

THE IN A HURRY SERIES

Sparta

in a Hurry

The warrior state, myth and reality

Max Brocklesby

BOOKSINAHURRY.COM

Contents

The Whole Thing in One Page 4

Why You Should Care 7

The Core Ideas 10

How It Actually Works 32

What People Get Wrong 43

Use It 51

Terms 58

Go Deeper 64

Notes and Sources 66

Bibliography 73

The Whole Thing in One Page

Sparta is the ancient society most often admired with most of its population removed. The surviving image contains red cloaks, short answers, hard training, common meals and men who would rather die than surrender. The historical system also contained conquered cultivators, free non-citizen towns, private estates, religious festivals, political rivalry and a shrinking body of full citizens who guarded membership so tightly that they eventually lacked enough members to sustain their power. The first picture is not false. It is cropped.

Sparta occupied the Eurotas valley in Laconia, then conquered neighbouring Messenia and forced much of its population into helotage. Helots produced the food that allowed male Spartiates to avoid ordinary agricultural labour and devote unusual time to politics, communal dining, exercise, ritual and war. The perioikoi, free communities without Spartan citizen rights, supplied soldiers, craftsmen, traders and local administration. Spartan austerity was therefore not freedom from an economy. It was a privileged position inside one.

The citizen body turned that privilege into cohesion. Boys passed through a publicly supervised education. Adult men ate in common messes and remained answerable to peers. Two hereditary kings shared authority with elders, annually elected ephors and an assembly. Religion ordered the calendar, legitimised offices and accompanied armies into battle. None of this formed one perfect

design issued by Lycurgus. The institutions developed across centuries, then later writers compressed the development into one founder because a plan is easier to admire than a history.

The results were formidable. Spartan troops gained a reputation for discipline and organisation that shaped battles before weapons met. Leonidas and three hundred Spartiates died at Thermopylae in 480 BCE beside other Greeks and became the purest version of the brand. Sparta led the victory at Plataea, dominated the Peloponnesian alliance and defeated Athens in 404 after learning to fight at sea with Persian money. The victory looked like proof of the system. It exposed the system's limits instead.

Empire required fleets, tribute, governors, distant commands and choices for which a narrow landholding citizen order was badly prepared. Wealth accumulated, full citizens declined, allies resisted and the reputation of invincibility was punctured at Sphacteria. At Leuctra in 371 BCE, Thebes defeated the Spartan army. The liberation of Messenia then removed much of the coerced labour base beneath citizen life. Sparta survived for centuries, but it never recovered its old position.

The myth survived because it detached the virtues from their invoice. Modern Sparta keeps courage, restraint and endurance, then edits out helots, exclusion, property and failure. The useful correction is not that Spartan discipline was fraudulent. It is that discipline was produced by a system, and the same system that

produced it also narrowed, exploited and finally weakened the society.

Put the population back into the picture.

That is the book.

Why You Should Care

A hotel room can be called Spartan. So can a diet, a workout, a budget or a management style. The adjective means stripped down, disciplined and free of softness. Nobody using it expects a discussion of land tenure in Messenia. That omission is the reason Sparta still matters.

The modern word preserves the visible behaviour and discards the machinery that made it possible. Full Spartan citizens could spend unusual amounts of time training, dining together, holding office and preparing for war because other people farmed, produced, traded and served beneath them. Their austerity was real, but it was selective. A Spartiate could reject manual work because helots could not. The next time somebody praises an institution for doing more with less, ask who has been moved outside the count.

Sparta also matters because it shows how demanding membership can become self-defeating. Citizenship required birth, education, acceptance into a mess, regular contributions and continued public standing. These tests created trust and made belonging valuable. They also meant that a man who lost the income needed for his mess could fall from the full citizen body. As property concentrated and citizen numbers contracted, Sparta defended the standards that distinguished its elite while losing the people required to command armies and govern allies. An institution can preserve its purity until purity becomes a method of decline.

Then there is reputation. Spartan military standing affected opponents before battle, steadied allies and disciplined citizens who knew how a Spartiate was expected to behave. Thermopylae multiplied that resource. Sphacteria damaged it when 120 Spartiates surrendered in 425 BCE. Reputation was not decoration. It changed strategic calculations. That makes Sparta useful wherever a company, army or country begins protecting the story of its competence more carefully than the capacity beneath it.

The political system deserves attention for the opposite reason. Sparta is often reduced to obedience under one stern state, yet authority was divided among two kings, five ephors, a council of elders and an assembly. The arrangement was unequal, secretive by modern standards and restricted to a small male citizen body. It still shows that durable order can emerge from rivalry managed through procedure rather than from harmony. The question is never whether offices look balanced on a diagram. It is who can convene, delay, accuse, command and refuse.

Sparta also teaches source discipline. Much of what people know comes from outsiders, admirers and writers living centuries after the classical city. Xenophon respected Spartan institutions. Plato and Aristotle used Sparta to test political arguments. Plutarch turned remembered customs into moral biography under the Roman Empire. Their evidence cannot be discarded, because without it the book would be thin. It cannot be combined into one timeless eyewitness account either. Every Spartan claim needs a date attached to both the practice and the person describing it.

The limits matter. Sparta was a small agrarian polis built on hereditary status and coerced labour, not a modern state, school or sports programme. Other Greek cities also enslaved, excluded and fought brutally, so Sparta should not be isolated as a monster designed to make everyone else look civilised. Nor should context become absolution. The point is narrower and harder: admired virtues have material conditions, institutions have denominators, and reputations hide costs most efficiently when everybody already knows the slogan.

That is why the subject rewards precision. Ask which practice, in which century, for which status group, supported by whose labour and reported by which witness. Only then does the adjective become history.

The Core Ideas

The Citizen Was Funded by the Helot

The Spartiate was a political and military specialist because somebody else produced his food. That sentence is the foundation beneath the red cloak. Sparta's full male citizens were expected to avoid ordinary productive labour, participate in common meals, remain available for public duties and cultivate the conduct associated with their status. The arrangement required land, produce and labour. It did not emerge from willpower.

The labourers were helots, unfree populations concentrated in Laconia and, above all, conquered Messenia. They lived in family groups, worked agricultural land and delivered a portion of its produce to Spartan masters. They were neither ordinary tenants nor identical to chattel slaves bought individually in a market. Their status was hereditary, coercive and attached to Spartan control of territory. Ancient descriptions vary, and modern scholars disagree about the daily intensity of violence, the exact share of produce and the degree of household autonomy. The bedrock is not disputed. Spartiate leisure and wealth depended upon helot labour.

Messenia changed the scale. Conquest west of Mount Taygetus gave Sparta access to a large and fertile territory. The wars by which that control was established are difficult to date, and later stories turn them into tidy campaigns. Tyrtaeus, writing in the seventh century BCE, gives the nearest early evidence for struggle,

endurance and Messenian subjection. By the classical period, Messenian helots supplied a large part of the produce supporting the citizen order. A state celebrated for self-denial had acquired the means to make one class's denial possible by denying another class freedom.

Control was never automatic. Helots outnumbered Spartiates, though ancient totals are unreliable and changed sharply across time. The danger of revolt appears repeatedly in the sources, most clearly after the earthquake of the 460s BCE, when Messenian resistance centred on Mount Ithome. Spartan institutions therefore faced inward as well as outward. Surveillance, exemplary violence and the threat of military action helped keep the labour system intact. Plutarch reports that ephors declared war on the helots annually, allowing them to be killed without ritual pollution, while accounts of the *krypteia* describe selected young men operating against them. These reports are late and their scope is disputed. They still preserve an ancient understanding that the relation was maintained through fear, not consent.

The *perioikoi* completed the structure. Their name means those dwelling around. They lived in communities across Laconia and Messenia, were personally free and managed local affairs, but lacked participation in Spartan citizen government. They served in the army, sometimes in large numbers, and handled much of the craft production, trade and maritime activity that the citizen ideal treated as beneath a Spartiate. At Plataea in 479 BCE, Herodotus places thousands of *perioikic* hoplites beside the Spartan citizens

and many more helots in support. The famous army was already a social coalition hidden beneath one name.

This is why the usual contrast between Spartan austerity and Athenian luxury misleads. Sparta did not abolish economic complexity. It distributed it by status. The citizen displayed restraint, the perioikos performed productive and commercial roles, and the helot carried the agricultural burden under coercion. Wealth could then appear morally clean at the level of citizen behaviour because the labour and exchange that sustained it had been assigned elsewhere.

Do not turn that correction into the opposite simplification. Helots were not a faceless mass waiting for freedom to arrive from outside, and perioikoi were not merely servants with better legal status. Both groups had communities, families, local identities and forms of agency that the citizen-centred sources record badly. Messenian identity itself changed and hardened through conflict and later liberation. The archive tells us most when Spartan power needed these people counted, punished, armed or transferred.

