Directions
You may write in this book during perusal time.

After the examination session
Take this book when you leave.
Planning space
The Spartan Constitution — general information

Source A — The Spartan Constitution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
<th>Eligibility</th>
<th>Powers and responsibilities</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kings</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Hereditary position</td>
<td>• Commanded Spartan army (one at a time)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Had religious duties as priests</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Had limited civil power, e.g. over adoption of children, marriage of heiresses and control of public roads</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>• Were supported at the state’s expense</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gerusia (council of elders)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>• Men over 60 only, plus the two kings • Elected by acclamation of people • Only nobles</td>
<td>• Held office for life • Prepared all matters for the apella to discuss • Acted as court of justice in criminal cases (sentence of death or exile) • Could veto any unacceptable decisions of apella</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ephors (“overseers”)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>• Elected by people • Any Spartan over 30 • One year of office only</td>
<td>• Supervised morals and discipline, were responsible for education of youth, and had the right to declare war on helots • Two always accompanied kings in battle • Dealt with foreign ambassadors, had control of secret police (krypteia), formed supreme civil court in Laconia • During year in office had power over all citizens, including kings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apella (assembly)</td>
<td></td>
<td>All Spartans over 30</td>
<td>• Met monthly, did not debate, but listened to kings and ephors (the latter chaired the meetings) • Elected gerusia and ephors by acclamation (cheering) • Voted on such issues as declaration of war and the signing of treaties, but decisions could be overridden by gerusia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* In all cases, only men were eligible

Williams, CM 1994, Chronicles: Investigating the Ancient World, Book One, p. 283

Source B

Sparta’s social structure and the firm leadership of the ephors, which henceforth competed with the traditional role of the kings, prevented the state from ever being ruled by a tyrant, as in fact the rise to eminence of any individual was excluded, except for a few great powerful military leaders.

Ehrenberg, V 1968, From Solon to Socrates, p. 43
Source C

Many people try to describe it as a democracy because its system has many democratic elements, for example, to begin with, the education of children (for the sons of the rich are brought up in the same way as those of the poor, and are educated in a manner which is also possible for the sons of the poor), and the same is the case in the next age group, and when they become men (for thus there is no distinctive mark of being rich or poor) the arrangements for eating in the common messes (syssitia) are the same for everybody, and the rich wear such clothing as any of the poor could afford. Additionally, of the two most important offices the people choose the members of one and share in the other (for they elect the elders and share in the ephorate). Those who call it an oligarchy do so because of its many oligarchic features, for example that everyone is elected and no one chosen by lot, and that a few people have supreme authority to give sentences of death or exile, and many other similar points.

Aristotle, *Politics*, 1294b19–34

Source D

Later admirers regarded Sparta’s constitution as a mixture of the three main forms — monarchy, aristocracy, democracy, represented respectively by kings, gerusia, and apella with the ephors. There is some truth in this theory, though the “mixed constitution” was not the cause of Sparta’s stability. There was no equal distribution of power among the elements of the constitution; the conflicts between the kings and the ephors never ceased, while oligarchy was restricted by the authority of the ephors; the ephors were also responsible for the fact that under their leadership the assembly was to play a more important part, though it is unlikely that the body of well-drilled Spartiates would ever try to act independently.

Ehrenberg, V 1968, *From Solon to Socrates*, p. 47

Source E

Officially, and especially in the descriptions by later writers, the rule of law was proclaimed … However, as there were no written laws, their application by ephors and gerusia could be very arbitrary. Tradition and discipline, both based on a firm belief in divine sanction, had created a state which might be called authoritarian. Authority was chiefly in the hands of the ephors; but usually they had to get the assembly’s consent. As they changed annually, theirs was not a personal authority: they were the powerful tools rather than the masters of the system, and the old men of the gerusia were the guardians of the tradition.

Ehrenberg, V 1968, *From Solon to Socrates*, p. 48
Kings

Source F

I wish to explain with sufficient detail the nature of the covenant between king and state as instituted by Lykourgos [Lycurgus]; for this, I take it, is the sole type of rule which still preserves the original form in which it was first established; whereas other constitutions will be found either to have been already modified or else to be still undergoing modifications at this moment.

He laid it down as law that the king shall offer in behalf of the state all public sacrifices, as being himself of divine descent, and shall lead wherever the state despatches an army. He granted him to receive honorary gifts from the sacrifices, and he assigned him choice land in many of the subject cities, enough to satisfy moderate needs without excess of wealth.

