucydides](/wiki/Thucydides). Herodotus seems to denote by it the [Mycenaean Greek](/wiki/Mycenaean_Greece) citadel at [Therapne](/wiki/Therapne), in contrast to the lower town of Sparta. It could be used synonymously with Sparta, but typically it was not. It denoted the terrain on which Sparta was situated.[[10]](#cite_note-10) In Homer it is typically combined with epithets of the countryside: wide, lovely, shining and most often hollow and broken (full of ravines).[[11]](#cite_note-11) The hollow suggests the Eurotas Valley. Sparta on the other hand is the country of lovely women, a people epithet.

The name of the population was often used for the state of Lacedaemon: the Lacedaemonians. This epithet utilized the plural of the adjective Lacedaemonius (Greek: [Template:Lang](/wiki/Template:Lang); Latin: *Lacedaemonii*, but also *Lacedaemones*). If the ancients wished to refer to the country more directly, instead of Lacedaemon, they could use a back-formation from the adjective: *Lacedaemonian country*. As most words for "country" were feminine, the adjective was in the feminine: *Lacedaemonia* ([Template:Lang](/wiki/Template:Lang), *Lakedaimonia*). Eventually, the adjective came to be used alone.

Lacedaemonia was not in general use during the classical period and before. It does occur in Greek as an equivalent of Laconia and Messenia during the Roman and early Byzantine periods, mostly in ethnographers and lexica glossing place names. For example, [Hesychius of Alexandria's](/wiki/Hesychius_of_Alexandria) *Lexicon* (5th century AD) defines Agiadae as a "place in Lacedaemonia" named after Agis.[[12]](#cite_note-12) The actual transition may be captured by [Isidore of Seville's](/wiki/Isidore_of_Seville) *Etymologiae* (7th century AD), an etymological dictionary. He relied heavily on [Orosius'](/wiki/Orosius) *Historiarum Adversum Paganos* (5th century AD) and [Eusebius of Caesarea's](/wiki/Eusebius_of_Caesarea) [*Chronicon*](/wiki/Chronicon_(Eusebius)) (early 5th century AD) as did Orosius. The latter defines Sparta to be *Lacedaemonia Civitas* but Isidore defines Lacedaemonia as founded by Lacedaemon, son of Semele, relying on Eusebius.[[13]](#cite_note-13) There is a rare use, perhaps the earliest of Lacedaemonia, in [Diodorus Siculus](/wiki/Diodorus_Siculus),[[14]](#cite_note-14) but probably with [Template:Lang](/wiki/Template:Lang) ("country") suppressed.

The immediate area around the town of Sparta, the plateau east of the Taygetos mountains, was generally referred as Laconice ([Template:Lang](/wiki/Template:Lang)).[[15]](#cite_note-15) This term was sometimes used to refer to all the regions under direct Spartan control, including [Messenia](/wiki/Messenia).

Lacedaemon is now the name of a [province](/wiki/Provinces_of_Greece) in the modern Greek [prefecture](/wiki/Prefectures_of_Greece) of [Laconia](/wiki/Laconia).

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## Geography[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=2)]

Sparta is located in the region of Laconia, in the south-eastern Peloponnese. Ancient Sparta was built on the banks of the Evrotas River, the main river of Laconia, which provided it with a source of fresh water. The valley of the Evrotas is a natural fortress, bounded to the west by [Mt. Taygetus](/wiki/Taygetus) (2407 m) and to the east by [Mt. Parnon](/wiki/Parnon) (1935 m). To the north, Laconia is separated from [Arcadia](/wiki/Arcadia) by hilly uplands reaching 1000 m in altitude. These natural defenses worked to Sparta's advantage and contributed to Sparta never having been sacked. Though landlocked, Sparta had a harbor, [Gytheio](/wiki/Gytheio), on the Laconian Gulf.

## Mythology[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=3)]

[Lacedaemon](/wiki/Lacedaemon_(mythology)) (Greek: [Template:Lang](/wiki/Template:Lang)) was a [mythical](/wiki/Greek_mythology) king of Laconia.<ref name=PausaniasIII.1.2>[Template:Harvnb](/wiki/Template:Harvnb).</ref> The son of [Zeus](/wiki/Zeus) by the nymph [Taygete](/wiki/Taygete), he married [Sparta](/wiki/Sparta_(mythology)), the daughter of [Eurotas](/wiki/Eurotas_(mythology)), by whom he became the father of [Amyclas](/wiki/King_Amyclas_of_Sparta), [Eurydice](/wiki/Eurydice_of_Argos), and Asine. He named the country after himself and the city after his wife.<ref name=PausaniasIII.1.2/> He was believed to have built the sanctuary of the [Charites](/wiki/Charites), which stood between Sparta and [Amyclae](/wiki/Amyclae), and to have given to those divinities the names of [Cleta](/wiki/Cleta) and Phaenna. A [shrine](/wiki/Heroon) was erected to him in the neighborhood of Therapne.

## Archaeology of the classical period[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=4)]

[thumb|The theater of ancient Sparta with](/wiki/File:Ancient_sparta_theater.jpg) [Mt. Taygetus](/wiki/Taygetus) in the background. [Thucydides](/wiki/Thucydides) wrote:

Suppose the city of Sparta to be deserted, and nothing left but the temples and the ground-plan, distant ages would be very unwilling to believe that the power of the Lacedaemonians was at all equal to their fame. Their city is not built continuously, and has no splendid temples or other edifices; it rather resembles a group of villages, like the ancient towns of Hellas, and would therefore make a poor show.[[16]](#cite_note-16)

Until the early 20th century, the chief ancient buildings at Sparta were the theatre, of which, however, little showed above ground except portions of the [retaining walls](/wiki/Retaining_wall); the so-called *Tomb of* [*Leonidas*](/wiki/Leonidas), a quadrangular building, perhaps a temple, constructed of immense blocks of stone and containing two chambers; the foundation of an ancient bridge over the [Eurotas](/wiki/Eurotas); the ruins of a circular structure; some remains of late Roman fortifications; several brick buildings and mosaic pavements.