The invoice is therefore incomplete, but it exists. Every common meal, training period and campaign began with produce grown by people excluded from the citizen ideal. Core Idea 7 will return to that dependency when Messenia is lost. For now, keep the first principle fixed: Spartan discipline was a social achievement financed by an unequal division of freedom.

Equality Was a Closed Membership

Spartans called their full citizens the *Homoioi*, the Similar Ones or Peers. The name described an aspiration, not an economic census. Citizens ate in common groups, passed through shared institutions, wore restrained clothing and submitted to public judgement. These practices compressed visible differences and produced intense solidarity. They did not make property equal, and they did not extend equality beyond the membership boundary.

The old story credited Lycurgus with dividing land into equal allotments, each supporting one citizen household. Modern scholarship has dismantled that neat foundation. Evidence for an original equal distribution is late, inconsistent and difficult to reconcile with inheritance, gift, marriage and the private wealth visible in classical sources. Spartan citizens owned and transmitted property. Elite families bred horses and funded chariot teams, one of the most expensive forms of Greek competition. Kyniska, sister of King Agesilaus II, became the first woman officially credited with an Olympic victory because she possessed the resources to own the winning team. Iron money did not make a racehorse cheap.

Membership nevertheless had material tests. Adult citizens belonged to a *syssition*, a common dining group, and supplied regular contributions of produce. A man unable to meet them could lose full status. Education, acceptance, conduct and resources therefore converged. Citizenship was inherited through the right parents, but inheritance alone did not guarantee that it could be maintained. The system converted economic failure into civic ex-

clusion and then described the smaller surviving body as the proper citizen class.

The people pushed below full status did not disappear. Sources mention hypomeiones, men who had become inferiors, alongside mothakes, nothoi, neodamodeis and other categories whose precise definitions vary by period and author. Some were raised near citizens, some freed through service, some connected to mixed or irregular descent. The proliferation of labels shows a society managing movement around a guarded centre. Sparta was not divided into three perfectly sealed boxes. It was a hierarchy with many ledges and few routes to the top.

Citizen women occupied one of its most striking positions. Girls received physical and choral education more publicly than in many Greek poleis. Women could inherit and hold property in their own names, manage estates during men's absences and gain influence through kinship and wealth. Aristotle, hostile to the arrangement, claimed that women controlled nearly two-fifths of Spartan land in his day. The figure cannot be checked as a survey, but the complaint confirms that female property mattered to contemporary explanations of Sparta's problems.

Power did not make women citizens. They did not vote in the assembly, become ephors or sit in the Gerousia. Their public value was tied heavily to reproduction, household continuity and the production of legitimate citizen sons. A wealthy Spartiate woman also stood above helot and perioikic women whose labour and rights differed sharply. The phrase Spartan women therefore

needs the same denominator check as the word Spartans. The most visible women belonged to the ruling class.

The citizen shortage, often called oliganthropia in the ancient analysis, exposed the cost of the boundary. Herodotus presents thousands of Spartiates in the Persian Wars. By the fourth century, Aristotle described a citizen body reduced below one thousand. Exact comparisons are hazardous because sources count different categories and idealise earlier numbers, but the direction is clear. Death in war, late marriage, reproductive patterns, property concentration, unequal inheritance and loss of status for failed contributions all contributed. No single cause explains the contraction.

Sparta responded by using non-citizens more heavily, freeing some helots for service and relying upon allies, while continuing to protect the distinction that made citizenship valuable. This is the membership trap. The system generated trust by making entry hard and expulsion possible. Those same mechanisms made recovery difficult when numbers fell.

Equality within a closed elite can be perfectly compatible with domination outside it. More than compatible, it can depend upon it. The Homoioi looked similar because differences in labour, freedom and production had been pushed down the social order, while differences in wealth were restrained in public rather than abolished. Sparta's famous equality was therefore a technique of cohesion. It was never a description of the whole society.

The Constitution Managed Rivalry

Spartan government looked simple from a distance and argumentative from inside. Two hereditary kings from separate royal houses commanded armies, performed major priesthoods and embodied dynastic prestige. Twenty-eight elders over the age of sixty joined them in the Gerousia. Five ephors were chosen annually. The citizen assembly voted on public decisions. Later political thinkers admired the mixture because monarchy, oligarchy and a limited popular element appeared to restrain one another. The diagram is tidy. The operation was not.

Dual kingship did not mean two equal chief executives sharing a modern office. The Agiad and Eurypontid houses possessed separate genealogies, rival interests and uneven personal authority. Kings led campaigns, conducted sacrifices and held privileges, but they could be fined, prosecuted, recalled or politically isolated. One king might remain at home while another commanded abroad. Disputes between Cleomenes I and Demaratus, Pausanias and the ephors, or Agesilaus II and rival politicians show offices colliding through people rather than balancing automatically.

The ephors supplied the sharpest counterweight. Elected for one year and unable to repeat the office, they convened bodies, supervised aspects of public life, received envoys and could bring kings to account. Ancient writers later gave them almost unlimited reach, and the office changed across time. Their short tenure prevented one ephorate from becoming a permanent dynasty, while collective authority allowed five ordinary citizens to confront

hereditary kings. Annual turnover was not democratic equality. It was a way of making oversight powerful and temporary at once.

The Gerousia carried the opposite logic. Its twenty-eight non-royal members served for life after election from citizens over sixty. It prepared business, judged serious cases and held prestige that age and tenure made difficult to challenge. Aristotle criticised the election procedure and the absence of accountability. Admirers saw experienced restraint. Both readings identify the same feature: the council insulated important decisions from rapid popular change.

The assembly is harder to recover. The Great Rhetra, preserved in Plutarch and linked to early constitutional settlement, instructs rulers to convene the people at a named place and gives the citizen body a role in decision. A later clause, or perhaps an original qualification, allowed kings and elders to reject a crooked decision. Scholars dispute the date, wording and constitutional stages behind the text. Classical accounts show assemblies voting, but the degree of open debate and the methods by which proposals could be altered remain uncertain. It is safer to picture controlled participation than either a powerless crowd or a miniature democracy.

Procedure mattered because no office owned the whole state. Kings possessed command and sacred authority. Ephors could obstruct and accuse. Elders framed and judged. Citizens conferred legitimacy through collective decision. Informal networks, wealth, family and reputation moved through every office. A con-

stitution is therefore not the sum of titles. It is the sequence by which a proposal becomes action and the points at which an opponent can stop it.

This divided structure helped Sparta survive bad kings and ambitious commanders. Pausanias, victor at Plataea, was investigated and died after taking refuge in a sanctuary. King Leotychidas was convicted of bribery and exiled. Pleistoanax faced accusations and exile. The system could discipline eminent men, though political enemies and faction shaped the charges. Accountability existed. Impartial administration did not descend from the mountains.

Secrecy also mattered. Spartan decision-making often appeared opaque to outsiders, and short public answers became part of the city's style. The state could delay, consult or reverse without producing the speeches through which Athens advertised disagreement. This has encouraged the false idea that Spartans did not argue. They argued inside institutions whose record is poor and whose public culture valued the appearance of settled unity.

The useful lesson is friction. Stable government does not require its parts to agree about first principles. It requires conflict to pass through recognised channels often enough that rivals prefer procedure to immediate force. Sparta managed that task for centuries within a brutally restricted citizen body. The achievement was real. So was the restriction.

Religion Made the Discipline Sacred

Sparta is regularly described as a military state and rarely described as a religious one. That order should be reversed. War occupied a central place in citizen identity, but warfare itself operated inside ritual, sacrifice, festival and divine consultation. The Spartiate did not understand discipline as a secular technology later decorated with gods. The gods were part of the chain of command.

The kings held major priesthoods and carried sacred authority with the army. Before battle, sacrifices and omens mattered. Campaigns could be delayed or limited by festivals and ritual obligations. In 490 BCE, the Spartans told the Athenians they could not march before the full moon, arriving after Marathon. In 480, the Carneia and the Olympic festival helped explain why only an advance force went to Thermopylae while the main Peloponnesian mobilisation waited. Modern readers often treat these decisions as excuses or absurdities because they assume military necessity was the one serious value. Spartan institutions did not recognise that separation.

The calendar formed citizens through collective performance. The Hyakinthia at Amyclae combined mourning for Hyacinthus with celebration of Apollo. The Gymnopaidiai displayed choruses and endurance in the civic centre. The Carneia bound communities through sacrifice, music and ordered participation. These were not days off from the Spartan system. They were occasions on which

age groups, status and collective memory became visible. A society famous for silence invested heavily in song.

