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Studies of Power

Source A — Spartan neighbours and slaves; The Helots of Messenia

Redacted due to copyright restrictions
Source B — Ephoros, History Fl 17: Sparta acquires a subject population

The Dorian conquest of the Peloponnesian was traditionally dated to c. 1100 BCE. The twins Eurysthenes and Prokles, descendants of Herakles, were supposed to be the fathers of Agis and Eurypontes respectively, the ‘founders’ of the two royal families, the Agiads (the senior branch) and the Eurypontids (the lesser). The Spartans then expanded their territory by conquering Messenia, including the supposed city of ‘Helos’, and so gained a subject population.

Ephoros tells us that the Herakleidai, Eurysthenes and Prokles took possession of Lakonia, divided it into six parts, and established cities in the countryside. Although all of the neighbouring people (the periokoi) were subject to the Spartiates, they still had legal equality and shared citizenship and the right to public office. Agis, however, the son of Eurysthenes, deprived them of these equal rights and ordered them to pay tribute to Sparta. Everyone obeyed, except for the Helians who lived at Helos and were called Helots, who rose in rebellion. They were forcibly subjugated in war and condemned to slavery, on the specific condition that no owner was allowed to set them free or sell them beyond the borders. This was called the ‘War against the Helots’. And it could be said that Agis and his associates were the instigators of the Helot system that lasted right down to the period of Roman supremacy, in which the Spartans kept these men in a sort of public slavery, assigning them places to live and specific duties.

Source C — Tyrtaeus Poem 5: Victory over Messenia

*In the second half of the eighth century BCE Sparta began a series of wars to extend its territory. The last Messenian victory in the Olympic games took place in 736 BCE; this, and the first Spartan victory in 716 at the Olympic games, as well as the approximate dates of Theopompous’ reign in the eighth century, gives a rough date for the First Messenian War, perhaps c. 740–720. Following this, Messenia was divided up amongst the Spartans and ceased to be an independent state.*

To our king, Theopompous, friend of the gods,
Because of whom we took spacious Messene,
Messene good to plough, good to plant;
They fought for it for fully nineteen years
Unceasingly and always stout of heart
The spearmen fathers of our fathers;
And in the twentieth, leaving their rich fields,
The Messenians fled from the great mountains of Ithome

*Elegy and iambus, trans. J. M. Edmonds*

Source D — Diodorus Siculus, 15.66

*Here I think it not unsuitable, since Messene has so often been captured and razed, to recapitulate its history from the beginning. In ancient times the line of Neleus and Nestor held it down to Trojan times; then Orestes, Agamemnon’s son, and his descendants down to the return of the Heraclidae; following which Cresphontes received Messene as his portion and his line ruled it for a time; but later when Cresphontes’ descendants had lost the kingship, the Lacedaemonians became masters of it. After this, at the death of the Lacedaemonian king Teleclus, the Messenians were defeated in a war by the Lacedaemonians. This war is said to have lasted twenty years, for the Lacedaemonians had taken an oath not to return to Sparta unless they should have captured Messene. Then it was that the children called partheniae were born and founded the city of Tarentum. Later, however, while the Messenians were in slavery to the Lacedaemonians, Aristomenes persuaded the Messenians to revolt from the Spartans, and he inflicted many defeats upon the Spartans at the time when the poet Tyrtaeus was given by the Athenians as a leader to Sparta. Some say that Aristomenes lived during the twenty-year war. The last war between them was on the occasion of a great earthquake; practically all Sparta was destroyed and left bare of men, and the remnants of the Messenians settled Ithome with the aid of the Helots who joined the revolt, after Messene had for a long time been desolate. But when they were unsuccessful in all their wars and were finally driven from their homes, they settled in Naupactus, a city which the Athenians had given them for an abode. Furthermore, some of their number were exiled to Cephalenia, while others settled in Messana in Sicily, which was named after them. Finally, at the time under discussion, the Thebans, at the instigation of Epameinondas, who gathered together the Messenians from all quarters, settled Messene and restored their ancient land to them. Such then were the many important vicissitudes of Messenian history.*