All rise from their seats for the king, but ephors do not rise from their seats of office. Monthly they exchange oaths, the ephors in behalf of the state, the king himself in his own behalf. This is the oath on the king's part: “I will exercise my kingship in accordance with the established laws of the state”. And on the part of the state the oath runs: “So long as he (who exercises kingship) shall abide by this oath we will not suffer his kingdom to be shaken”.

Xenophon, Constitution of the Spartans, 15
From Hennessy, D (ed) 1991, Studies in Ancient Greece, p. 66

Source G

Of constitutional kingships, the Spartan type is thought by some to come nearest to the true pattern. But this is not really so. The kings of Sparta command the army on foreign expeditions, and may supervise religious worship; beyond that their sovereignty does not extend. This sort of kingship may accordingly be described as an independent and permanent generalship. It has never included the power of life and death, except that in ancient times a king, when on campaign, might execute a subject “by right of superior force”.

Aristotle, Politics, 3.1.1 [1285a]
From Hennessy, D (ed) 1991, Studies in Ancient Greece, p. 66

Source H

Aristotle (Pol. 3.14.4 [1285b]) calls the Spartan kingship a perpetual hereditary generalship, but in the hands of an able king it could be and normally was far more than that. The king, it is true, was at home merely one of the elders, and the political leadership of the assembly was in the hands of the ephors. But the advice of a successful general had immense weight with the assembly, and the kings had the advantage of permanency over their potential rivals. A king might, it is true, be baulked by his colleague, but this in fact very rarely happened, since the colleague of an influential king was very often a minor or an ineffective character. In fact, the number of Spartan commoners who swayed Spartan policy can be numbered on the fingers of one hand — the legendary Chilon, Hetoemaridas, Brasidas, Lysander, Antalcidas. The history of Sparta falls naturally into reigns of a series of great kings — Cleomenes I, Archidamus, Agesilaus, Areus, Agis III, Cleomenes IV, Nabis — who left their imprint, for good or ill, on the fortunes of their country.

AHM Jones, Sparta
Source I

The Spartiates have given their kings these prerogatives: two priesthoods, of Zeus Lakedaimon and Zeus Ouranios, and the power to declare war against any country they might choose; none of the Spartiates is allowed to hinder this, and if one should, then he is put under a curse. When they take the field, the kings are the first to go and the last to return; on campaign they are guarded by a hundred picked men; and on their expeditions they can use as many animals as they wish, and they keep for themselves the skins and chines of all that are sacrificed. This is in war, and in peacetime their other prerogatives are as follows: whenever a sacrifice takes place at public expense, the kings are the first to sit down to dinner and are the first served, each being given twice as much of everything as the other guests; theirs is the right of making the first libation and they get the skins of the sacrificed animals. On the first and seventh days of every month each of them is given by the state a perfect victim for sacrifice at the temple of Apollo and a bushel of barley and a Lakonian quart of wine, and at all public games they have the privilege of specially reserved seats. It is their duty to appoint whomever of the citizens they wish as proxenoi and each of them chooses two Pythioi; the Pythioi are officials sent to Delphi, and they eat with the kings at public expense. If the kings do not attend dinner they are each sent at their houses two choinikes of barley and a kotyle of wine, and when they are present they are given double rations of everything; they are awarded this same honour when they are invited to dinner at the houses of private citizens. They guard the oracular responses, and the Pythioi also have knowledge of these. The kings have the sole right to make decisions on specific matters: concerning an heiress whom she should marry, if her father has not betrothed her, and concerning public roads. And if anyone wants to adopt a child, he must do it in the kings’ presence. And they sit beside the elders in council, of whom there are twenty-eight; and if the (two) kings are not present, those of the elders who are most closely related to them have the prerogatives of the kings and cast two votes and a third for themselves … If one of the kings dies in war, they prepare a likeness of him and carry it to burial on a finely strewn bier. And when they bury a king, no public business takes places for ten days and no election is held, but they spend all these days in mourning.

Herodotos, The Histories, 6.56–60.1: The Prerogatives of Spartan Kings
Ephors

Source J

Accordingly the ephors are competent to punish whomsoever they choose; they have power to exact fines on the spur of the moment; they have power to depose magistrates in mid-career — nay, actually to imprison and bring them to trial on the capital charge. Entrusted with these vast powers, they do not, as do the rest of states, allow the elected magistrates to exercise authority as they like, right through the year of office; but, in the style rather of despotic monarchs or presidents of gymnastic games, at the first sign of any transgression they inflict chastisement without warning and without hesitation.