The remaining archaeological wealth consisted of inscriptions, sculptures, and other objects collected in the local museum, founded by Stamatakis in 1872 and enlarged in 1907. Partial excavation of the round building was undertaken in 1892 and 1893 by the American School at Athens. The structure has been since found to be a semicircular retaining wall of Hellenic origin that was partly restored during the Roman period.

[thumb|left|](/wiki/File:Sparta_ruins.PNG)[Ruins](/wiki/Ruins) from the ancient site

In 1904, the British School at Athens began a thorough exploration of [Laconia](/wiki/Laconia), and in the following year excavations were made at Thalamae, Geronthrae, and Angelona near [Monemvasia](/wiki/Monemvasia). In 1906, excavations began in Sparta.

A small circus described by [Leake](/wiki/William_Martin_Leake) proved to be a theatre-like building constructed soon after AD 200 around the altar and in front of the temple of [Artemis Orthia](/wiki/Artemis_Orthia). Here musical and gymnastic contests took place as well as the famous flogging ordeal ([*diamastigosis*](/wiki/Sanctuary_of_Artemis_Orthia#Winged_Artemis#Diamastigosis)). The temple, which can be dated to the 2nd century BC, rests on the foundation of an older temple of the 6th century, and close beside it were found the remains of a yet earlier temple, dating from the 9th or even the 10th century. The [votive offerings](/wiki/Votive_offering) in clay, amber, bronze, ivory and lead found in great profusion within the precinct range, dating from the 9th to the 4th centuries BC, supply invaluable evidence for early Spartan art.

In 1907, the sanctuary of Athena "of the Brazen House" (*Chalkioikos*) was located on the acropolis immediately above the theatre, and though the actual temple is almost completely destroyed, the site has produced the longest extant archaic inscription of Laconia, numerous bronze nails and plates, and a considerable number of votive offerings. The Greek [city-wall](/wiki/City-wall), built in successive stages from the 4th to the 2nd century, was traced for a great part of its circuit, which measured 48 stades or nearly [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) (Polyb. 1X. 21). The late Roman wall enclosing the acropolis, part of which probably dates from the years following the Gothic raid of AD 262, was also investigated. Besides the actual buildings discovered, a number of points were situated and mapped in a general study of Spartan topography, based upon the description of [Pausanias](/wiki/Pausanias_(geographer)).

### Menelaion[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=5)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) The Menelaion is a shrine associated with Menelaus, located east of Sparta, by the river Eurotas, on the hill *Profitis Ilias* ([Coordinates](/wiki/Geographic_coordinate_system): [Template:Coord](/wiki/Template:Coord)). Built early 8th century BC it was believed by Spartans to be the home of Menelaus. In 1970 the British School in Athens started excavations in an attempt to locate Mycenaean remains in the area around Menelaion. Among other findings, they uncovered the remains of two Mycenaean mansions and found the first offerings dedicated to Helen and Menelaus. These mansions were destroyed, by an earthquake and by fire, and archaeologists consider as the possible palace of Menelaus himself.[[17]](#cite_note-17) Excavations made from the early 1990s to the present suggest that the area around Menelaion in the southern part of the Eurotas valley seems to have been the center of Mycenaean Laconia.[[18]](#cite_note-18) The Mycenaean settlement was roughly triangular in shape, with its apex pointed towards the north. Its area was approximately equal to that of the "newer" Sparta, but denudation has wreaked havoc with its buildings and nothing is left save ruined foundations and broken potsherds.

## History[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=6)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main)

### Prehistory, "Dark Age" and Archaic period[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=7)]

The prehistory of Sparta is difficult to reconstruct because the literary evidence is far removed in time from the events it describes and is also distorted by oral tradition.[[19]](#cite_note-19) However, the earliest certain evidence of human settlement in the region of Sparta consists of [pottery](/wiki/Pottery) dating from the Middle [Neolithic](/wiki/Neolithic) period, found in the vicinity of Kouphovouno some two kilometres ([Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert)) south-southwest of Sparta.[[20]](#cite_note-20) These are the earliest traces of the original [Mycenaean](/wiki/Mycenaean_Greece) Spartan civilisation, as represented in Homer's [*Iliad*](/wiki/Iliad). [Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)

This civilization seems to have fallen into decline by the late [Bronze Age](/wiki/Bronze_Age), when, according to Herodotus, Macedonian tribes from the north marched into Peloponnese, where they were called [Dorians](/wiki/Dorians) and subjugating the local tribes, settled there.[[19]](#cite_note-19) The Dorians seem to have set about expanding the frontiers of Spartan territory almost before they had established their own state.[[21]](#cite_note-21) They fought against the [Argive](/wiki/Argive) Dorians to the east and southeast, and also the [Arcadian](/wiki/Arcadia) Achaeans to the northwest. The evidence suggests that Sparta, relatively inaccessible because of the topography of the Taygetan plain, was secure from early on: it was never fortified.[[21]](#cite_note-21) [thumb|right|150px|](/wiki/File:Lycurgus.jpg)[Lycurgus](/wiki/Lycurgus_of_Sparta)

Nothing distinctive in the archaeology of the Eurotas River Valley identifies the Dorians or the Dorian Spartan state. The prehistory of the Neolithic, the Bronze Age and the Dark Age (the Early Iron Age) at this moment must be treated apart from the stream of Dorian Spartan history.

The legendary period of Spartan history is believed to fall into the Dark Age. It treats the mythic heroes such as the Heraclids and the Perseids, offering a view of the occupation of the Peloponnesus that contains both fantastic and possibly historical elements. The subsequent proto-historic period, combining both legend and historical fragments, offers the first credible history.

Between the 8th and 7th centuries BC the Spartans experienced a period of lawlessness and civil strife, later attested by both Herodotus and Thucydides.[[22]](#cite_note-22) As a result, they carried out a series of political and social reforms of their own society which they later attributed to a semi-mythical lawgiver, [Lycurgus](/wiki/Lycurgus_of_Sparta).[[23]](#cite_note-23) These reforms mark the beginning of the history of Classical Sparta.