Archaic Sparta was a major centre of poetry, music and crafted objects. Alcman composed choral song there. Tyrtaeus turned endurance and civic obligation into verse. Laconian pottery, bronzes and ivory work travelled beyond the region. The later picture of an artless barracks has pushed this culture out because beauty seems to weaken the austerity brand. It does the opposite. Choral training, procession, rhythm and public performance were methods of coordination. The city taught bodies to move together before the phalanx required it.

Sanctuaries also reveal a Sparta larger than citizen men. Artemis Orthia's sanctuary produced thousands of dedications and became associated with youth ritual. The Menelaion linked the community to Helen and Menelaus. Apollo at Amyclae connected Sparta with a place whose incorporation belonged to the city's early development. Cults gave women, young people, perioikoi and visitors roles that political texts overlook. Archaeology often recovers these people first as small offerings because historians were trained to look for laws and battles.

Later evidence must be dated carefully. Under Roman rule, the contest at Artemis Orthia in which youths endured whipping became a celebrated display watched by visitors. Ancient authors connected it to older training, but the spectacle developed across time and was reshaped for an audience fascinated by Spartan

toughness. It is evidence for Roman Sparta performing its inheritance, not a camera pointed at the sixth century BCE.

Religion also disciplined command. A king who misread or manipulated signs could be accused. Oracles at Delphi legitimated reforms, decisions and royal claims, though stories of consultation were equally useful after the event. Cleomenes I secured the deposition of Demaratus through a corrupted Delphic response, according to Herodotus, then suffered political consequences when the fraud emerged. Sacred authority could restrain power and become a weapon inside faction. The gods did not remove politics. They gave politics another language.

This is the missing pillar because it changes every other one. The agoge trained songs and ritual participation, not merely pain tolerance. Kingship was priestly as well as military. Common meals and festivals bound citizens through sacrifice. Thermopylae became sacred memory, not merely tactical case study. Even Spartan conservatism was expressed as obedience to ancestral custom approved by divine authority.

A modern admirer can copy cold showers without copying Apollo, which is one reason the copied fragment becomes strange. The historical Spartiate was not an athlete following a performance plan. He was a member of a sacred civic order in which courage, status, ancestry and divine favour had been taught to reinforce one another.

Remove religion and Sparta looks like an efficient machine. Put it back and Sparta becomes recognisably ancient: disciplined, argu-

mentative and governed by powers its citizens believed were present.

The Agoge Made Citizens, Not Commandos

The agoge is where modern Sparta becomes a film. A boy is taken at seven, starved, beaten, sent into the wild, trained to kill and returned as a perfect soldier. Ancient evidence supports public supervision, harsh discipline, age organisation, competition and endurance. It does not support a continuous weapons academy manufacturing commandos from childhood.

Xenophon gives the earliest extended account, written in the fourth century BCE by an admirer with close connections to Sparta. He contrasts Lycurgan education with that of other Greek cities. Boys were placed under a paidonomos, supervised by older youths, kept lightly clothed, taught to endure hunger, encouraged to steal food but punished if caught, and trained in obedience. The point was not that theft itself was virtuous. Resourcefulness had to operate under institutional judgement. Even disobedience was arranged by authority.

The programme involved physical exercise, hunting, choruses, dance, competition and relationships between age groups. Music was not an optional soft subject. Greek civic education used song and performance to teach memory, rhythm, religious identity and public conduct. Young Spartans learned how a citizen looked before they learned any technical manoeuvre unavailable to other hoplites. The agoge created recognition among insiders.

Military skill should be stated precisely. Recent scholarship has challenged the idea that Spartiates were professional full-time soldiers. Their army benefited from standardised command, repeated collective experience, fitness and the confidence produced by stable units and hierarchy. Basic drill mattered. The classical evidence does not show citizen men practising weapons every day while the rest of Greece improvised. Spartan superiority, where it existed, was organisational and social before it was technical.

Adult life continued the education. Citizens belonged to common messes, hunted, exercised, served in public roles and remained under observation. Younger men deferred to older ones. Cowardice could produce social exclusion so severe that appearance, marriage prospects and everyday interaction changed. The state did not need a barracks wall around every citizen because peers carried the institution with them.

Girls also received education, including physical and choral training. Ancient male observers connected this to producing strong children and criticised the visibility and speech of Spartan women. The system gave citizen girls a public formation unusual by Greek standards without giving them formal political rights. It trained gendered roles inside one civic project: men for citizen duty and war, women for property, household continuity, ritual and the reproduction of the citizen body.

The evidence becomes less secure when later customs are projected backwards. Plutarch, writing under Rome, provides famous

details about infant inspection, marriage rituals, black broth and childhood severity. Some may preserve classical practices. Others reflect Hellenistic reform, Roman performance or moralising tradition. The agoge itself was revived and reshaped after Sparta lost great-power status. A Roman visitor watching boys at Artemis Orthia saw a city performing the reputation the visitor had paid to encounter.

Education was also exclusion. Helot and perioikic children did not pass through the same route to full citizenship. A few outsiders, boys raised in citizen households or marginal categories could be admitted in exceptional ways, and those exceptions show the value of access. The agoge did not educate the population. It reproduced the ruling group.

That distinction explains both its power and its limit. Shared hardship can create trust, self-command and a language of obligation. It can also teach members to identify the institution's standards with virtue itself and outsiders with deficiency. The curriculum produces the person who can survive it, then uses survival as proof that the curriculum was right.

Spartan education deserves neither worship nor dismissal. It was a sophisticated system of social formation whose military effects came through cohesion, hierarchy and expectation. Calling it brutal captures part of the method. Calling it military captures part of the purpose. Calling it education forces the harder question: what kind of human being was the city trying to make, and for whom was that human being useful?

Reputation Was a Weapon

Sparta's most efficient weapon was often the expectation that Spartans would win. Reputation could steady an allied line, frighten an opponent, attract deference and tell a citizen how much shame would follow failure. It was stored power. Thermopylae did not create it from nothing, but the battle gave it a story simple enough to travel for millennia.

In 480 BCE, Leonidas led three hundred Spartiates to the pass with troops from several Greek communities. When the Persian turning movement made the position untenable, the final defence included the Spartans, seven hundred Thespians and Thebans whose role Herodotus presents controversially, along with helot attendants largely removed from later memory. The three hundred were distinctive because they were citizens selected under a king and because their city already possessed a language of obedience and beautiful death. They were not alone.

The defeat became strategically useful as memory. The epitaph about obeying Spartan laws compressed coalition, terrain, Persian success and later Greek victory into one civic claim. Leonidas' body, the royal sacrifice and the refusal to leave could be remembered without the negotiations and contingencies that make most battles hard to sell. Sparta gained ownership of a collective last stand because its existing reputation made the event look like the fulfilment of character.

Reputation had battlefield substance. Spartan formations were known for order, officers and controlled movement. At Mantinea in

418 BCE, Thucydides describes commands passing through a structured army amid the common tendency of hoplite lines to drift right. The Spartans recovered from confusion and won. Their performance was not flawless. Their organisation made recovery more likely.

The same reputation could become a hostage. At Pylos and Sphacteria in 425, Athenian forces trapped Lacedaemonians on an island. After bombardment and fighting, 292 surrendered, including 120 Spartiates. Thucydides records the surprise that men reputed to prefer death had laid down their shields. Sparta sought a truce and negotiated intensely for their return. The state behaved rationally because scarce citizens mattered more than the slogan. Greece was shocked because the slogan had been mistaken for biology.

Spartan success also depended on people who did not fit the standard image. Brasidas campaigned rapidly and persuasively in the north, using diplomacy and local alliances as much as hoplite intimidation. Gylippus helped reorganise Syracusan resistance to Athens. Lysander built networks, handled Persian finance and commanded naval war. These men were effective because they adapted beyond the narrow land-war model. Their careers also created suspicion at home, where extended commands and foreign relationships threatened the equality citizens were meant to display.

Laconic speech belongs to the same economy. Brief replies implied confidence, discipline and refusal to perform for outsiders.

Many famous sayings come through late collections and cannot be assigned securely to the people named. Their historical accuracy matters less than the consistency of the ideal. A Spartan did not need many words because his city was expected to supply the weight behind them.

The danger arrived when image and capacity separated. Allies resented Spartan commands. Citizen numbers fell. Naval and imperial commitments multiplied. Yet the name continued to demand certainty. Leuctra punctured the expectation on open ground when the Theban army under Epaminondas defeated Sparta in 371 BCE. The event mattered beyond casualties because an assumption had been publicly falsified.

Do not conclude that the reputation was invented. Myths do not need to be false to distort. Spartan cohesion, organisation and courage were repeatedly demonstrated. The distortion came when achievements under particular conditions became a timeless racial or moral essence. Once that happened, every defeat required an excuse and every ally became scenery.