*Diodorus Siculus n d., Library of History Book XV, trans. B Thayer*
Source E — Aristotle: On the Lacedaemonian Constitution, 30–49

Some, indeed, say that the best constitution is a combination of all existing forms, and they praise the Lacedaemonian because it is made up of oligarchy, monarchy, and democracy, the king forming the monarchy, and the council of elders the oligarchy while the democratic element is represented by the Ephors; for the Ephors are selected from the people. Others, however, declare the Ephoralty to be a tyranny, and find the element of democracy in the common meals and in the habits of daily life.


Source F — Xenophon: On the Spartans

He took from the men the liberty of marrying when each of them pleased, and appointed that they should contract marriages only when they were in full bodily vigor, deeming this injunction also conducive to producing excellent offspring. An old man should introduce to his wife whatever man in the prime of life he admired for his bodily and mental qualities, so that she might have children by him …


Source G — Xenophon: On the Spartans

At Sparta the citizens pay strictest obedience to the magistrates and the laws. Lycurgus did not attempt to establish such an ‘Excellent Order of Things’ (Eunomia) until he had brought the most powerful men in the state to be of the same opinion as he was with regard to the constitution … Obedience is of the greatest benefit, as well in a State as in an army and a family. An honourable death is preferable to a dishonourable life. At Lacedaemon everyone would be ashamed to allow a coward into the same tent as himself, or allow him to be his opponent in a match at wrestling. Lycurgus also imposed on his countrymen an obligation, from which there is no exception, of practising every kind of political virtue; for he made the privileges of citizenship Equally available to all those who observed what was commanded by the Laws, without taking any account either of bodily weakness or limited financial means; but if anyone was too lazy to do what the Laws demanded, Lycurgus commanded that he should no longer be counted among the number of ‘equally privileged citizens’ (the Homoioi).


Source H — Plutarch: Life of Lycurgus

To return to the Lacedaemonians. Their discipline continued still after they were full-grown men. No one was allowed to live after his own fancy; but the city was a sort of camp, in which every man had his share of provisions and business set out, and looked upon himself not so much born to serve his own ends as the interest of his country. Therefore, if they were commanded nothing else, they went to see the boys perform their exercises, to teach them something useful or to learn it themselves of those who knew better. And indeed, one of the greatest and highest blessings Lycurgus procured his people was the abundance of leisure which proceeded from his forbidding to them the exercise of any mean and mechanical trade. Of the money-making that depends on troublesome going about and seeing people and doing business, they had no need at all in a state where wealth obtained no honour or respect. The Helots tilled their ground for them, and paid them yearly in kind the appointed quantity, without any trouble of theirs.

Lycurgus n.d., The Internet Classics Archive, trans. J Dryden
Source I — Plutarch: Life of Lycurgus

This is as follows: The magistrates (Krypteia) from time to time sent out into the countryside at large the most discreet of the young men, equipped only with daggers and necessary supplies. During the day they scattered into obscure and out of the way places, where they hid themselves and lay quiet. But in the night, they came down to the roads and killed every Helot whom they caught. Often, too, they actually made their way across fields where the Helots were working and killed the sturdiest and best of them. So, too, Thucydides, in his History of the Peloponnesian War (IV.80), states that the Helots who had been judged by the Spartans to be superior in bravery, set wreathes upon their heads in token of their emancipation, and visited the temples of the gods in procession, but in a little while afterwards all disappeared, more than two thousand of them, in such a way that no man was able to say, either then or afterwards, how they came to their deaths.