### Classical Sparta[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=8)]

In the [Second Messenian War](/wiki/Second_Messenian_War), Sparta established itself as a local power in Peloponnesus and the rest of Greece. During the following centuries, Sparta's reputation as a land-fighting force was unequalled.[[24]](#cite_note-24) In 480 BC a small force of Spartans, Thespians, and Thebans led by King [Leonidas](/wiki/Leonidas_I) (approximately 300 were full Spartiates, 700 were Thespians, and 400 were Thebans although these numbers do not reflect casualties incurred prior to the final battle), made a legendary [last stand](/wiki/Last_stand) at the [Battle of Thermopylae](/wiki/Battle_of_Thermopylae) against the massive Persian army, inflicting very high casualties on the Persian forces before finally being encircled.[[25]](#cite_note-25) The superior weaponry, strategy, and [bronze](/wiki/Bronze) armour of the Greek [hoplites](/wiki/Hoplite) and their [phalanx](/wiki/Phalanx_formation) again proved their worth one year later when Sparta assembled at full strength and led a Greek alliance against the Persians at the [battle of Plataea](/wiki/Battle_of_Plataea).

[thumb|left|180px|](/wiki/File:Leonidas_I_of_Sparta.jpg)[Leonidas I](/wiki/Leonidas_I) of Sparta

The decisive Greek victory at Plataea put an end to the [Greco-Persian War](/wiki/Greco-Persian_War) along with Persian ambition of expanding into Europe. Even though this war was won by a pan-Greek army, credit was given to Sparta, who besides being the protagonist at Thermopylae and Plataea, had been the de facto leader of the entire Greek expedition.[[26]](#cite_note-26) In later Classical times, Sparta along with [Athens](/wiki/Athens), [Thebes](/wiki/Thebes,_Greece), and [Persia](/wiki/Persia) had been the main powers fighting for supremacy against each other. As a result of the [Peloponnesian War](/wiki/Peloponnesian_War), Sparta, a traditionally continental culture, became a naval power. At the peak of its power Sparta subdued many of the key Greek states and even managed to overpower the elite Athenian navy. By the end of the 5th century BC it stood out as a state which had defeated the [Athenian Empire](/wiki/Athenian_Empire) and had invaded the Persian provinces in Anatolia, a period which marks the [Spartan Hegemony](/wiki/Spartan_hegemony).

During the [Corinthian War](/wiki/Corinthian_War) Sparta faced a coalition of the leading Greek states: [Thebes](/wiki/Thebes,_Greece), [Athens](/wiki/Athens), [Corinth](/wiki/Ancient_Corinth), and [Argos](/wiki/Argos). The alliance was initially backed by Persia, whose lands in [Anatolia](/wiki/Anatolia) had been invaded by Sparta and which feared further Spartan expansion into Asia.[[27]](#cite_note-27) Sparta achieved a series of land victories, but many of her ships were destroyed at the [battle of Cnidus](/wiki/Battle_of_Cnidus) by a Greek-Phoenician mercenary fleet that Persia had provided to Athens. The event severely damaged Sparta's naval power but did not end its aspirations of invading further into Persia, until [Conon](/wiki/Conon) the Athenian ravaged the Spartan coastline and provoked the old Spartan fear of a [helot](/wiki/Helot) revolt.<ref name=boardman>"The Oxford Illustrated History of Greece and the Hellenistic World" p. 141, John Boardman, Jasper Griffin, Oswyn Murray</ref>

After a few more years of fighting, in 387 BC the [Peace of Antalcidas](/wiki/Peace_of_Antalcidas) was established, according to which all Greek cities of [Ionia](/wiki/Ionia) would return to Persian control, and Persia's Asian border would be free of the Spartan threat.<ref name=boardman/> The effects of the war were to reaffirm Persia's ability to interfere successfully in Greek politics and to affirm Sparta's weakened hegemonic position in the Greek political system.[[28]](#cite_note-28) Sparta entered its long-term decline after a severe military defeat to [Epaminondas](/wiki/Epaminondas) of Thebes at the [Battle of Leuctra](/wiki/Battle_of_Leuctra). This was the first time that a [Spartan army](/wiki/Spartan_Army) lost a land battle at full strength.

As Spartan citizenship was inherited by blood, Sparta now increasingly faced a helot population that vastly outnumbered its citizens. The alarming decline of Spartan citizens was commented on by [Aristotle](/wiki/Aristotle).

### Hellenistic and Roman Sparta[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=9)]

Sparta never fully recovered from the losses that the Spartans suffered at Leuctra in 371 BC and the subsequent [helot revolts](/wiki/Helots#Helot_revolts). Nonetheless, it was able to continue as a regional power for over two centuries. Neither [Philip II](/wiki/Philip_II_of_Macedon) nor his son [Alexander the Great](/wiki/Alexander_the_Great) attempted to conquer Sparta itself.

Even during its decline, Sparta never forgot its claim to be the "defender of Hellenism" and its [Laconic wit](/wiki/Laconic_phrase). An anecdote has it that when Philip II sent a message to Sparta saying "If I enter Laconia, I will raze Sparta", the Spartans responded with the single, terse reply: [Template:Lang](/wiki/Template:Lang), "if".[[29]](#cite_note-29)[[30]](#cite_note-30)[[31]](#cite_note-31) When Philip created the [league of the Greeks](/wiki/League_of_Corinth) on the pretext of unifying Greece against Persia, the Spartans chose not to join, since they had no interest in joining a pan-Greek expedition unless it were under Spartan leadership. Thus, upon the conquest of Persia, Alexander the Great sent to Athens 300 suits of Persian armour with the following inscription: *Alexander, son of Philip, and all the Greeks* ***except the Spartans****, give these offerings taken from the foreigners who live in Asia* [emphasis added].