Reputation is real power with an expiry risk. It works while behaviour, institutions and resources keep renewing it. Sparta mastered the first half of that equation and became the world's favourite example of what happens when the second half is forgotten.

Victory Exposed the System

Sparta defeated Athens in 404 BCE and began losing the system that had won. The paradox is not that victory made Spartans suddenly corrupt. Empire changed the scale and type of work. A citizen order built around land, messes, seasonal campaigning and leadership within a Peloponnesian alliance now had to manage fleets, tribute, overseas garrisons, civil conflicts and commanders who spent years beyond peer supervision.

The final phase of the Peloponnesian War already showed the adaptation. Sparta could not defeat the Athenian maritime empire by producing courage more intensely. It needed ships, experienced crews and money. Persian support supplied finance, while Lysander built a navy and political network capable of cutting Athens from grain and forcing surrender. The victory was Spartan. Its mechanism sat awkwardly beside the image of economic self-sufficiency and hostility to precious metal.

After 404, Spartan harmosts and allied oligarchies extended control across Greek cities. The Thirty at Athens became the most notorious client regime, though Sparta soon helped permit a settlement after their fall. Lysander's influence frightened other Spartiates. King Agesilaus campaigned in Asia and across Greece. The state that had justified war as liberation from Athenian empire now faced resistance to its own interventions. Moral vocabulary changed owner faster than imperial behaviour changed form.

The Corinthian War from 395 to 387/6 forced Sparta to fight a coalition that included former allies and Athens. A Persian fleet

helped destroy Spartan naval power at Cnidus in 394, an elegant reversal after Persian money had helped create it. The King's Peace restored Spartan authority on the Greek mainland by accepting Persian control of the Greek cities in Asia and presenting Sparta as enforcer of autonomy. The word autonomy had become compatible with whatever arrangement preserved Spartan leadership.

Internal weakness mattered more with every commitment. Full citizen numbers had been falling, and losses struck a body that could not be replaced easily. Wealth and land concentrated. Mess contributions excluded poorer men. Command abroad created fortunes and relationships difficult to fit inside public sameness. Aristotle later diagnosed a society with too much land in too few hands and too few citizens to use the territory it controlled. His account is argumentative, but the contradiction was visible.

At Leuctra in 371 BCE, the Thebans under Epaminondas defeated a Spartan-led army. Ancient and modern explanations focus on tactical formation, leadership, morale and numbers. No single manoeuvre explains the whole political consequence. The battle killed many Spartiates, including King Cleombrotus, and proved that the army could be beaten. The larger disaster followed when Theban campaigns entered the Peloponnese and supported the creation of an independent Messenian state.

Messenia's liberation removed territory and helot labour that had supported Spartiate households for generations. The opening in voice came due. A system that had converted conquest into cit-

izen leisure lost the conquest and could not reproduce the old citizen order on a smaller base. Leuctra broke the military assumption. Messenia broke the political economy.

Sparta did not vanish. It remained a polis, fought, negotiated and produced reformers. In the third century BCE, Kings Agis IV and Cleomenes III attempted to restore citizen numbers, redistribute land and revive common institutions. Their programmes presented innovation as a return to Lycurgus, proving how useful the founder myth remained. Nabis later pursued another radical regime. Each reform fought over the same question: could the old citizen body be recreated after the society that funded it had changed?

Under Roman rule, Sparta became a respected historic city whose customs attracted patrons and visitors. The agoge and rituals at Artemis Orthia were performed in forms shaped by later conditions. The warrior state became heritage. That afterlife was not a fake appended to dead history. It was the final adaptation of a community whose reputation now brought value even when military dominance had gone.

The loop closes here. Core Idea 1 began with helot labour beneath citizen discipline. The fall from hegemony became permanent when Messenian independence removed much of that labour base. Sparta's decline was not one battle punishing arrogance. It was a system losing the dependencies it had treated as background while its restricted membership had become too small to compensate.

The brand survived because it required none of those resources. A word can keep the discipline and discard the fields. History cannot.

How It Actually Works

The Eurotas valley had powerful communities before Sparta. Mycenaean Laconia contained elite centres, tombs, sanctuaries and connections across the Bronze Age Aegean. Excavation at Ayios Vasileios, south of the later city, has revealed a palatial centre with Linear B tablets and destruction around the collapse of the Mycenaean palace system. The Menelaion ridge preserved another important Bronze Age complex and later became a sanctuary associated with Menelaus and Helen. Classical Spartans did not begin on empty ground. They inherited a region whose ruins could be converted into ancestry.

After about 1200 BCE, the palace order broke apart. Population, settlement and material culture changed across Greece. Later Greeks explained the movement of peoples through stories of the Return of the Heraclidae and the Dorian conquest. The Spartan kings claimed descent from Heracles, turning migration and political formation into a family restoration. Archaeology does not show one neat invasion replacing one population on one date. Greek dialect, burial, pottery and settlement indicate long change, local continuity and new connections. The story gave a mixed process a legitimate winner.

Sparta itself developed from settlements in the Eurotas valley rather than from one heavily fortified urban centre. Ancient tradition named four villages, with Amyclae incorporated from farther south. The community's sparse monumental centre later surprised

visitors accustomed to walls and grand civic architecture. Thucydides used Sparta as a warning against judging power by ruins: if the city were abandoned, future observers might underestimate it, while Athens would look greater than its military strength. He understood the coming archaeological public-relations problem two thousand years early.

The decisive expansion went west. Spartan conquest of Messenia, traditionally divided into two wars, is among the most important and least securely reconstructed events in Greek history. Later narratives supply kings, battles and heroic episodes. Tyrtaeus provides contemporary or near-contemporary poetry from the seventh century BCE, urging endurance and recalling conflict over Messenia. The broad result is secure. Sparta brought a large territory and population under control, and much of the conquered population became helots.

The conquest created both capacity and danger. Produce from Messenia supported Spartiate households. The need to control a large unfree population encouraged solidarity, military readiness and suspicion of internal division. That does not mean every Spartan institution was invented in one emergency. Dual kingship, councils, assemblies, age structures, messes and education developed through different processes. Later memory assigned them to Lycurgus because one founder could make accumulated compromise look like intentional design.

The Great Rhetra belongs to this obscure formation. Plutarch preserves a Delphic constitutional utterance concerning tribes, sub-

divisions, the Gerousia and the assembly. Its language is early, but its date, stages and interpretation remain disputed. Tyrtaeus also linked political order to divine instruction and named kings, elders and people. The evidence suggests that Spartan order emerged through negotiated authority before classical writers turned it into the oldest stable constitution in Greece.

Archaic Sparta was neither poor in culture nor sealed from the wider Greek world. Alcman composed choral poetry. Tyrtaeus wrote martial elegy. Laconian pottery, bronze and ivory work travelled. Sanctuaries at Orthia, Amyclae and elsewhere accumulated dedications. Spartan competitors won at Olympia, especially in chariot events demanding immense wealth. The austere city was once a successful producer of luxury objects and song. Its later restriction of display was a historical change, not a timeless ethnic character.

The military order associated with classical Sparta also grew during this long transformation. The hoplite phalanx was not a Spartan invention, and other Greek citizens trained, campaigned and died in close formation. Sparta's advantage lay in the consistency with which social hierarchy, age and command were carried into the army. Units were subdivided under officers, orders could pass through an established chain and citizens had practised collective movement through drill, hunting, dance and ritual. The organisation was respected because it reduced the confusion common when thousands of armed men tried to turn together. It did not remove confusion. At Mantinea in 418 BCE, Spartan commanders

made mistakes, units drifted and the line nearly opened before organisation helped recover the battle.

The army also extended beyond Spartiates. Perioikic hoplites, Sciritae from the northern frontier, helot attendants, freed helots, allies and later mercenaries all appear in Spartan warfare. The full citizen stood at the symbolic centre, but campaigns depended upon forces with different rights and motives. As citizen numbers fell, the distance between the image of a citizen army and the composition of the army widened. Sparta did not respond by admitting everybody who fought. It created and used more subordinate categories.

By the sixth century BCE, Sparta had become the leading power in the Peloponnese. It did not annex every neighbour. It built alliances, most famously the network later called the Peloponnesian League, in which allies retained their own governments and supplied forces under Spartan leadership. The arrangement gave Sparta depth without direct administration across the whole peninsula. It also meant that policy depended upon allied consent and that Spartan power was collective even when later memory used the singular.