Source J — Aristotle: The Politics of Aristotle

The mention of avarice naturally suggests a criticism on the inequality of property. While some of the Spartan citizen have quite small properties, others have very large ones; hence the land has passed into the hands of a few. And this is due also to faulty laws; for, although the legislator rightly holds up to shame the sale or purchase of an inheritance, he allows anybody who likes to give or bequeath it. Yet both practices lead to the same result. And nearly two-fifths of the whole country are held by women; this is owing to the number of heiresses and to the large dowries which are customary. It would surely have been better to have given no dowries at all, or, if any, but small or moderate ones. As the law now stands, a man may bestow his heiress on any one whom he pleases, and, if he dies intestate, the privilege of giving her away descends to his heir.


Source K — Xenophon: The Polity of the Spartans

I recall the astonishment with which I first noted the unique position of Sparta among the states of Hellas (Greece), the relatively sparse population, and at the same time the extraordinary powers and prestige of the community. I was puzzled to account for the fact. It was only when I came to consider the peculiar institutions of the Spartans, that my wonderment ceased. When we turn to Lycurgus, instead of leaving it to each member of the state privately to appoint a slave to be his son’s tutor, he set over the young Spartans a public guardian—the paidonomos—with complete authority over them. This guardian was elected from those who filled the highest magistracies. He had authority to hold musters of the boys, and as their guardian, in case of any misbehaviour, to chastise severely. Lycurgus further provided the guardian with a body of youths in the prime of life and bearing whips to inflict punishment when necessary, with this happy result, that in Sparta modesty and obedience ever go hand in hand, nor is there lack of either. Instead of softening their feet with shoe or sandal, his rule was to make them hardy through going barefoot. This habit, if practiced, would, as he believed, enable them to scale heights more easily and clamber down precipices with less danger. In fact, with his feet so trained the young Spartan would leap and spring and run faster unshod than another in the ordinary way. Instead of making them effeminate with a variety of clothes, his rule was to habituate them to a single garment the whole year through, thinking that so they would be better prepared to withstand the variations of heat and cold. Again, as regards food, according to his regulation, the Eiren, or head of the flock, must
see that his messmates gather to the club meal with such moderate food as to avoid bloating and yet not remain unacquainted with the pains of starvation. His belief was that by such training in boyhood they would be better able when occasion demanded to continue toiling on an empty stomach … On the other hand, to guard against a too great pinch of starvation, he did give them permission to steal this thing or that in the effort to alleviate their hunger.

**Source L — Xenophon: The Polity of the Spartans**

It is clear that Lycurgus set himself deliberately to provide all the blessings of heaven for the good man, and a sorry and ill-starred existence for the coward. In other states the man who shows himself base and cowardly, wins to himself an evil reputation and the nickname of a coward, but that is all. For the rest he buys and sells in the same marketplace with a good man; he sits beside him at a play; he exercises with him in the same gymnasium, and all as suits his humour. But at Sparta there is not one man who would not feel ashamed to welcome the coward at the common mess-tables or to try conclusions with him in a wrestling bout. During games he is left out as the odd man; during the choric dance he is driven away. Nay, in the very streets it is he who must step aside for others to pass, or, being seated, he must rise and make room, even for a younger man …

**Source M — Plutarch: Lycurgus, 16.1–2**

They examined the infant, and if it was sturdy and robust, they told him to rear it, and allocated it one of the 9,000 lots of land. But, if it was weak and deformed, they sent it off to the so-called Place of Exposure (Apothetai), a place like a pit by Mount Taygetos, considering it better for both the child itself and the city that what was not properly formed with a view to health and strength right from the very beginning should not live.