During Alexander's campaigns in the east, the Spartan king, [Agis III](/wiki/Agis_III) sent a force to Crete in 333 BC with the aim of securing the island for Sparta.[[32]](#cite_note-32) Agis next took command of allied Greek forces against Macedon, gaining early successes, before laying siege to [Megalopolis](/wiki/Megalopolis,_Greece) in 331 BC. A large Macedonian army under general [Antipater](/wiki/Antipater) marched to its relief and defeated the Spartan-led force in a pitched battle.[[33]](#cite_note-33) More than 5,300 of the Spartans and their allies were killed in battle, and 3,500 of Antipater's troops.[[34]](#cite_note-34) Agis, now wounded and unable to stand, ordered his men to leave him behind to face the advancing Macedonian army so that he could buy them time to retreat. On his knees, the Spartan king slew several enemy soldiers before being finally killed by a javelin.[[35]](#cite_note-35) Alexander was merciful, and he only forced the Spartans to join the League of Corinth, which they had previously refused to join.[[36]](#cite_note-36) During the [Punic Wars](/wiki/Punic_Wars) Sparta was an ally of the [Roman Republic](/wiki/Roman_Republic). Spartan political independence was put to an end when it was eventually forced into the [Achaean League](/wiki/Achaean_League) after its defeat in the decisive [Laconian War](/wiki/War_against_Nabis) by a coalition of other Greek city-states and Rome and the resultant overthrow of its final king [Nabis](/wiki/Nabis). In 146 BC Greece was conquered by the Roman general [Lucius Mummius](/wiki/Lucius_Mummius_Achaicus). Following the Roman conquest, the Spartans continued their way of life, and the city became a tourist attraction for the Roman elite who came to observe exotic Spartan customs.[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn)

### Medieval and modern Sparta[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=10)]

According to Byzantine sources, [some parts](/wiki/Maniots) of the Laconian region remained [pagan](/wiki/Paganism) until well into the 10th century AD. [Doric](/wiki/Doric_Greek)-speaking populations survive today in [Tsakonia](/wiki/Tsakonia). In the Middle Ages, the political and cultural center of Laconia shifted to the nearby settlement of [Mystras](/wiki/Mystras), and Sparta fell further in even local importance. Modern [Sparti](/wiki/Sparti_(municipality)) was re-founded in 1834, by a decree of King [Otto of Greece](/wiki/Otto_of_Greece).

## Structure of Classical Spartan society[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=11)]

### Constitution[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=12)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) [thumb|right|200px|Structure of the Spartan Constitution](/wiki/File:SpartaGreatRhetra.png) Sparta was an [oligarchy](/wiki/Oligarchy). The state was ruled by two [hereditary kings](/wiki/Diarchy) of the [Agiad and Eurypontid](/wiki/List_of_Kings_of_Sparta) [families](/wiki/Family),[[37]](#cite_note-37) both supposedly descendants of [Heracles](/wiki/Heracles) and equal in authority, so that one could not act against the power and political enactments of his colleague.

The duties of the kings were primarily religious, judicial, and military. They were the chief priests of the state and also maintained communication with the Delphian sanctuary, which always exercised great authority in Spartan politics. In the time of Herodotus, about 450 BC, their judicial functions had been restricted to cases dealing with heiresses, adoptions and the public roads. [Aristotle](/wiki/Aristotle) describes the kingship at Sparta as "a kind of unlimited and perpetual generalship" (Pol. iii. I285a),[[38]](#cite_note-38) while [Isocrates](/wiki/Isocrates) refers to the Spartans as "subject to an [oligarchy](/wiki/Oligarchy) at home, to a kingship on campaign" (iii. 24).[[39]](#cite_note-39) Civil and criminal cases were decided by a group of officials known as the [ephors](/wiki/Ephors), as well as a council of [elders](/wiki/Elder_(administrative_title)) known as the [gerousia](/wiki/Gerousia). The gerousia consisted of 28 elders over the age of 60, elected for life and usually part of the royal households, and the two kings.[[40]](#cite_note-40) High state policy decisions were discussed by this council who could then propose action alternatives to the *damos*, the collective body of Spartan citizenry, who would [select one of the alternatives by voting](/wiki/Great_Rhetra).[[41]](#cite_note-41)[[42]](#cite_note-42) The royal prerogatives were curtailed over time. Dating from the period of the Persian wars, the king lost the right to [declare war](/wiki/Declaration_of_war) and was accompanied in the field by two ephors. He was supplanted also by the ephors in the control of foreign policy. Over time, the kings became mere figureheads except in their capacity as generals. Real power was transferred to the ephors and to the gerousia.

The origins of the powers exercised by the assembly of the citizens called the [Apella](/wiki/Apella) are virtually unknown because of the lack of historical documentation and Spartan state secrecy.

### Citizenship[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=13)]

Not all inhabitants of the Spartan state were considered to be citizens. Only those who had undertaken the Spartan education process known as the [agoge](/wiki/Agoge) were eligible. However, usually the only people eligible to receive the agoge were [Spartiates](/wiki/Spartiates), or people who could trace their ancestry to the original inhabitants of the city.

There were two exceptions. [Trophimoi](/wiki/Trophimoi) or "foster sons" were foreign students invited to study. The Athenian general [Xenophon](/wiki/Xenophon), for example, sent his two sons to Sparta as trophimoi. The other exception was that the son of a helot could be enrolled as a syntrophos[[43]](#cite_note-43) if a Spartiate formally adopted him and paid his way. If a syntrophos did exceptionally well in training, he might be sponsored to become a Spartiate.[[44]](#cite_note-44) Others in the state were the [perioikoi](/wiki/Perioeci), who were free inhabitants of Spartan territory but were non-citizens, and the [helots](/wiki/Helots),[[45]](#cite_note-45) the state-owned [serfs](/wiki/Serfs). Descendants of non-Spartan citizens were not able to follow the agoge and Spartans who could not afford to pay the expenses of the agoge could lose their citizenship. These laws meant that Sparta could not readily replace citizens lost in battle or otherwise and eventually proved near fatal to the continuance of the state as the number of citizens became greatly outnumbered by the non-citizens and, even more dangerously, the helots.