Kings could act aggressively within that system. Cleomenes I intervened in Athens, helped expel the Peisistratid tyranny, then failed in attempts to control what followed. He fought Argos and managed royal rivalry through Delphi in ways Herodotus presents as both forceful and corrupt. His career shows a Sparta capable of in-

tervention, improvisation and political overreach before the Persian Wars made Leonidas the preferred royal type.

When Darius invaded Greece in 490 BCE, Spartan troops arrived after the battle of Marathon, having observed the religious restriction attached to the lunar calendar. Ten years later Leonidas led the advance force at Thermopylae. The pass fell. The stand became the moral centre of the resistance, while the naval battle of Salamis and the coalition victory at Plataea in 479 produced the strategic result. At Plataea, Pausanias commanded a force containing Spartiates, perioikoi, helots and allies. Sparta's prestige reached its height through an army that proved the state was larger than its citizens.

The Persian Wars also fixed the contrast between Sparta and Athens in later thought. Sparta supplied the leading land power and a king who died. Athens supplied ships, walls, speeches and an empire. Greek writers could then use the pair as rival answers to the same question: should a city trust discipline or debate, land or sea, stability or innovation? The contrast was productive and misleading. Sparta had assemblies and faction. Athens trained bodies and enforced obedience. Each city became clearer as an idea by losing inconvenient similarities.

The victory also produced trouble. Pausanias became entangled in accusations of arrogance, treason and dealings with Persia. He died after taking sanctuary when Spartan authorities sealed him in. Whether every allegation was true is less important than the institutional response. A commander whose authority grew abroad

could become dangerous at home. Sparta preferred successful generals who returned to peer supervision.

In the 460s, a major earthquake struck Laconia. Ancient casualty figures are inflated and accounts differ, but the disaster was followed by a long helot revolt centred on Mount Ithome. Sparta requested allied assistance, then dismissed the Athenian contingent, helping turn suspicion into the hostility that defined the next generation. The episode exposed the domestic dependency beneath foreign power. A state feared across Greece could still be trapped by resistance from the people working its land.

The Peloponnesian War began in 431 BCE after years of conflict between Athens, Sparta and their allies. Sparta possessed the stronger land reputation, Athens the maritime empire. Early Spartan invasions could damage Attic agriculture but not force surrender behind the Long Walls. Plague, revolt, finance, naval skill and allied politics repeatedly changed the war. The simple contest between soldiers and sailors became a twenty-seven-year lesson in why each side had to learn the other's kind of power.

Sparta produced adaptable figures. Brasidas moved north, won support among cities subject to Athens and died at Amphipolis in 422. Gylippus helped defeat the Athenian expedition in Sicily. At the same time, Pylos and Sphacteria showed the vulnerability of the citizen ideal when trapped troops surrendered. The Peace of Nicias paused rather than solved the conflict.

After Athens' Sicilian disaster, Persia and Sparta found common interest. Persian finance supported a Peloponnesian fleet. Lysander

cultivated Prince Cyrus, reorganised command and defeated the Athenians at Aegospotami in 405. Athens surrendered the next year. Its walls were dismantled, its empire dissolved and an oligarchic regime installed. The city famous for land war had won through sea power, foreign money and one commander's personal network.

Victory altered life inside Sparta as well. Commanders returned with foreign contacts and access to money. Allies and subjects brought petitions, gifts and resentment. The old public style required citizens to appear similar while imperial service created new opportunities for distinction. The scandal was not that wealth entered a previously cashless city. It was that wealth acquired through distant command became harder for peers to monitor. Lysander's monuments and network advertised a scale of personal influence that Spartan institutions had been designed to distrust.

Spartan hegemony after 404 generated resistance quickly. Garrisons and harmosts appeared across cities. Allies resented intervention. Lysander's influence alarmed citizens at home. Agesilaus II campaigned in Asia and returned to fight a coalition in the Corinthian War. In 394, a Persian-backed fleet destroyed Spartan naval power at Cnidus. The King's Peace of 387/6 restored Spartan leverage in Greece while conceding the Greek cities of Asia to Persia. Sparta enforced autonomy through selective coercion, which is what hegemonic powers often mean by a universal principle.

The confrontation with Thebes brought the limit. Sparta seized the Theban citadel in 382, then lost control. At Leuctra in 371, a Theban army defeated King Cleombrotus and killed a heavy proportion of the Spartiates present. Epaminondas invaded the Peloponnese, helped establish Megalopolis and restored Messenia as an independent state. The loss of Messenia permanently reduced Spartan resources and revealed how deeply citizen life had depended upon conquest.

The defeat did not leave the city defenceless. Agesilaus organised resistance when Theban forces entered Laconia, and Sparta itself was not taken. That survival later encouraged the comforting claim that Sparta had no walls because its men were the walls. In practice the open settlement benefited from terrain, allied forces, enemy limits and emergency defence. The boast worked because it converted a narrow escape into proof of an old principle.

The demographic problem now became harder to disguise. The loss of Messenian estates reduced the produce available to citizen households, while the demanding route to full status remained. Sparta could field armies, but the proportion of full citizens inside them kept falling. Military need pushed the state towards people its ideology placed below the centre, including freed helots and mercenaries. The system preserved the rank and diluted the army around it.

Sparta continued. It fought at Mantinea in 362, survived Macedonian dominance and remained politically distinctive. Hellenistic reformers Agis IV and Cleomenes III tried to enlarge citizenship, re-

distribute land and revive the messes. Their programmes used Lycurgus to authorise change. Nabis later ruled through another contested reform regime. The old constitution had become a language in which rivals argued about a society that no longer existed in classical form.

Roman Sparta turned reputation into civic capital. Emperors and elite patrons honoured the city. Visitors watched rituals and the endurance contest at Artemis Orthia. Local families claimed old names and offices. Sparta did not end when it ceased to dominate Greece. It became a community maintaining, revising and selling the memory of dominance.

That is the full movement. Conquest funded the citizen order. Institutions converted resources into cohesion. Reputation multiplied the result. Victory enlarged the task. Citizen contraction and the loss of Messenia removed the foundation. The city survived by performing the part that history had made famous.

How we know

Sparta is unusually difficult to know because the evidence is rich in judgement and poor in ordinary self-description. The city produced poetry, inscriptions, dedications, buildings and administrative traces, but no surviving continuous history written by a classical Spartiate. Most extended accounts come from outsiders. That does not make them useless. It means their questions must remain attached.

Tyrtaeus and Alcman are early and therefore precious. Their fragmentary poetry shows war, political order, choral culture and civic values before the classical mirage hardened. Poetry is not a census. It preserves language, ideals and occasions rather than a complete social system.

Herodotus and Thucydides provide the strongest narrative evidence for the fifth century. Herodotus records kingship, Thermopylae, Plataea and customs through stories shaped by his larger inquiry into power and the Persian Wars. Thucydides knew Spartan politics and war closely but wrote a selective history whose speeches and causal analysis serve his argument. Silence in either author is not proof that an institution did not exist.

Xenophon's Spartan Society is the earliest sustained account of the constitution and education. He admired Lycurgus and had personal connections with Sparta, which gives him access and a programme. His praise tells us what an intelligent fourth-century supporter thought the system did. It does not certify that every rule was ancient, universal or still functioning as described.

Plato and Aristotle used Sparta comparatively. Plato borrowed and transformed Spartan practices in philosophical constitutions. Aristotle criticised property, women, ephors and citizen decline as part of his analysis of regimes. Both are indispensable precisely because they were arguing. A hostile witness can reveal a problem and exaggerate its cause in the same paragraph.

Plutarch wrote centuries later under Roman rule. His Lives of Lycurgus, Lysander, Agesilaus, Agis and Cleomenes preserve earlier

authors now lost, local traditions and moral anecdotes. They also combine periods and organise evidence around character. Famous details found only in Plutarch, especially about early institutions, require explicit caution. Late does not mean invented. It means transmitted through more layers.

Archaeology corrects the text-centred image. Sanctuaries reveal art, gender, youth and exchange. Survey places Sparta inside Laconia and Messenia rather than inside the citizen centre alone. Burials and settlements challenge claims of total exceptionalism. New discoveries such as the palace at Ayios Vasileios revise the regional prehistory. Archaeology still has its own gaps: ancient Sparta was continuously inhabited, excavation is uneven, mud brick disappears and political status rarely labels a skeleton.

The method is therefore triangulation. Date the source, identify its purpose, separate classical practice from later revival, and ask which population the evidence can see. No single account gives Sparta whole. The disagreements are part of the subject, because the Spartan mirage began in antiquity and entered the archive before modern historians arrived.

What People Get Wrong

“Spartan babies were thrown from Mount Taygetus”

The familiar story comes from Plutarch, writing centuries after classical Sparta. He says newborn boys were examined by elders and that infants judged weak or deformed were sent to a place called the Apothetae near Taygetus. Modern retellings converted this into babies being thrown from a cliff under a systematic state eugenics programme.