**Source N — Helot aid to besieged Spartan soldiers, 425 BCE**

Meanwhile the Athenians at Pylos were still besieging the Lacedaemonians in the island, the Peloponnesian forces on the continent remaining where they were. The blockade was very laborious for the Athenians from want of food and water; there was no spring except one in the citadel of Pylos itself, and that not a large one, and most of them were obliged to grub up the shingle on the sea beach and drink such water as they could find. They also suffered from want of room, being encamped in a narrow space; and as there was no anchorage for the ships, some took their meals on shore in their turn, while the others were anchored out at sea. But their greatest discouragement arose from the unexpectedly long time which it took to reduce a body of men shut up in a desert island, with only brackish water to drink, a matter which they had imagined would take them only a few days. The fact was, that the Lacedaemonians had made advertisement for volunteers to carry into the island ground corn, wine, cheese, and any other food useful in a siege; high prices being offered, and freedom promised to any of the Helots who should succeed in doing so. The Helots accordingly were most forward to engage in this risky traffic, putting off from this or that part of Peloponnese, and running in by night on the seaward side of the island. They were best pleased, however, when they could catch a wind to carry them in. It was more easy to elude the look-out of the galleys, when it blew
from the seaward, as it became impossible for them to anchor round the island; while the Helots had their boats rated at their value in money, and ran them ashore, without caring how they landed, being sure to find the soldiers waiting for them at the landing-places. But all who risked it in fair weather were taken. Divers also swam in under water from the harbour, dragging by a cord in skins poppy-seed mixed with honey, and bruised linseed; these at first escaped notice, but afterwards a look-out was kept for them. In short, both sides tried every possible contrivance, the one to throw in provisions, and the other to prevent their introduction.

Thucydides, n.d., *The Peloponnesian War*, 4.26: 1–9, Perseus Under PhiloLogic, Greek Texts & Translations

**Source O — Sparta recruit Helots into their army vs Thebes, 370 BCE**

As for the people in the city, the women could not even endure the sight of the smoke, since they had never seen an enemy; but the Spartiates, their city being without walls, were posted at intervals, one here, another there, and so kept guard, though they were, and were seen to be, very few in number. It was also determined by the authorities to make proclamation to the Helots that if any wished to take up arms and be assigned to a place in the ranks, they should be given a promise that all should be free who took part in the war.

Xenophon 1921, *Xenophon in Seven Volumes, Volumes 1 and 2*, trans. CL Brownson

**Source P — Peloponnesian League**

Peloponnesian League: modern name for the alliance of Sparta. This informal coalition of towns on the Peloponnesian had its origins in the Archaic period; in the classical age, it was opposed to (and overcame) the Delian League of Athens. The origin of the Peloponnesian League is sought in the sixth century BCE, when in many places in the Greek world long-lasting military coalitions were concluded. The alliance that was called ‘the Spartans and their allies’ was one of them. It is not clear why and how it was created, but it is not a wild guess that Spartan aggression was a factor. The city-state that had conquered Messenia and reduced its inhabitants to serfdom (they became Helots), needed to create a system of political control to guarantee that the Messenians would not receive outside support.

When Archidamus, the son of Zeuxidamus, was in the fourth year of his reign at Sparta, a greater earthquake than any before reported rent the land of the Lacedaemonians into many chasms, shook Taïgetus so that sundry peaks were torn away, and demolished the entire city with the exception of five houses. The rest were thrown down by the earthquake. Archidamus at once comprehended from the danger at hand that which was sure to follow, and as he saw the citizens trying to save the choicest valuables out of their houses, ordered the trumpet to give the signal of an enemy’s attack, in order that they might flock to him at once under arms. This was all that saved Sparta at that crisis. For the Helots hurriedly gathered from all the country round about with intent to despatch the surviving Spartans. But finding them arrayed in arms, they withdrew to their cities and waged open war, persuading many Perioeci also so to do. The Messenians besides joined in this attack upon the Spartans. Accordingly, the Lacedaemonians sent Pericleidas to Athens with request for aid, and Aristophanes introduces him into comedy as ‘sitting at the altars, pale of face, in purple cloak, soliciting an army.’ But Ephialtes opposed the project, and besought the Athenians not to succour or restore a city which was their rival, but to let haughty Sparta lie to be trodden under foot of men. However, Cimon prevailed upon the Athenians, exhorting them ‘not to suffer Hellas to be crippled, nor their city to be robbed of its yoke-fellow.’