Xenophon, Constitution of the Spartans, 8

Source K

We come now to a criticism of the Spartan ephoralty, a board of magistrates which enjoys supreme authority in matters of the highest importance. Its members are chosen from the whole people, with the result that very poor men often find themselves elected to an office where their indigence [poverty] lays them open to bribery. The annals of Sparta contain many such instances, including the recent affair at Andros. [It is not certain to what episode Aristotle refers.] when some of the ephors were bribed and did their best to ruin the state. Their power, indeed, is so great, amounting almost to tyranny, that even the kings have been obliged to seek their favour. And in this way, too, not only the royal office, but the constitution as a whole has deteriorated; democracy has superseded aristocracy. It is true, of course, that the ephoralty does hold the state together; their right to share in the highest office keeps the people contented, and this result, whether intended by the legislator or merely accidental, has proved beneficial.

Aristotle, Politics, 2.3.4 [1270b]
From Hennessy, D (ed) 1991, Studies in Ancient Greece, p. 68

Source L

It seems certain that the whole constructive policy up to the middle of the sixth century was the work of the ephors, and Chilon may have played an important part. Despite the annual change of office, the ephors had early developed a firm tradition of power. Constitutionally their leadership was safely established. They were elected “from all citizens” (Aristotle, Politics, 1270b, 27 f.); how “democratic” this “very childish” form of election by acclamation was may be doubtful. As a collegium, the ephors represented an anonymous rule, even a kind of tyranny, sanctioned by the gerusia. It was the ephors who decided state policy and supervised the whole life of the community. They shared some jurisdiction with the elders, and they left the command in the field to the kings, though normally they were responsible for the call-up of the army, and it soon became the rule that some ephors accompanied king and army. Most legal and moral matters were directed by the ephors, and they could interfere in the private lives of the citizens, to say nothing of perioeci and helots. The former stood under their direct jurisdiction. The only rivals of the ephors were some of the kings, especially among the Agiads; but the ephors knew how to play one king off against the other.

Ehrenberg, V 1968, From Solon to Socrates, p. 46
**Source M**

Significant for the relations between kings and ephors even under normal conditions was the monthly exchange of oaths (Xen. *rep. Lac*. 15, 7): the kings swore “to reign according to the laws”, the ephors in the name of the state “to uphold monarchy as long as the kings kept their oath”. Their mutual position could not be made clearer.

Ehrenberg, V 1968, *From Solon to Socrates* pp. 46–47

**Source N**

Every nine years the ephors pick a clear, moonless night, and sit in silence gazing up at the sky. Should, then, a star shoot from one sector to another 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. It was this sign which Lysander now claimed had appeared to him. He had Leonidas brought to trial and produced witnesses to say that he had had two children by an Asian woman whom he had acquired as a spouse from one of Seleucus’ officers; but then, when he found her intolerable and was loathed in return, he came home unexpectedly and occupied the kingship since there was no heir to it. While bringing this case, Lysander also tried to persuade Cleombrotus, Leonidas’ son-in-law and of royal birth, to lay claim to the kingship. So Leonidas panicked and became a suppliant of Athena in the Bronze House; his daughter, too, left her husband Cleombrotus and took sanctuary with her father. When he was called to trial and did not emerge, the court deprived him of his kingship and conferred it on Cleombrotus.

At this point Lysander went out of office because his term had expired. The newly installed ephors brought Leonidas out of his sanctuary, while prosecuting Lysander and Mandrocleidas on a charge of having illegally voted for cancellation of debts and redistribution of land. So in this hazardous predicament the pair of them persuaded the kings to act jointly and to ignore the ephors’ resolutions. Their argument was that this magistracy derived its power from disagreements between the kings by adding its vote to that of the one who expressed the better opinion whenever the other disputed a beneficial policy. But when the pair of them were of the same mind their authority was absolute, and opposition to them was unlawful; it was the ephors’ proper function to mediate and arbitrate between them when they were in dispute, but not to interfere when they were in agreement. Thus convinced, the two kings and their friends descended on the agora, and first removed the ephors from their chairs, and then appointed others, including Agesilaus, to take their places.