The evidence cannot carry that confidence. Contemporary classical sources do not describe a regular Spartan inspection and killing system, and Plutarch's account belongs to a biography designed to explain how Lycurgus subordinated private life to the city. Infant exposure occurred in the Greek world, and disabled or unwanted children faced danger, but that wider practice does not verify one uniquely Spartan procedure or the cinematic cliff.

The responsible conclusion is narrow. Plutarch preserves a late tradition expressing the idea that citizen children belonged to Sparta's collective future. Whether it records a stable classical institution is uncertain. The most graphic part is the least secure and the most repeated, because a Spartan childhood without a death test feels insufficiently Spartan to later audiences. The myth also lets modern people discuss eugenics through one convenient ancient villain while forgetting that abandonment of infants was not confined to Laconia.

No archaeological discovery can settle the whole practice, because exposure often leaves no organised deposit and the location named by Plutarch is uncertain. The absence of a nursery-sized mass grave is not proof of humane policy. It is another reason to stop claiming that one late paragraph has been excavated into certainty.

“Spartan boys became professional soldiers at seven”

The publicly supervised education began around seven in the standard ancient account. Boys were organised by age, trained in obedience and endurance, and judged by older citizens. That did not make seven-year-olds professional soldiers in the modern sense. Xenophon stresses discipline, limited clothing, controlled hunger, competition and supervision. He does not describe years of daily weapons instruction.

Music, dance, religion, hunting, physical exercise and social relationships formed the programme. Its purpose was to produce a recognisable Spartiate: obedient to lawful authority, competitive before peers, capable of discomfort and fluent in the city's rituals. Adult military effectiveness came from cohesion, organisation, fitness, hierarchy and repeated collective service more than from secret technical skills unknown to other Greeks.

Calling the agoge a military academy creates a second error. It makes adult citizens seem to live permanently in barracks and removes politics, property, ritual and household life. Spartiates had unusual freedom from agricultural labour because helots worked

the land. They still held office, managed interests, hunted, worshipped and argued. The system made ruling citizens whose central obligation included war. “Professional soldier” replaces social formation with an action-film job description.

The distinction matters because professionalisation is a claim about specialised labour. Spartiates were a ruling class relieved from much productive work, not salaried technicians whose only occupation was combat. Their public life was broader and their privilege was deeper.

“Three hundred Spartans stood alone at Thermopylae”

Leonidas commanded three hundred Spartiates, and their deaths became the centre of the story. They were never the whole Greek force. Several thousand troops initially defended the pass. When the Persian turning movement made the position untenable, seven hundred Thespians remained for the final fighting. Four hundred Thebans were also present, though Herodotus' account of their loyalty is hostile and disputed. Helot attendants accompanied the Spartans and largely disappeared from commemoration.

The correction does not diminish Leonidas. A king stayed with a selected citizen force under conditions that made death likely, and the choice became a model of obedience. It does show how coalition warfare becomes one city's property. Thespians lacked Sparta's reputation, so comparable death produced unequal fame.

Thermopylae was also a Persian victory, not the battle that ended the invasion. Salamis and Plataea mattered more to the outcome. The pass became immortal because defeat displayed courage in a form uncomplicated by the negotiations, allied interests and strategic aftermath surrounding victory. Three hundred is the slogan. The battlefield held thousands. Memory cropped the rest.

A coalition chose the pass, supplied the force and later finished the war. Sparta supplied the image that survived. Those are separate achievements, and only the first three words of the modern title usually remember the difference.

“Spartans never surrendered or lost”

At Sphacteria in 425 BCE, 292 Lacedaemonians surrendered to Athens, including 120 Spartiates. The event shocked Greece because Spartan reputation had made surrender appear contrary to nature. Sparta negotiated urgently for the prisoners' return, proving that the state valued scarce citizens more than a rule requiring each one to die on command.

Spartan armies suffered other defeats. Thebes beat a Spartan army decisively at Leuctra in 371. Spartan naval power was destroyed at Cnidus in 394 by a Persian-backed fleet. Commanders failed, cities rebelled and allies refused. The claim survives by treating each reverse as exceptional, not fully Spartan or redeemed by courage elsewhere.

The stronger historical claim is narrower. Spartan citizen forces developed an unusual reputation for cohesion and controlled movement, and that reputation affected enemies and allies. It was a military resource, not immunity. Sphacteria showed that Spartans could calculate survival. Leuctra showed that opponents could calculate how to beat them. Neither event makes earlier discipline imaginary. It makes the discipline historical, which means effective under conditions and vulnerable when those conditions change.

An invincibility myth also hides victories by non-Spartan allies and commanders. Success belongs to the whole system when it wins, then defeat is assigned to circumstance when it loses. That accounting method can protect any reputation indefinitely.

“Spartan women were equal to men”

Spartiate women received public physical and choral education, could inherit and own property, managed estates and appeared more visibly in ritual and public speech than elite Athenian women. These differences were substantial. They did not make women citizens or political equals. Women did not vote in the assembly, sit in the Gerousia, become ephors or inherit either kingship in their own right.

Their economic power also belonged mainly to citizen women within a society resting on helot labour. Kyniska could own a victorious Olympic chariot team because royal wealth paid for horses, trainers and transport. A helot woman might work inside

the system that generated such wealth while remaining nearly invisible to authors praising female freedom. "Spartan women" misleads when one privileged group stands for every woman under Spartan control.

The state valued citizen women as mothers of citizens, managers of property and carriers of dynastic wealth. That importance created room for authority while preserving male political sovereignty. Power and equality are different measurements. Sparta gave some women more of the first than many poleis did. It did not grant the second.

Comparison with Athens explains why ancient observers were startled. It does not provide a scale whose other end is modern equality. A wider room inside patriarchy remains inside patriarchy.

"Spartans rejected money, luxury and private wealth"

Later tradition credited Lycurgus with banning gold and silver currency and imposing heavy iron money so inconvenient that theft and luxury became pointless. The story expresses Spartan restraint beautifully and describes classical economic life badly. Sparta traded, received tribute, financed campaigns and operated inside a Greek world using precious metal. Persian money became indispensable to the naval victory over Athens.

Private wealth never disappeared. Citizens needed land and produce to maintain mess contributions. Women inherited substantial property. Elite families bred horses and entered chariot teams,

one of the costliest status competitions in Greece. A society without wealth does not produce multiple Olympic victories in four-horse racing.

Sparta restricted display and cultivated hostility to some forms of consumption. That is different from abolishing property. Public sameness concealed or redirected competition, while poorer citizens could lose status when they failed to contribute. The state objected more consistently to visible luxury than to rich Spartans. Once empire brought silver, tribute and overseas command into citizen life, the old language of austerity became harder to reconcile with fortunes victory created.

Austerity governed what could be displayed without shame. It did not erase the estates, inheritances and dependent labour from which public restraint was financed.

“Lycurgus designed the whole Spartan system”

Ancient writers credited Lycurgus with the council, assembly, common messes, education, land division, iron money and the decision to make Sparta unlike every other city. They disagreed about when he lived, where he travelled and which institutions belonged to him. Plutarch opens his *Life* by admitting that almost nothing secure can be said about the man.

The institutions developed across centuries. Dual kingship had dynastic roots. The Great Rhetra belongs to difficult early evidence. Ephoral power grew through a process no surviving source

can date cleanly. The agoge changed and was later revived. Equal land allotments are especially doubtful when classical evidence shows private wealth and inheritance.

Lycurgus solved a political problem for Spartan memory. If the system came from one founder backed by Delphi, reform could be presented as restoration rather than invention. Hellenistic kings changed citizenship and property while claiming to recover his laws. The historical figure may preserve memories of early lawmakers. The complete designer is a founding myth that turned conflict, conquest and compromise into one plan. That plan was useful inside Sparta and irresistible outside it.

The founder survived every contradiction because any failed practice could be blamed on departure from his design. A constitution attributed to a lost original can never be disproved by the society that claims to have abandoned it.

Use It

Sparta is useful because it demonstrates how a reputation can detach from the system that produced it. Discipline, courage, austerity and cohesion were real features of Spartan citizen culture. They were sustained by land, helot labour, perioikic production, restrictive citizenship and constant political control. The modern brand keeps the virtues and removes the supporting structure. To use Sparta properly, put the structure back.

Begin with the invoice test. Whenever austerity is praised, ask who supplies the material conditions that make the austerity possible. Spartiates could devote unusual time to common dining, politics, exercise and war because dependent cultivators produced much of their food and free non-citizen communities performed essential economic and military work. The citizen's rejection of ordinary labour was not independence from labour. It was command over somebody else's.