Source Q — Plutarch, Cimon, 16–17

During this year [464 BCE] a great and incredible catastrophe befell the Lacedaemonians; for great earthquakes occurred in Sparta, and as a result the houses collapsed from their foundations and more than twenty thousand Lacedaemonians perished. And since the tumbling down of the city and the falling in of the houses continued uninterruptedly over a long period, many persons were caught and crushed in the collapse of the walls and no little household property was ruined by the quake. And although they suffered this disaster because some god, as it were, was wreaking his anger upon them, it so happened that other dangers befell them at the hands of men for the following reasons. The Helots and Messenians, although enemies of the Lacedaemonians, had remained quiet up to this time, since they stood in fear of the eminent position and power of Sparta; but when they observed that the larger part of them had perished because of the earthquake, they held in contempt the survivors, who were few. Consequently, they came to an agreement with each other and joined together in the war against the Lacedaemonians. The king of the Lacedaemonians, Archidamus, by his personal foresight not only was the saviour of his fellow citizens even during the earthquake, but in the course of the war also he bravely fought the aggressors. For instance, when the terrible earthquake struck Sparta, he was the first Spartan to seize his armour and hasten from the city into the country, calling upon the other citizens to follow his example. The Spartans obeyed him and thus those who survived the shock were saved and these men King Archidamus organized into an army and prepared to make war upon the revolters.

The Messenians together with the Helots at first advanced against the city of Sparta, assuming that they would take it because there would be no one to defend it; but when they heard that the survivors were drawn up in a body with Archidamus the king and were ready for the struggle on behalf of their native land, they gave up this plan, and seizing a stronghold in Messenia they made it their base of operations and from there continued to overrun Laconia. And the Spartans, turning for help to the Athenians, received from them an army; and they gathered troops as well from the rest of their
allies and thus became able to meet their enemy on equal terms. At the outset they were much superior to the enemy, but at a later time, when a suspicion arose that the Athenians were about to go over to the Messenians, they broke the alliance with them, stating as their reason that in the other allies they had sufficient men to meet the impending battle. The Athenians, although they believed that they had suffered an affront, at the time did no more than withdraw; later, however, their relations to the Lacedaemonians being unfriendly, they were more and more inclined to fan the flames of hatred. Consequently, the Athenians took this incident as the first cause of the estrangement of the two states, and later on they quarrelled and, embarking upon great wars, filled all Greece with vast calamities. But we shall give an account of these matters severally in connection with the appropriate periods of time. At the time in question the Lacedaemonians together with their allies marched forth against Ithome and laid siege to it. And the Helots, revolting in a body from the Lacedaemonians, joined as allies with the Messenians, and at one time they were winning and at another losing. And since for ten years no decision could be reached in the war, for that length of time they never ceased injuring each other. At this time, it may be explained, the Lacedaemonians had finally overcome both the Helots and Messenians, with whom they had been at war over a long period, and the Messenians they had allowed to depart from Ithome under a truce, as we have said, but of the Helots they had punished those who were responsible for the revolt and had enslaved the rest.

Diodorus Siculus n.d., Library of History, Book X1

Source S — Herodotus: Histories, book 9
When this matter had been arranged, the Greek army, which was in part composed of those who came at the first, in part of such as had flocked in from day to day, drew up in the following order: Ten thousand Lacedaemonian troops held the right wing, five thousand of whom were Spartans; and these five thousand were attended by a body of thirty-five thousand Helots, who were only lightly armed; seven Helots to each Spartan.