Note: Leonidas was one of the Spartan kings, early 4th century BC.


**Source O**

While there may be some dispute about that, certainly Agis was the first reigning king at Sparta to be put to death by ephors. The course of action he chose to follow was admirable and worthy of Sparta, even though he was of an age at which men who make mistakes gain pardon for them. His friends had more justification for finding fault with him than his enemies, because among the latter he actually saved Leonidas’ life and trusted the others, thanks to his very gentle and mild nature.

Source P

Their arrangements concerning the powers of the elders are also not faultless. One might suppose that as long as they are respectable men and sufficiently trained in manly virtue they would benefit the state, but it should be doubted whether they should possess for life supreme jurisdiction in cases of importance (for the mind, like the body, is subject to old age); and when they have been trained in such a manner that the lawgiver himself has no confidence in their being good men, it is dangerous. For those who have had a share in this office have manifestly been guilty of taking bribes and have been corrupt enough to give away a lot of public property. Accordingly it would be better if they were accountable; but now they are not.

*Aristotle, Politics, 1270b35–1271a18*


Source Q

The gerusia consisted of men over sixty who were elected for the rest of their lives by popular acclamation, a method again called childish by Aristotle (Pol. 1271a, 9), but probably well suited to preserve the aristocratic character of the gerusia. Its members were not responsible to anybody, and formed the highest court of justice. Its composition and power possibly still depended on some of the “first families”, and thus maintained an oligarchic character. The gerusia may have held the right of *probouleusis*, that is to say they prepared any proposal put before the apella, which retained the right of refusal. In practice, there must have been a good deal of co-operation between gerusia and ephors, though the latter held the initiative. A good example during the sixth century is their common intervention when the king Anaxandridas had no son, and they allowed him to take a second wife (Hdt. 5, 39 ff.).

*Ehrenberg, V 1968, From Solon to Socrates, p. 47*

Source R

Of the numerous reforms of Lykourgos, the first and most important was the institution of the elders (gerusia) which Plato says, because it was mixed with the “fevered” rule of the kings and had an equal vote with them in important matters, provided stability and common sense. For the state was unstable, at one moment inclining towards the kings and tyranny, and at the next to the populace and democracy, and by placing the office of the elders in the middle as a kind of ballast, and making it balanced, he ensured the safest organisation and constitution, with the twenty-eight elders taking the side of the kings when it was a question of resisting democracy, and alternatively strengthening the people to avoid the development of a tyranny.

*Plutarch, Life of Lykourgos, 5.10–11*

From Dillon, M and Garland, L 2010, Ancient Greece, p. 225
Apella

Source S

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 Sthenelaidas 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 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. Then they rose to their feet and separated into two divisions. The great majority were of the opinion that the treaty had been broken.

Thucydides, The Peloponnesian War, 1, 87
Unseen sources for Questions 1 and 2
(Sources 1–6)

The Spartan Constitution

Source 1

Regarding kingship, we can consider elsewhere whether it is better for states to have kings or not; but it would be better not to have kings in the present fashion, but for each of the kings to be chosen with regard to his personal life. It is clear that even the lawgiver himself does not think that it is possible to make them really good men; at any rate he has no confidence in their being good men enough; that is why the Spartans used to send their enemies with them as fellow envoys, and think that the well-being of the state lay in discord between the kings.

Aristotle, Politics, 1271a18–26
From Dillon, M and Garland, L 2010, Ancient Greece, p. 234

Source 2

After accurately hearing all this the ephors went away, intending, now that they knew all the facts, to arrest Pausanias in the city. It is said that he was on the point of being arrested in the street, but, when he saw the face of one of the ephors who was approaching, realised why he was coming, while another out of goodwill gave him a secret sign revealing their intent, and that he ran to the temple of Athena of the Brazen House (Chalkioikos) and escaped them; the precinct was nearby. He entered a small room which belonged to the temple, so he should not suffer hardship by being out in the open air, and stayed there quietly. For the moment the ephors were too late in their pursuit, but they then took off the roof of the room, and having observed that he was inside, walled up the doors and barricaded him inside, and stationed themselves to wait until he was forced to give himself up from starvation. And when they perceived that he was on the point of dying, they brought him out of the temple, just as he was in the room, still breathing, and once brought out he immediately died.