This does not invalidate discipline. It measures it. The useful correction is not that Spartans were frauds because helots farmed. It is that character and structure cannot be separated. A person may endure hardship voluntarily inside an institution funded by involuntary hardship elsewhere. Admiration becomes less sentimental when both experiences remain in view.

Then distinguish citizen culture from the whole society. Ancient authors often use "Spartans" when they mean full male citizens, although citizens were a minority within the state. Women, perioikoi,

helots, freed helots and men of reduced status lived under Spartan power without sharing identical rights or obligations. Whenever a society is described by the behaviour of its ruling class, ask how many people have disappeared into the name.

This is especially important with equality. The Homoioi could experience intense sameness through messes, education and public obligation while ruling a deeply unequal population. Equality within a closed group can strengthen hierarchy outside it. The same pattern appears whenever members of an elite suppress visible differences among themselves and mistake their internal solidarity for justice across the institution.

Use the membership test next. Spartan citizenship was not merely inherited and stored. Men had to pass through accepted education, enter a mess, maintain contributions and preserve public standing. The system made belonging valuable by making exclusion possible. As property concentrated and citizen numbers shrank, the state protected demanding standards while losing the people needed to sustain them. Ask whether an institution's purity rules are preserving its purpose or gradually making performance impossible.

Apply the founder test to Lycurgus. When many institutions are attributed to one distant lawgiver whose date and biography cannot be fixed, the story is doing political work. A founder turns conflict and gradual change into one coherent design. Later reform can then be presented as restoration rather than innovation. Whenever an organisation invokes original principles, ask who re-

constructed those principles, which later problem the reconstruction solves and whether the supposed original was ever practised in the form now defended.

Read divided government as friction, not a diagram. Two kings, ephors, elders and an assembly did not form a modern separation of powers drawn to prevent tyranny in general. They embodied rival status claims within a narrow citizen body and developed across time. The important question is how conflict was processed. Who could convene, accuse, delay, command or refuse? Constitutions work through procedures and expectations, not through the attractive symmetry of offices listed on a page.

Sparta also provides a reputation test. Military standing affected allies and enemies before battle. Opponents could hesitate, allies could comply and citizens could behave according to the image expected of them. Thermopylae magnified that resource. Reputation is therefore material power, not superficial publicity. It becomes dangerous when the institution begins making decisions to preserve the image rather than the capacity beneath it.

Sphacteria reveals the value of puncture. Spartan surrender shocked Greece because the myth of refusal had become strategically relevant. The prisoners did not prove that Spartan courage had always been fictitious. They showed that a reputation built from selected behaviour had been mistaken for a law of nature. Whenever an organisation claims it "always" acts in one way, search for the conditions under which it calculates differently.

Use victory as a stress test. Sparta's defeat of Athens is commonly treated as proof of its system. Victory then required naval war, Persian finance, overseas commanders, garrisons and imperial decisions for which the traditional citizen order was poorly designed. Success enlarged the task faster than institutions adapted. Ask whether an achievement validates the system or exposes costs that the previous scale concealed. Sometimes winning is the event that makes failure visible.

Leuctra and Messenian independence supply the dependency test. Sparta lost a battle and then lost much of the coerced labour base supporting citizen life. The second loss explains more than the first. Institutions often describe their dependencies as background until disruption reveals them as load-bearing. Ask what the organisation cannot replace. That answer identifies the true foundation more reliably than its public values do.

Women require another distinction: power is not equality. Citizen women could own property, inherit, manage estates and appear publicly in ways that startled several Greek observers. They remained excluded from formal citizenship and government. Their position also depended upon status above helot women whose labour and lives are poorly represented. Whenever one privileged subgroup is used to prove general emancipation, change the denominator.

Read education as social reproduction. The agoge trained endurance and cohesion, but it also taught age hierarchy, obedience, performance and recognition among future citizens. Education

does more than transmit skills. It creates the people an institution needs and supplies tests through which insiders recognise one another. Ask which virtues are being trained, which loyalties are being normalised and who can never enter the programme.

The archive needs the outsider test. Sparta left less continuous historical prose in its own voice than Athens. Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Plato, Aristotle and Plutarch approached the city with different evidence and uses. Admiration can idealise. Hostility can exaggerate. Distance can preserve older sources and import later practice at once. Instead of asking which author liked Sparta, ask what question he used Sparta to answer.

This leads to the mirage test. A mirage is not pure invention. It is a distorted image produced from real features, perspective and desire. Spartan austerity, military organisation and unusual institutions existed. The mirage freezes centuries of change, removes non-citizens and combines every striking custom into one timeless constitution. Correct it by restoring dates, status groups and political development, not by declaring that nothing distinctive existed.

Commemoration deserves the coalition test. Thermopylae became Spartan property in later memory even though several Greek contingents fought there and the Thespians remained for the final stand. Plataea, a larger coalition victory under Spartan command, became less culturally dominant. Ask who receives the singular noun after a collective achievement. The answer often follows later prestige rather than proportional contribution. Memory

is another distribution system, and fame can be allocated as unequally as land.

Modern branding should be analysed the same way. Gyms and political movements select endurance, obedience, simplicity or heroic resistance. They rarely select helotage, demographic contraction or dependence upon Persian money. Ask which Sparta has been chosen and what commercial or ideological need the selection serves. A symbol becomes suspicious when every cost has been edited away.

Do not answer this selectivity by assigning Sparta one opposite moral identity. The society was not a fraud hiding beneath propaganda, nor a uniquely evil exception to ordinary Greek violence. It produced genuine courage, public discipline, political sophistication, exploitation and exclusion. A useful history keeps these together because the same institutions helped produce them together.

Limits

Sparta cannot serve as a direct manual for modern education, military organisation or government. Its small citizen body, agrarian economy, hereditary status system, helotage and polis institutions differ sharply from modern states. Analogies become unserious when red cloaks are retained and political economy is discarded.

The evidence also changes across periods. The Sparta of Tyrtaeus, Leonidas, Agesilaus and Roman tourists was not one fixed system.

Later sources sometimes describe institutions revived or reshaped after classical power had faded. "Spartan" must therefore be dated before it is explained.

The final limit is moral comparison. Other Greek poleis also used slavery, excluded women and fought brutally. That context prevents easy claims of unique barbarity. It does not excuse helot domination or convert common injustice into no injustice at all.

The one thing to keep

Whenever somebody praises a Spartan virtue, ask which people, property and institutions made that virtue possible.

The brand shows the discipline. History restores the cost.

Terms

Agoge

The publicly supervised upbringing associated with Spartan citizen youth. It organised discipline, physical training, competition, song and age hierarchy. The system changed across periods and was later revived.

Amyclae

An important settlement and sanctuary south of Sparta, centred on Apollo and the Hyakinthia. Its incorporation belonged to Sparta's early formation rather than one instant foundation.

Apella

A name used for the Spartan citizen assembly and connected with an early festival or meeting. Adult male citizens voted, although procedures and debate remain incompletely known.

Artemis Orthia

A goddess worshipped at a major Spartan sanctuary associated with youth ritual. Under Rome, an endurance contest involving whipping became a celebrated performance for visitors. The Roman spectacle should not be projected backwards unchanged.

Carneia

A major festival of Apollo Carneios. Its observance affected military timing, including the limited Spartan commitment at Thermopylae. Festival discipline was part of state discipline. Religious timing could override immediate strategic preference.

Krypteia

An obscure institution involving selected young men and violence or surveillance against helots. Ancient accounts differ, and its date, purpose and relation to the agoge remain disputed.

Ephor

One of five annually chosen magistrates. Ephors supervised public business, dealt with foreign affairs and could hold kings accountable. Their power varied across time and circumstance.

Eurotas

The river running through the Spartan plain in Laconia. Its valley supported settlement and agriculture, while Mount Taygetus separated Laconia from much of Messenia.

Gerousia

The council of twenty-eight elected elders over sixty, joined by the two kings. Members served for life and prepared business while judging serious political and criminal cases.

Great Rhetra

An early constitutional utterance preserved by Plutarch and associated with Delphi. It names political divisions, elders, kings and assembly. Its date and exact interpretation are contested.

Gymnopaïdai

A Spartan festival featuring choral and physical performance in the civic centre. It displayed age, endurance and collective identity rather than separating cultural life from discipline.

Helot

An unfree labourer under Spartan control, especially in Laconia and Messenia. Helot families worked land supporting Spartiate households. Scholars debate their exact legal and economic conditions. Their communities and identities changed across region and period.

Homoioi

The Similar Ones or Peers, a name for full Spartan male citizens. Their public sameness was institutional and ideological, not proof of equal property across the citizen body. Membership could be lost through economic and social failure.