The History of Herodotus by Herodotus n.d., trans. G Rawlinson

Source T — Plutarch: Life of Agesilaus, 6.1–3: 32.7
Agesilaus had but recently come to the throne, when tidings were brought from Asia that the Persian king was preparing a great armament with which to drive the Lacedaemonians from the sea. Now, Lysander was eager to be sent again into Asia, and to aid his friends there. These he had left governors and masters of the cities, but owing to their unjust and violent conduct of affairs, they were being driven out by the citizens, and even put to death. He therefore persuaded Agesilaus to undertake the expedition and make war on behalf of Hellas, proceeding to the farthest point across the sea, and thus anticipating the preparations of the Barbarian. At the same time, he wrote to his friends in Asia urging them to send messengers to Sparta and demand Agesilaus as their commander. Accordingly, Agesilaus went before the assembly of the people and agreed to undertake the war if they would grant him thirty Spartans as captains and counsellors, a select corps of two thousand enfranchised Helots, and a force of allies amounting to six thousand. They readily voted everything, owing to the cooperation of Lysander, and sent Agesilaus forth at once with the thirty Spartans. Of these Lysander was first and foremost, not only because of his own reputation and influence, but also because of the friendship of Agesilaus, in whose eyes his procuring him this command was a greater boon than his raising him to the throne.
Later in the campaign many of the provincials and Helots who had been enrolled in the army ran away from the city and joined the enemy, and this caused very deep discouragement. Agesilaus therefore instructed his servants to go every morning before it was light to the barracks and take the arms of the deserters and hide them, that their numbers might not be known.

Plutarch’s Lives 1917, trans. B Perrin

Source U — Plutarch: Life of Lycurgus

And Aristotle, in particular, adds, that the ephori, so soon as they were entered into their office, used to declare war against them (Helots), that they might be massacred without a breach of religion. It is confessed, on all hands, that the Spartans dealt with them very hardly; for it was a common thing to force them to drink to excess, 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, forbidding them expressly to meddle with any of a better kind. And accordingly, when the Thebans made their invasion into Laconia (371 BCE), and took a great number of the Helots, they could by no means persuade them to sing the verses of Terpander, Alcman, or Spendon, ‘For,’ said they, ‘he masters do not like it.’ So that it was truly observed by one, that in Sparta he who was free was most so, and he that was a slave there, the greatest slave in the world. For my part, I am of the opinion that these outrages and cruelties began to be exercised in Sparta at a later time, especially after the great earthquake (464 BCE) when the Helots made a general insurrection, and, joining with the Messenians, laid the country waste, and brought the greatest danger upon the city.


Source V — Helots as hoplites

The only definite new development in the late fifth century is Sparta’s recruitment of several thousand Helots as hoplite soldiers from the late 420s onwards. This began with the one-off recruitment of 700 Helots for Brasidas’ campaign in northern Greece in 424 BCE and continued with the creation of the neodamōdeis, a permanent force of ex-Helots given their freedom on enrolment. By the 390s the neodamōdeis numbered several thousand strong and formed a mainstay of Sparta’s overseas campaigns (Thucydides 5.34; Xenophon Hellenika 3.1.4, 4.2; Hodkinson 2000, 421–2). The willingness of so many Helots to join up in return for their freedom should not be taken as evidence of contentment with Spartan rule. But it does illustrate the complexities of the Spartan-Helot relationship and the impossibility of reducing it to the simple narrative of a ‘Helot threat’.

Hodkinson, S 2015, Transforming Sparta: New approaches to the study of Spartan society, pp. 1–42
The Helots/Messanians are freed by Thebes, in 371 BCE.

Now Epameinondas, whose nature it was to aim at great enterprises and to crave everlasting fame, counselled the Arcadians and his other allies to resettle Messene, which for many years had remained stripped of its inhabitants by the Lacedaemonians, for it occupied a position well suited for operations against Sparta. When they all concurred, he sought out the remnants of the Messenians, and registering as citizens any others who so wished he founded Messene again, making it a populous city. Among them he divided the land, and reconstructing its buildings restored a notable Greek city and gained the widespread approbation of all men.