Thucydides 1.130.1–133.4 (Simonides 17)

Source 3

Life of Agesilaus (Spartan king, b. 440, d. 360 BC)

As for Xenophon’s assertion that, by obeying his countrymen’s will in everything, Agesilaus gained so much power that he could do what he liked, the facts are as follows. At that time the supreme power in the state was exercised by the ephors and the Elders. Ephors hold office for only a year, while Elders enjoy their distinction for life — the role of both being to curb the exercise of absolute power by the kings, as I have explained in my Lycurgus. This was why a state of perpetual feud and hostility had grown up from the very earliest times between the kings and these officeholders. Agesilaus, however, was determined to break with this tradition. Instead of opposing and clashing with these men, he cultivated them. He took no initiative without involving them, and if summoned, he hurried to the meeting at more than walking-pace. If ever the ephors appeared when he was seated on the throne and transacting business, he would rise, and on the induction of every new Elder he would send him a cloak and an ox as a mark of recognition. Thus all the time that he appeared to be honouring and exalting the dignity of their office, he was unobtrusively increasing his
own authority and strengthening the power of the kingship through the goodwill which he attracted to himself.

Talbert, RJA and Scott-Kilvert, I (trans) 1988, Plutarch: On Sparta, p. 42

Source 4

Life of Cleomenes ( Spartan king, c. 260–219 BC)

On Leonidas’ death Cleomenes succeeded to the throne and saw how thoroughly enervated the citizens were by then. Among the rich there was neglect of public affairs in favour of their private pleasures and gains, while ordinary people, because of the wretched state of their domestic affairs, had lost their enthusiasm for campaigning and their motivation for the traditional system of education. He was, however, king merely in name, and all power belonged to the ephors. Thus he at once developed the idea of changing and overturning this current state of affairs.

So when day broke, Cleomenes proscribed eighty citizens who were required to leave, and he removed the ephors’ seats — except for one in which he intended to sit himself and handle business. Calling an assembly, he spoke in defence of what had been done. Lycurgus, he said, had associated the Elders with the kings, and for a long period the city had been administered in this way and needed no other form of government. But later, when the war against the Messenians became prolonged, and the kings were not free to attend personally to their judicial work because of their campaigning, they picked some of their friends and left them for the citizens as their replacements. These men were called “ephors”, and at first they did continue to be just the kings’ assistants, but gradually they diverted authority to themselves and so, before others realized it, they developed a magistracy in its own right. There is proof of that in the practice still current whereby when the ephors send for the king, he refuses the first time and the second, but at their third summons he rises and goes to them. Asteropus, the first ephor to have given the magistracy notable strength and scope, had lived many generations later. So long as the ephors’ behaviour had been moderate, he said, it had been better to tolerate them. But now they had become insufferable as they used their usurped authority to break up the traditional form of government — chasing out some kings, putting others to death without trial, and uttering threats against people who yearned to see Sparta return to its loveliest, most divine condition.

When he was close to the city he first sent Eurycleidas to the ephors’ mess on the pretence that he had come from the army with some message from the king: Theryclic and Phoebis, two of those brought up with Cleomenes (men termed mothakes), followed behind with a few soldiers. Then, while Eurycleidas was still talking to the ephors, these dashed in with daggers drawn and stabbed them. The first ephor, Agylaeus, collapsed under the blow and gave the impression of being dead, but quietly rallied and dragged himself out of the room. Quite unnoticed he crept towards a little building which was a shrine of Fear — normally always kept closed, but by chance it happened to be open at that moment. So he hauled himself inside and shut the door. The other four ephors were killed along with at least ten of those who came to their rescue. But people who kept quiet were not killed, nor was anyone who tried to leave the city obstructed. Even Agylaeus was spared when he emerged from the temple the next day.

Source 5

Sayings of Spartans — Anaxilas (seventh-century Eurypontid king)

To the man who was wondering why the ephors do not stand up to show respect to the kings, even though they are appointed to this office by the kings, Anaxilas said: “For the same reason that they are also ephors (‘overseers’)”.

Talbert, RJA and Scott-Kilvert, I (trans) 1988, Plutarch: On Sparta, p. 152

Source 6

Sayings of Spartans — Agis IV (Eurypontid king, 244/3–241)

Agis, the last Spartan king, was arrested by means of a trap and condemned by the ephors without trial. As he was being led off to the noose, he noticed one of the attendants in tears and said: “Man, stop crying for me, since my death in defiance of law and justice makes me superior to my murderers”. With these words he readily allowed the noose to be placed around his neck.