### Helots and perioikoi[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=14)]

#### Helots[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=15)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) The Spartans were a minority of the Lakonian population. The largest class of inhabitants were the helots (in [Classical Greek](/wiki/Ancient_Greek_language) [Template:Lang](/wiki/Template:Lang) / *Heílôtes*).[[46]](#cite_note-46)[[47]](#cite_note-47) The helots were originally free Greeks from the areas of [Messenia](/wiki/Messenia) and [Lakonia](/wiki/Lakonia) whom the Spartans had defeated in battle and subsequently enslaved. In contrast to populations conquered by other Greek cities (e.g. the Athenian treatment of Melos), the male population was not exterminated and the women and children turned into chattel slaves. Instead, the helots were given a subordinate position in society more comparable to serfs in medieval Europe than chattel slaves in the rest of Greece.

Helots did not have voting rights, although compared to non-Greek [chattel slaves](/wiki/Chattel_slaves) in other parts of Greece they were relatively privileged. The Spartan poet [Tyrtaios](/wiki/Tyrtaeus) refers to Helots being allowed to marry and retaining 50% of the fruits of their labor.[[48]](#cite_note-48) They also seem to have been allowed to practice religious rites and, according to Thucydides, own a limited amount of personal property.[[49]](#cite_note-49)Some 6,000 helots accumulated enough wealth to buy their freedom, for example, in 227 BC.

In other Greek city-states, free citizens were part-time soldiers who, when not at war, carried on other trades. Since Spartan men were full-time soldiers, they were not available to carry out manual labour.[[50]](#cite_note-50) The helots were used as unskilled [serfs](/wiki/Serf), tilling Spartan land. Helot women were often used as [wet nurses](/wiki/Wet_nurse). Helots also travelled with the Spartan army as non-combatant serfs. At the last stand of the [Battle of Thermopylae](/wiki/Battle_of_Thermopylae), the Greek dead included not just the legendary three hundred Spartan soldiers but also several hundred [Thespian](/wiki/Thespiae) and [Theban](/wiki/Thebes,_Greece) troops and a number of helots.[[51]](#cite_note-51) Relations between the helots and their Spartan masters were sometimes strained. There was at least one helot revolt (ca. 465–460 BC), and Thucydides remarked that "Spartan policy is always mainly governed by the necessity of taking precautions against the helots."[[52]](#cite_note-52)[[53]](#cite_note-53) On the other hand, the Spartans trusted their helots enough in 479 BC to take a force of 35,000 with them to Plataea, something they could not have risked if they feared the helots would attack them or run away. Slave revolts occurred elsewhere in the Greek world, and in 413 BC 20,000 Athenian slaves ran away to join the Spartan forces occupying Attica.[[54]](#cite_note-54) What made Sparta's relations with her slave population unique was that the helots, precisely because they enjoyed privileges such as family and property, retained their identity as a conquered people (the Messenians) and also had effective kinship groups that could be used to organize rebellion.

As the Spartiate population declined and the helot population continued to grow, the imbalance of power caused increasing tension. According to Myron of Priene[[55]](#cite_note-55) of the middle 3rd century BC:

[Template:Quote](/wiki/Template:Quote)

Plutarch also states that Spartans treated the Helots "harshly and cruelly": they compelled them to drink pure wine (which was considered dangerous – [wine](/wiki/Diet_of_Ancient_Greece#Wine) usually being cut with water) "*...and to lead them in that condition into their public halls, that the children might see what a sight a drunken man is; they made them to dance low dances, and sing ridiculous songs...*" during [syssitia](/wiki/Syssitia) (obligatory banquets).[[56]](#cite_note-56) Each year when the Ephors took office they ritually declared war on the helots, thereby allowing Spartans to kill them without the risk of ritual pollution.[[57]](#cite_note-57) This seems to have been done by *kryptes* (sing. κρύπτης), graduates of the *Agoge* who took part in the mysterious institution known as the [*Krypteia*](/wiki/Crypteia).[[58]](#cite_note-58) Thucydides states:

"The helots were invited by a proclamation to pick out those of their number who claimed to have most distinguished themselves against the enemy, in order that they might receive their freedom; the object being to test them, as it was thought that the first to claim their freedom would be the most high spirited and the most apt to rebel. As many as two thousand were selected accordingly, who crowned themselves and went round the temples, rejoicing in their new freedom. The Spartans, however, soon afterwards did away with them, and no one ever knew how each of them perished."[[59]](#cite_note-59)[[60]](#cite_note-60)

#### Perioikoi[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=16)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) The Perioikoi came from similar origins as the helots but occupied a significantly different position in Spartan society. Although they did not enjoy full citizen-rights, they were free and not subjected to the same restrictions as the helots. The exact nature of their subjection to the Spartans is not clear, but they seem to have served partly as a kind of military reserve, partly as skilled craftsmen and partly as agents of foreign trade.[[61]](#cite_note-61) Perioikoic hoplites served increasingly with the Spartan army, explicitly at the [Battle of Plataea](/wiki/Battle_of_Plataea), and although they may also have fulfilled functions such as the manufacture and repair of armour and weapons,[[62]](#cite_note-62) they were increasingly integrated into the combat units of the Spartan army as the Spartiate population declined.[[63]](#cite_note-63)

### Economy[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=17)]

[thumb|](/wiki/File:Rider_BM_B1.jpg)[Name vase](/wiki/Name_vase) of the Spartan artist known as the [Rider Painter](/wiki/Rider_Painter) ([black-figured](/wiki/Black-figure) [kylix](/wiki/Kylix_(cup)), ca. 550–530 BC) Spartan citizens were debarred by law from trade or manufacture, which consequently rested in the hands of the Perioikoi. The Periokoi monopoly on trade and manufacturing in one of the richest territories of Greece explains in large part the loyalty of the perioikoi to the Spartan state. Lacedaemon was rich in natural resources, fertile and blessed with a number of good natural harbors. The periokoi could exploit these resources for their own enrichment, and did.[[64]](#cite_note-64) Spartiates, on the other hand, were forbidden (in theory) from engaging in menial labor or trade, although there is evidence of Spartan sculptors,[[65]](#cite_note-65) and Spartans were certainly poets, magistrates, ambassadors, and governors as well as soldiers. Allegedly, Spartans were prohibited from possessing gold and silver coins, and according to legend Spartan currency consisted of iron bars to discourage hoarding.[[66]](#cite_note-66)[[67]](#cite_note-67) In fact, archeology has not produced evidence of this currency, and it is more likely that Sparta simply used currencies minted elsewhere.