Diodorus Siculus n.d., Library of History, Book XV
Source 1 — Tyrtaeus Poems 6, 7: Messenian Tribute and Servitude

[The italicised text below is written by M Dillon and L Garland, lecturers in Ancient History, University of New England, NSW Australia]

The Messenians themselves were treated by the Spartans in the following way: first they made them take an oath that they would never rebel against them or attempt any form of revolution. Secondly, while the Spartans imposed no fixed tribute on them, they used to bring half of all their agricultural produce to Sparta. It was also laid down that at the funerals of kings and other magistrates both men and women should come from Messenia in black clothes; and a penalty was imposed on transgressors. As to the punishments with which they maltreated the Messenians, this is written in the poems of Tyrtaeus:

Just like donkeys oppressed great burdens,
Bringing to their masters of grievous necessity,
Half of all the produce their land bears.

Dillon, M & Garland, L 2010, Ancient Greece, Social and Historical Documents from Archaic Times to the Death of Alexander the Great, 3rd edition, pp. 382-381

Source 2 — Herodotus, Histories VIII: The dead Thermopylae, 480 BCE, Persian Wars

‘Comrades, King Xerxes gives permission to all who please, to quit their posts, and see how he fights with the senseless men who think to overthrow his armies.’ No sooner had these words been uttered than it became difficult to get a boat, so great was the number of those who desired to see the sight. Such as went crossed the strait, and passing among the heaps of dead, in this way viewed the spectacle. Many Helots were included in the slain, but everyone imagined that the bodies were all either Lacedaemonians or Thespians.

Herodotus 1942, The Persian Wars, trans. G Rawlinson

Source 3 — Xenophon, Hellenica, 3.4 (following the Peloponnesian Wars, c. 400 BCE)

Lysander, thinking that the Greeks would be far superior on the sea, and reflecting that the land force which went up country with Cyrus had returned safely, persuaded Agesilaus to promise, in case the Lacedaemonians would give him thirty Spartiates, two thousand emancipated Helots, and a contingent of six thousand of the allies, to make an expedition to Asia.

Xenophon 1921, Xenophon in Seven Volumes, Volumes 1 and 2: Hellenica, trans. CL Brownson
Source 4 — Plutarch: Sayings of Spartan Women

241b–c 7: One woman sent forth her sons, five in number, to war, and, standing in the outskirts of the city, she awaited anxiously the outcome of the battle. And when someone arrived and, in answer to her inquiry, reported that all her sons had met death, she said, ‘I did not inquire about that, you vile varlet, but how fares our country?’ And when he declared that it was victorious, ‘Then,’ she said, ‘I accept gladly also the death of my sons.’

241.1: Another Spartan woman killed her son, who had deserted his post because he was unworthy of Sparta. She declared: ‘He was not my offspring […] for I did not bear one unworthy of Sparta.’

241.5: A woman, when she saw her son approaching, asked: ‘How does our country fare?’ And when he said: ‘All 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?’

241.16: Another woman handed her son his shield and exhorted him: ‘Son, either with this or on this.’

Plutarch 1931, Moralia: Sayings of Spartan Women, trans. FC Babbitt

Source 5 — Xenophon: On the Spartans

Lycurgus thought that female slaves were competent to furnish clothes; and, considering that the production of children was the noblest duty of the free, he enacted that the female should practice bodily exercise no less than the male sex.


Source 6 — Myron of Priene

They assign to the Helots every shameful task leading to disgrace. For they ordained that each one of them must wear a dog skin cap and wrap himself in skins and receive a stipulated number of beatings every year regardless of any wrongdoing, so that they would never forget they were slaves. Moreover, if any exceeded the vigour proper to a slave’s condition, they made death the penalty; and they allotted a punishment to those controlling them if they failed.

Who were the Helots of ancient Sparta?, GreekBoston
Acknowledgments


Who were the Helots in ancient Sparta? n.d., GreekBoston, www.greekboston.com/culture/ancient-history/helots/