Talbert, RJA and Scott-Kilvert, I (trans) 1988, Plutarch: On Sparta, pp. 149–50
Seen sources for Question 3  
(Sources A–K)

Spartan women

Source A

I recall the astonishment with which I first noted the unique position of Sparta among the states of Hellas, the relatively sparse population, and at the same time the extraordinary power and prestige of the community …

Take, for example — and it is well to begin at the beginning — the whole topic of the begetting and rearing of children. Throughout the rest of the world the young girl, who will one day become a mother (and I speak of those who may be held to be well brought up), is nurtured on the plainest food attainable, with the scantiest addition of meat or other condiments; while as to wine they train them either to total abstinence or to take it highly diluted with water. And in imitation, as it were, of the handicraft type, since the majority of artificers are sedentary, we, the rest of the Hellenes, are content that our girls should sit quietly and work wools. This is all we demand of them. But how are we to expect that women nurtured in this fashion should produce a splendid offspring?

Lykourgos pursued a different path. Clothes were things, he held, the furnishing of which might well enough be left to female slaves. And, believing that the highest function of a free woman was the bearing of children, in the first place he insisted on the training of the body as incumbent no less on the female than on the male; and in pursuit of the same idea he instituted contest in running and feats of strength for women as for men. His belief was that where both parents were strong their progeny would be found to be more vigorous.

In view of the fact that immoderate intercourse is elsewhere permitted during the earlier period of matrimony, he adopted a principle directly opposite. He laid it down as an ordinance that a man should be ashamed to be seen visiting the chamber of his wife, whether going in or coming out. When they did meet under such restraint the mutual longing of these lovers could not but be increased, and the fruit which might spring from such intercourse would tend to be more robust than theirs whose affections are cloyed by satiety. By a further step in the same direction he refused to allow marriages to be contracted at any period of life according to the fancy of the parties concerned. Marriage, as he ordained it, must only take place in the prime of bodily vigour, this too being, as he believed, a condition conducive to the production of healthy offspring. Or, in the case of an old man wedded to a young wife, considering the jealous watch which such husbands are apt to keep over their wives, he introduced a directly opposite custom; that is to say, he made it incumbent on the aged husband to introduce someone whose qualities, physical and moral, he admired, to play the husband’s part and to beget him children. Or again, in the case of a man who might not desire to live with a wife permanently, but yet might be anxious to have children of his own worthy of the name, the lawgiver laid down a law in his behalf; such as one might select some woman, the wife of some man, well born herself and blest with fair offspring, and, the sanction and consent of her husband first obtained, raise up children for himself through her.

These and many other adaptations of a like sort the lawgiver sanctioned. As, for instance, at Sparta a wife will not object to bear the burden of a double establishment, or a husband to adopt sons as foster-brothers of his own children, with a full share in his family and position, but possessing no claim to his wealth and property.
So opposed to those of the rest of the world are the principles which Lykourgos devised in reference to the production of children. Whether they enabled him to provide Sparta with a race of men superior to all in size and strength I leave to the judgment of whomsoever it may concern.

Xenophon, *Constitution of the Spartans*, 1, 2
From Bradley, P 1988, *Ancient Greece*, pp. 70–71

**Source B**

The archaeological evidence provides comparatively little for the Spartiates themselves. Naturally, the Spartans still knew how to dance and to make music. That was part of their education, and both sexes joined in such activities at religious festivals.

Ehrenberg, V 1968, *From Solon to Socrates* p. 44

**Source C**

He [Lycurgus] made it ... honourable for men to give the use of their wives to those whom they should think fit, that so they might have children by them ... Lycurgus allowed a man who was advanced in years and had a young wife to recommend some virtuous and approved young man, that she might have a child by him ...

Plutarch, *Life of Lycurgus*, 14

**Source D**

He [that is, Lycurgus] ordered the maidens to exercise themselves with wrestling, running, throwing the quoit, and casting the dart, to the end that the fruit they conceived might, in strong healthy bodies, take firm root and find better growth, and withal that they, with this greater vigour, might be the more able to undergo the pains of childbearing ... he ordered that the young women should go naked in the processions, as well as the young men, and dance, too, in that condition ... Nor was there anything shameful in this nakedness of the young women; modesty attended them, and all wantonness was excluded. It taught them simplicity and a care for good health and gave them a taste of higher feelings, admitted as they were to the field of noble action and glory.