The conspicuous display of wealth appears to have been discouraged, although this did not preclude the production of very fine, highly decorated bronze, ivory and wooden works of art and the production of jewellery. Archeology has produced many examples of all these objects, some of which are exquisite.[[68]](#cite_note-68) Allegedly in connection with the Lycurgan Reforms (e.g. in the mid-8th Century BC), property had been divided into 9,000 equal portions as part of a massive land reform. Each citizen received one estate, a kleros, and thereafter was expected to derive his wealth from it.[[69]](#cite_note-69) The land itself was worked by helots, who retained half the yield. From the other half, the Spartiate was expected to pay his mess (syssitia) fees, and the agoge fees for his children. However, we know nothing about whether land could be bought and sold, whether it could be inherited, if so by what system (primogeniture or equally divided among heirs), whether daughters received dowries and much more.[[70]](#cite_note-70) What is clear is that from early on there were marked differences of wealth within the state, and these became even more serious after the law of [Epitadeus](/wiki/Epitadeus), passed at some time after the [Peloponnesian War](/wiki/Peloponnesian_War), removed the legal prohibition of the gift or bequest of land.[[71]](#cite_note-71) By the mid-5th century, land had become concentrated in the hands of a tiny elite, and the notion of all Spartan citizens being "equals" had become a farce. By Aristotle's day (384–322 BC) citizenship had been reduced from 9,000 to less than 1,000, and then further decreased to 700 at the accession of [Agis IV](/wiki/Agis_IV) in 244 BC. Attempts were made to remedy this situation by creating new laws. Certain penalties were imposed upon those who remained unmarried or who married too late in life. These laws, however, came too late and were ineffective in reversing the trend.

## Life in Classical Sparta[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=18)]

### Birth and death[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=19)]

Sparta was above all a militarist state, and emphasis on military fitness began virtually at birth. Shortly after birth, a mother would bathe her child in wine to see whether the child was strong. If the child survived it was brought before the Gerousia by the child's father. The Gerousia then decided whether it was to be reared or not. It is commonly stated that if they considered it "puny and deformed", the baby was thrown into a chasm on [Mount Taygetos](/wiki/Taygetus) known euphemistically as the *Apothetae* (Gr., *ἀποθέται*, "Deposits").[[72]](#cite_note-72)[[73]](#cite_note-73) This was, in effect, a primitive form of [eugenics](/wiki/Eugenics).[[72]](#cite_note-72) Sparta is often portrayed as being unique in this matter; however, there is considerable evidence that the [killing of unwanted children](/wiki/Infanticide#Greece_and_Rome) was practiced in other Greek regions, including Athens.[[74]](#cite_note-74) There is controversy about the matter in Sparta, since excavations in the chasm only uncovered adult remains, likely belonging to criminals.[[75]](#cite_note-75) When Spartans died, marked headstones would only be granted to soldiers who died in combat during a victorious campaign or women who died either in service of a divine office or in childbirth.[[76]](#cite_note-76)

### Education[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=20)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) [thumb|upright|Bronze appliqué of Spartan manufacture, possibly depicting](/wiki/File:Spartan_swordman.jpg) [Orestes](/wiki/Orestes), 550-525 BC ([Getty Villa](/wiki/Getty_Villa)) When male Spartans began military training at age seven, they would enter the *Agoge* system. The *Agoge* was designed to encourage discipline and physical toughness and to emphasise the importance of the Spartan state. Boys lived in communal messes and, according to Xenophon, whose sons attended the agoge, the boys were fed "just the right amount for them never to become sluggish through being too full, while also giving them a taste of what it is not to have enough."[[77]](#cite_note-77) Besides physical and weapons training, boys studied reading, writing, music and dancing. Special punishments were imposed if boys failed to answer questions sufficiently 'laconically' (i.e. briefly and wittily).[[78]](#cite_note-78) There is some evidence that in late-Classical and Hellenistic Sparta boys were expected to take an older male mentor, usually an unmarried young man. However, there is no evidence of this in archaic Sparta. According to some sources, the older man was expected to function as a kind of substitute father and role model to his junior partner; however, others believe it was reasonably certain that they had sexual relations (the exact nature of [Spartan pederasty](/wiki/Pederasty_in_ancient_Greece#Sparta) is not entirely clear).[[79]](#cite_note-79) It is notable, however, that the only contemporary source with direct experience of the agoge, Xenophon, explicitly denies the sexual nature of the relationship.[[77]](#cite_note-77) Post 465 BC, some Spartan youth apparently became members of an irregular unit known as the [*Krypteia*](/wiki/Krypteia). The immediate objective of this unit was to seek out and kill vulnerable helot Laconians as part of the larger program of terrorising and intimidating the helot population.[[80]](#cite_note-80) Less information is available about the education of Spartan girls, but they seem to have gone through a fairly extensive formal educational cycle, broadly similar to that of the boys but with less emphasis on military training. In this respect, classical Sparta was unique in ancient Greece. In no other city-state did women receive any kind of formal education.[[81]](#cite_note-81)

### Military life[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=21)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) [thumb|](/wiki/File:Helmed_Hoplite_Sparta.JPG)[Marble](/wiki/Marble) statue of a helmed [hoplite](/wiki/Hoplite) (5th century BC), [Archaeological Museum of Sparta](/wiki/Archaeological_Museum_of_Sparta), Greece At age 20, the Spartan citizen began his membership in one of the [*syssitia*](/wiki/Syssitia) (dining messes or clubs), composed of about fifteen members each, of which every citizen was required to be a member. Here each group learned how to bond and rely on one another. The Spartans were not eligible for election for public office until the age of 30. Only native Spartans were considered full citizens and were obliged to undergo the training as prescribed by law, as well as participate in and contribute financially to one of the *syssitia*.[[82]](#cite_note-82) Sparta is thought to be the first city to practice athletic nudity, and some scholars claim that it was also the first to formalize pederasty.[[83]](#cite_note-83) According to these sources, the Spartans believed that the love of an older, accomplished aristocrat for an adolescent was essential to his formation as a free citizen. The [*agoge*](/wiki/Agoge), the education of the ruling class, was, they claim, founded on pederastic relationships required of each citizen,[[84]](#cite_note-84) with the lover responsible for the boy's training.