Plutarch, *Life of Lycurgus*, 14

**Source E**

Sayings of Spartan women — Gyrtias

When a messenger came from Crete to report Acrotatus’ death she said: “Wasn’t it inevitable that, when he proceeded against the enemy, either he would be killed by them or he would kill them? To hear that he died in a fashion worthy of me and the city and his ancestors is pleasanter than if he were immortal but a coward”.

Source F

Sayings of Spartan women — Damatria

After hearing that her son was a coward and unworthy of her, Damatria killed him when he made his appearance. This is the epigram about her:

_Damatrius who broke the laws was killed by his mother —_  
_She a Spartan lady, he a Spartan youth._

RJA and Scott-Kilvert, I (trans) 1988, _Plutarch: On Sparta_, p. 184

Source G

Sayings of Spartan women — Archileonis

Some Amphipolitans came to Sparta and visited Archileonis, the mother of Brasidas, after her son’s death. She asked if her son had died nobly, in a manner worthy of Sparta. As they heaped praise on him and declared that in his exploits he was the best of all the Spartans, she said: “Strangers, my son was indeed noble and brave, but Sparta has many better men than he”.

Talbert, RJA and Scott-Kilvert, I (trans) 1988, _Plutarch: On Sparta_, p. 183

Source H

Sparta was perceived as being unique in many ways by other ancient Greeks, who were perpetually intrigued by Spartan life.

…

The lifestyle of Spartan women was viewed as odd, to say the least, by other Greeks and, indeed, sometimes considered as shocking. Unfortunately, there exists no evidence from Sparta itself, even from men; so the viewpoint is all from outsiders. Athenian writers, such as Aristotle, Plato and Xenophon, wrote copiously about Sparta. Later the Greek historian Plutarch had much to say also and so it is from their writings that Sparta is well known to us.

Williams, CM 1994, _Chronicles: Investigating the Ancient World, Book One_ p. 394

Source I

The licence permitted women defeats the aim of the Spartan constitution and is harmful to the welfare of that state. For as a husband and wife are constituent elements of a household, we may regard the state as about equally divided into men and women; so that, in a state where the women are disorderly, half of it may be considered without the rule of law. And this is what happened in Sparta. Her lawgiver wished to make the whole civic body tough and self-disciplined, and no-one can deny the men are so; but he overlooked the women, who give free rein to every form of intemperance and luxury.

…

Female licence at Sparta dates from the earliest times … For during a long series of wars against the Argives, Arcadians and Messenians the men were constantly from home on active service …

Aristotle, _Politics_, Bk II, 1269b–1270a

**Source J**

Overall, Spartan women enjoyed more freedom than other Greek women. Their clothes were less restrictive — slit skirts which bared their thighs, permitting freedom of movement. Above all, Spartan women were far less tied to household tasks than other Greek women. They did not weave, for instance, but were allowed to do gymnastics and other outdoor pursuits. Possibly they exercised in the nude, although it is not certain.


**Source K**

**Sayings of Spartan women — unnamed**

Someone contacted a Spartan woman to ask if she would agree to let him seduce her. She said: “When I was a child I learned to obey my father, and I did so; then when I became a woman I obeyed my husband; so if this man is making me a proper proposal, let him put it to my husband first”.

While taking part in a public procession another woman heard of her son’s success in the battle-line but also of his death from many wounds. Her reaction was not to remove her garland but to say proudly to the women near her: “Friends, how much finer it is die victorious in the battle-line than to win at the Olympic Games and live”.

Another woman, when her sons fled from a battle and reached her, said: “In making your escape, vile slaves, where is it you’ve come to? Or do you plan to creep back in here where you emerged from?” At this she pulled up her clothes and exposed her belly to them.

A woman, when she saw her son approaching, asked how their country was doing. When he said: “All the men are dead”, she picked up a tile, threw it at him and killed him, saying: “Then, did they send you to bring us the bad news?”

A woman, after sending off her five sons to war, stood on the outskirts of the city to watch anxiously what the outcome of the battle might be. When someone appeared and she questioned him, he reported that all her sons had perished. She said: “Yet this isn’t what I asked you, vile slave, but rather how our country was doing”. When he said that it was winning, she remarked: “Then I gladly accept the death of my sons too”.