However, other scholars question this interpretation. Xenophon explicitly denies it,[[77]](#cite_note-77) but not Plutarch.[[85]](#cite_note-85) Spartan men remained in the active reserve until age 60. Men were encouraged to marry at age 20 but could not live with their families until they left their active military service at age 30. They called themselves "*homoioi*" (equals), pointing to their common lifestyle and the discipline of the [phalanx](/wiki/Phalanx_formation), which demanded that no soldier be superior to his comrades.<ref name=cowley>Readers Companion Military Hist p. 438—Cowley</ref> Insofar as [hoplite](/wiki/Hoplite) warfare could be perfected, the Spartans did so.[[86]](#cite_note-86) Thucydides reports that when a Spartan man went to war, his wife (or another woman of some significance) would customarily present him with his [hoplon](/wiki/Hoplon) (shield) and say: "With this, or upon this" (Ἢ τὰν ἢ ἐπὶ τᾶς, *Èi tàn èi èpì tàs*), meaning that true Spartans could only return to Sparta either victorious (with their shield in hand) or dead (carried upon it).[[87]](#cite_note-87) Unfortunately, poignant as this image may be, it is almost certainly propaganda. Spartans buried their battle dead on or near the battle field; corpses were not brought back on their hoplons.[[88]](#cite_note-88) Nevertheless, it is fair to say that it was less of a disgrace for a soldier to lose his helmet, breastplate or greaves than his hoplon, since the former were designed to protect one man, whereas the hoplon also protected the man on his left. Thus the shield was symbolic of the individual soldier's subordination to his unit, his integral part in its success, and his solemn responsibility to his comrades in arms – messmates and friends, often close blood relations.

According to Aristotle, the Spartan military culture was actually short-sighted and ineffective. He observed:

It is the standards of civilized men not of beasts that must be kept in mind, for it is good men not beasts who are capable of real courage. Those like the Spartans who concentrate on the one and ignore the other in their education turn men into machines and in devoting themselves to one single aspect of city's life, end up making them inferior even in that.[[89]](#cite_note-89)

Aristotle, of course, was a harsh critic of the Spartan constitution and way of life. There is considerable evidence that the Spartans, certainly in the archaic period, were not educated as one-sidedly as Aristotle asserts. In fact, the Spartans were also rigorously trained in logic and philosophy.[[90]](#cite_note-90) One of the most persistent myths about Sparta that has no basis in fact is the notion that Spartan mothers were without feelings toward their off-spring and helped enforce a militaristic lifestyle on their sons and husbands.[[91]](#cite_note-91)[[92]](#cite_note-92) The myth can be traced back to Plutarch, who includes no less than 17 "sayings" of "Spartan women," all of which paraphrase or elaborate on the theme that Spartan mothers rejected their own offspring if they showed any kind of cowardice. In some of these sayings, mothers revile their sons in insulting language merely for surviving a battle. These sayings purporting to be from Spartan women were far more likely to be of Athenian origin and designed to portray Spartan women as unnatural and so undeserving of pity.[[88]](#cite_note-88)

### Marriage[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=22)]

Plutarch reports the peculiar customs associated with the Spartan wedding night:

The custom was to capture women for marriage(...) The so-called 'bridesmaid' took charge of the captured girl. She first shaved her head to the scalp, then dressed her in a man's cloak and sandals, and laid her down alone on a mattress in the dark. The bridegroom – who was not drunk and thus not impotent, but was sober as always – first had dinner in the messes, then would slip in, undo her belt, lift her and carry her to the bed.[[93]](#cite_note-93)

The husband continued to visit his wife in secret for some time after the marriage. These customs, unique to the Spartans, have been interpreted in various ways. One of them decidedly supports the need to disguise the bride as a man in order to help the bridegroom consummate the marriage, so unaccustomed were men to women's looks at the time of their first intercourse. The "abduction" may have served to ward off the [evil eye](/wiki/Evil_eye), and the cutting of the wife's hair was perhaps part of a rite of passage that signaled her entrance into a new life.[[94]](#cite_note-94)

## Role of women[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=23)]

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### Political, social, and economic equality[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=24)]