Unseen sources for Question 3  
(Sources 1–6)

Spartan women

Source 1

Family life was hardly possible, though when a man had reached the age of thirty he could at least sleep at home. Boys and girls had their separate physical training, and could be seen naked at their exercises and games. Women counted as healthy mothers of healthy sons, but they also enjoyed a freedom unusual elsewhere in Greece. No doubt the Spartiates were proud of their new order, and the individual was, in general, eager not only to comply with its rules but even enthusiastically to support it and to out-rival his fellow-citizens.

Ehrenberg, V 1968, From Solon to Socrates p. 44

Source 2

Just how influential were Spartan women is the subject of modern debate. Some historians argue their influence has been overestimated. Other historians, in favour of their influence being great, point to the relatively late age of marriage, ownership of property (Aristotle claimed that Spartan women owned two-fifths of the land because of the number of heiresses and the practice of giving large dowries), de facto polyandry (polygamy in which a woman has more than one husband) and constant absences of husbands due to war.

Williams, CM 1994, Chronicles: Investigating the Ancient World, Book One, p. 395

Source 3

In their marriages, the husband carries off his bride by a sort of force; nor were their brides ever small and of tender years, but in their full bloom and ripeness. After this she who superintended the wedding comes and clips the hair of the bride close around her head, dresses her up in men’s clothes, and leaves her upon a mattress in the dark; afterwards comes the bridegroom, in his everyday clothes, sober and composed, as having supped at the common table, and entering privately into the room where the bride lies … and takes her to himself; and, after staying some time together, he returns composedly to his own apartment, to sleep as usual with the other young men. And so he continues to do so, spending his days and even his nights with them, visiting his bride in fear and shame, and with circumspection, when he thought he should not be observed …

Plutarch, Life of Lycurgus, 14
From Williams, CM 1994, Chronicles: Investigating the Ancient World, Book One, p. 395
Source 4

Sayings of Spartan women — Gorgo (daughter of King Cleomenes I, born about 506 BC. Married her uncle, King Leonidas I)

When the Milesian Aristagoras was urging Cleomenes to make war against the Great King in support of the Ionians and was promising him quantities of money, and also adding more to meet his objections, the king’s daughter Gorgo said: “Father, this miserable little foreigner will ruin you completely unless you drive him out of the house pretty quickly”.

When asked by a woman from Attica: “Why are you Spartan women the only ones who can rule men?”, she said: “Because we are also the only ones who give birth to men”.

On her husband Leonidas’ departure for Thermopylae, while urging him to show himself worthy of Sparta, she asked what she should do, He said: “Marry a good man and bear good children”.

Talbert, RJA and Scott-Kilvert, I (trans) 1988, Plutarch: On Sparta, p. 184

Source 5

A Spartan woman who was up for sale and was asked what skills she possessed, said: “To be trustworthy”.

Another woman who had been taken prisoner and was being asked much the same question, said: “To manage a household well”.

When a woman was asked by somebody whether she would be good if he were to buy her, she said: “Yes, and even if you don’t buy me”.

Another woman when on sale was asked by the auctioneer what skills she had and said: “To be free”. When the man who bought her kept ordering her to perform certain services unfitting for a free woman, she declared: “You’ll be sorry that you didn’t decide not to make a purchase like this!”, and committed suicide.

Talbert, RJA and Scott-Kilvert, I (trans) 1988, Plutarch: On Sparta, p. 188

Source 6

When an Ionian woman was priding herself on one of the tapestries she had made (which was indeed of great value), a Spartan woman showed off her four most dutiful sons and said they were the kind of thing a noble and good woman ought to produce, and should boast of them and take pride in them.

When another woman heard that her son was behaving badly abroad, she wrote to him: “You’ve acquired a bad reputation. Either shake this off or cease to exist”.

In much the same way Chian exiles, too, came to Sparta and levelled many accusations against Pedaritus; his mother Teleutia sent for them, heard their charges, and having concluded that her son was in the wrong, sent him this message: “His mother to Pedaritus. Either behave better or stay there with no hope of a safe return to Sparta”.

Talbert, RJA and Scott-Kilvert, I (trans) 1988, Plutarch: On Sparta, p. 186
Acknowledgments


Ehrenberg, V 1968, From Solon to Socrates: Greek History and Civilisation During the Sixth and Fifth Centuries B.C., Second edition, Methuen, London.


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