Spartan women, of the citizenry class, enjoyed a status, power, and respect that was unknown in the rest of the classical world. The higher status of females in Spartan society started at birth; unlike Athens, Spartan girls were fed the same food as their brothers.[[95]](#cite_note-95) Nor were they confined to their father's house and prevented from exercising or getting fresh air as in Athens, but exercised and even competed in sports.[[95]](#cite_note-95) Most important, rather than being married off at the age of 12 or 13, Spartan law forbade the marriage of a girl until she was in her late teens or early 20s. The reasons for delaying marriage were to ensure the birth of healthy children, but the effect was to spare Spartan women the hazards and lasting health damage associated with pregnancy among adolescents. Spartan women, better fed from childhood and fit from exercise, stood a far better chance of reaching old age than their sisters in other Greek cities, where the median age for death was 34.6 years or roughly 10 years below that of men.[[96]](#cite_note-96) Unlike Athenian women who wore heavy, concealing clothes and were rarely seen outside the house, Spartan women wore dresses (peplos) slit up the side to allow freer movement and moved freely about the city, either walking or driving chariots. Girls as well as boys exercised, possibly in the nude, and young women as well as young men may have participated in the [*Gymnopaedia*](/wiki/Gymnopaedia) ("Festival of Nude Youths").[[97]](#cite_note-97)[[98]](#cite_note-98) Another practice that was mentioned by many visitors to Sparta was the practice of “wife-sharing”. In accordance with the Spartan belief that breeding should be between the most physically fit parents, many older men allowed younger, more fit men, to impregnate their wives. Other unmarried or childless men might even request another man’s wife to bear his children if she had previously been a strong child bearer.[[99]](#cite_note-99) For this reason many considered Spartan women [polygamous](/wiki/Polygamy) or [polyandrous](/wiki/Polyandry).[[100]](#cite_note-100) This practice was encouraged in order that women bear as many strong-bodied children as they could. The Spartan population was hard to maintain due to the constant absence and loss of the men in battle and the intense physical inspection of newborns.[[101]](#cite_note-101) Spartan women were also literate and numerate, a rarity in the ancient world. Furthermore, as a result of their education and the fact that they moved freely in society engaging with their fellow (male) citizens, they were notorious for speaking their minds even in public.[[102]](#cite_note-102) Most importantly, Spartan women had economic power because they controlled their own properties, and those of their husbands. It is estimated that in later Classical Sparta, when the male population was in serious decline, women were the sole owners of at least 35% of all land and property in Sparta.[[103]](#cite_note-103) The laws regarding a divorce were the same for both men and women. Unlike women in Athens, if a Spartan woman became the heiress of her father because she had no living brothers to inherit (an [epikleros](/wiki/Epikleros)), the woman was not required to divorce her current spouse in order to marry her nearest paternal relative.<ref name=Pomeroy1995>Pomeroy, Sarah B. *Goddess, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*. New York: Schocken Books, 1995 p. 60-62</ref>

Spartan women acquired so much wealth that in [Aristotle](/wiki/Aristotle)’s analysis of the laws and history of Sparta he attributed its precipitous fall (which happened during his lifetime) from being the master of Greece to a second rate power in less than 50 years to the fact that Sparta had become a [gynecocracy](/wiki/Wikt:gynecocracy) whose intemperate women loved luxury. These tendencies became worse after the huge influx of wealth following the Spartan victory of the Peloponnesian War, leading to the eventual downfall of Sparta.[[104]](#cite_note-104)

### Historic women[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=25)]

Many women played a significant role in the [history of Sparta](/wiki/History_of_Sparta).[[105]](#cite_note-105) [Queen Gorgo](/wiki/Gorgo,_Queen_of_Sparta), heiress to the throne and the wife of [Leonidas I](/wiki/Leonidas_I), was an influential and well-documented figure. Herodotus records that as a small girl she advised her father [Cleomenes](/wiki/Cleomenes_I) to resist a bribe. She was later said to be responsible for decoding a warning that the Persian forces were about to invade Greece; after Spartan generals could not decode a wooden tablet covered in wax, she ordered them to clear the wax, revealing the warning.[[106]](#cite_note-106) Plutarch's [*Moralia*](/wiki/Moralia) contains a collection of "Sayings of Spartan Women", including a laconic quip attributed to Gorgo: when asked by a woman from [Attica](/wiki/Attica) why Spartan women were the only women in the world who could rule men, she replied "Because we are the only women who are mothers of men".[[107]](#cite_note-107)

## Laconophilia[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=26)]

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Laconophilia is love or admiration of Sparta and of the Spartan culture or constitution. Sparta was subject of considerable admiration in its day, even in its rival, [Athens](/wiki/Ancient_Athens). In ancient times "Many of the noblest and best of the Athenians always considered the Spartan state nearly as an ideal theory realised in practice."[[108]](#cite_note-108) Many Greek philosophers, especially Platonists, would often describe Sparta as an ideal state, strong, brave, and free from the corruptions of commerce and money.

[thumb|](/wiki/File:Young_Spartans_National_Gallery_NG3860.jpg)[*Young Spartans Exercising*](/wiki/Young_Spartans_Exercising) by [Edgar Degas](/wiki/Edgar_Degas) (1834–1917)

With the revival of classical learning in [Renaissance Europe](/wiki/Renaissance), Laconophilia re-appears, for examples in the writings of [Machiavelli](/wiki/Machiavelli). The Elizabethan English constitutionalist [John Aylmer](/wiki/John_Aylmer_(English_constitutionalist)) compared the mixed government of Tudor England to the Spartan republic, stating that "Lacedemonia [meaning Sparta], [was] the noblest and best city governed that ever was". He commended it as a model for England. The Swiss-French philosopher [Jean-Jacques Rousseau](/wiki/Jean-Jacques_Rousseau) contrasted Sparta favourably with Athens in his [Discourse on the Arts and Sciences](/wiki/Discourse_on_the_Arts_and_Sciences), arguing that its austere constitution was preferable to the more cultured nature of Athenian life. Sparta was also used as a model of social purity by Revolutionary and Napoleonic France.[[109]](#cite_note-109) Certain early Zionists, and particularly the founders of [Kibbutz](/wiki/Kibbutz) movement in Israel, had been influenced by Spartan ideals, particularly as a model for education. Tabenkin, for example, a founding father of the Kibbutz and the [Palmach](/wiki/Palmach), was influenced by Spartan education. He prescribed that education for warfare "should begin from the nursery", that children should from kindergarten age be taken to "spend nights in the mountains and valleys".[[110]](#cite_note-110)[[111]](#cite_note-111) A new element of Laconophilia by [Karl Otfried Müller](/wiki/Karl_Otfried_Müller), who linked Spartan ideals to the supposed racial superiority of the Dorians, the ethnic sub-group of the Greeks to which the Spartans belonged. [Adolf Hitler](/wiki/Adolf_Hitler) praised the Spartans, recommending in 1928 that Germany should imitate them by limiting "the number allowed to live". He added that "The Spartans were once capable of such a wise measure... The subjugation of 350,000 Helots by 6,000 Spartans was only possible because of the racial superiority of the Spartans." The Spartans had created "the first racialist state".[[112]](#cite_note-112) In the modern times, the adjective "spartan" is used to imply simplicity, frugality, or avoidance of luxury and comfort.[[113]](#cite_note-113)