Hyakinthia

A major festival at Amyclae combining mourning for Hyacinthus with celebration of Apollo. Ritual, procession and shared meals connected Spartan identity to a place older than the classical state. Mourning and celebration occupied the same civic ritual.

Hypomeion

An Inferior, generally understood as a man who had fallen below full Spartiate status. The term shows that citizenship could be lost as well as inherited. Sources reveal the stigma more clearly than the procedure.

Kleros

A landholding or allotment associated with supporting a citizen household. The tradition of equal Lycurgan allotments is late and does not describe classical property distribution reliably. Land remained private, transferable and increasingly concentrated.

Lacedaemonian

A broad political and military name for people under the Spartan state, including Spartiates and perioikoi. Ancient battle totals often use it more widely than the word Spartiate. Context determines whether the term includes several statuses.

Laconia

The south-eastern Peloponnesian region centred on the Eurotas valley. Sparta dominated its communities, resources and routes, while the perioikoi occupied many settlements beyond the citizen centre.

Laconic

Brief in speech, from Laconia. Short Spartan replies became a literary genre and political style. Many famous examples are late, polished or impossible to verify. Brevity became evidence of character through repetition.

Lycurgus

The legendary Spartan lawgiver credited with most distinctive institutions. Ancient authors disagreed about his life and date. His authority allowed later reforms to present themselves as restoration. Hellenistic reformers repeatedly claimed to recover his order.

Messenia

The fertile region west of Mount Taygetus conquered by Sparta and later restored as an independent state after Leuctra. Its land and helot labour supported Spartiate power. Its liberation changed Spartan power more than one defeat alone.

Mora

A major division of the classical Spartan army, subdivided into smaller units under a chain of officers. Exact strengths varied and ancient numerical evidence is inconsistent. Organisation mattered more than a fixed textbook headcount.

Mothax

A person raised alongside Spartiates without possessing straightforward full citizen birth. The category is poorly defined but shows limited routes around the formal membership boundary. Ancient authors use related labels inconsistently.

Neodamodeis

Freed helots who served Sparta militarily, especially during the Peloponnesian War and its aftermath. Their existence reveals growing reliance on men outside the shrinking citizen body. Freedom through service did not create full equality.

Peloponnesian League

The modern name for Sparta's alliance system with many Peloponnesian states. Members retained governments and voted on joint action while recognising Spartan military leadership. It was an alliance, not one centralised state.

Perioikoi

Free inhabitants of communities around Sparta who lacked Spartiate political rights. They served in armies, managed local affairs and carried much craft, commercial and maritime activity. Their communities differed in wealth, location and function.

Spartiate

A full male citizen of Sparta, distinguished from the wider Lacedaemonian population. Status depended on descent, education, common-mess membership, contributions and continued public standing. The category was narrower than Spartan or Lacedaemonian.

Syssition

A common dining group to which adult Spartiates belonged and contributed produce. Failure to maintain contributions could cost full status, linking citizenship directly to household resources. Dining converted household resources into public membership.

Tyrtaeus

A seventh-century BCE poet whose surviving martial elegies provide early evidence for war, civic order and Messenian conflict. Later tradition made him Sparta's model patriotic voice. His poetry cannot supply a full campaign chronology.

Xenelasia

The alleged or occasional exclusion of foreigners from Spartan territory. Sources present it as protection of customs, but it was not a permanent sealed-border policy across all periods. Foreign contact continued despite the ideal of insulation.

Go Deeper

The narrative: Nigel M. Kennell, *Spartans: A New History*. Start here for a compact history extending from Bronze Age Laconia through classical power, Hellenistic reform and the Roman afterlife. Kennell separates classical institutions from later performances that popular accounts combine. His Sparta changes, which is the first requirement of a serious history. The book is concise enough to read straight through and broad enough to expose where the surviving evidence thins. Use it as the chronological frame, then return to its notes whenever a famous custom seems suspiciously timeless. Its greatest service is refusing to let the city die at Leuctra merely because the modern reader has stopped looking.

The primary source: Plutarch, *On Sparta*, translated by Richard J. A. Talbert. This volume collects the Lives of Lycurgus, Agesilaus, Agis and Cleomenes with Spartan sayings. It is vivid, influential and late. Read it to see the engine that created much of the modern Sparta, while keeping Talbert's introduction and notes beside every anecdote. Plutarch preserves earlier material now lost, but he arranges it around character and moral argument. The correct response is neither trust nor dismissal. Mark which details have earlier support, which belong to later reforms and which became famous because Plutarch made them unforgettable. Read the sayings last, once the institutions and chronology are secure, because the sharpest line is usually the easiest evidence to misuse.

The argument: Stephen Hodkinson, *Property and Wealth in Classical Sparta*. Read this when the equal, moneyless citizen society begins sounding too neat. Hodkinson reconstructs landholding, inheritance, women's property, elite expenditure and the concentration of wealth. The book is demanding because the evidence is difficult. That difficulty is the point: the famous economic system rests on late claims that patient analysis repeatedly overturns. It also demonstrates the method this short book can only summarise, testing every institutional claim against property transmission, household incentives and the social consequences of losing the resources required for citizenship. Few books show more clearly how one economic correction can alter military, gender and constitutional history at the same time.

How we know: Paul Cartledge, *Sparta and Lakonia: A Regional History 1300–362 BC*. Cartledge places the citizen city back inside Laconia and Messenia, combining literature, archaeology, geography and social structure. It gives the regional frame needed to understand helots and perioikoi rather than treating them as footnotes to warriors. Use the second edition, and read its conclusions beside newer work where evidence remains contested. The value lies in scale: sanctuaries, settlements, routes and conquered territory are allowed to explain institutions that a biography of kings cannot. It is the best single demonstration that Sparta was a region organised around a citizen centre, not a barracks floating outside an economy. Keep a map open: the argument becomes obvious once Messenia and the perioikic communities stop appearing as empty space around Sparta.

Notes and Sources

1. The Whole Thing in One Page

The cropped Sparta: The distinction between Spartiates, peri-oikoi and helots is basic to modern reconstruction. Davies 2017 shows the importance and complexity of legal status, while Lewis 2021 updates the helot entry in the Oxford Classical Dictionary.

Conquest and dependency: Cartledge 2002, Hodkinson 2000 and Luraghi 2008 support the account of Spartan territorial power and Messenian dependence. Dates and narratives for the Messenian Wars remain disputed.

Citizen contraction: The decline in full citizens is clear across the classical period, though ancient figures are not directly comparable. Aristotle, Politics II, supplies the most famous diagnosis; Hodkinson analyses property and status mechanisms.

2. Why You Should Care

Spartan as an adjective: Modern reception is treated across A Companion to Sparta, especially the chapters on European and North American uses. The adjective selects restraint and toughness while removing the social structure.

Reputation as power: Thucydides IV records the shock of Sphacteria and the prisoner totals. The interpretation of reputation as a

strategic resource is an inference from its effects on allies, enemies and Spartan negotiations.

Divided authority: Esu 2017 and 2024 argue for more complex deliberative procedures than the old picture of a passive assembly. The precise powers of each body changed and remain debated.

3. The Core Ideas

Helot status: Lewis 2018 argues that helots should be understood as privately owned slaves within a distinctive territorial system. Other scholars retain different terminology, but coercive hereditary labour and Spartiate dependence are secure.

Annual declaration and krypteia: The declaration of war appears in Plutarch, Lycurgus 28, and the krypteia in Plato, Aristotle as reported by Plutarch, and later sources. Their date, regularity and institutional relationship are contested.

Perioikoi: Ducat 2018 in *A Companion to Sparta* surveys the free non-citizen communities. Their internal diversity and degree of local autonomy prevent treatment as one uniform occupational caste.

Property and equality: Hodkinson 1986 and 2000 dismantle the model of permanently equal citizen allotments and show the importance of inheritance, female ownership and elite expenditure.

Women and land: Aristotle claims women held nearly two-fifths of the land. The number is his polemical estimate, not a surviving cadastral return. Hodkinson treats it as evidence for substantial female property rather than exact measurement.

Citizen numbers: Herodotus and Aristotle supply widely separated totals. War losses, property concentration, reproductive practice and status rules all appear in modern explanations. No single-cause model commands consensus.

The Great Rhetra: Plutarch, *Lycurgus* 6, preserves the text. Its early language is important, but scholars dispute its date, the authenticity of its rider and the constitutional sequence behind it.

Ephors and deliberation: Xenophon, Aristotle and Plutarch offer different pictures. Esu 2017 emphasises procedure and divided power, correcting both the image of ephoral dictatorship and the idea of a powerless assembly.

Spartan religion: Flower 2018 provides the best concise modern survey. Herodotus supplies the delays around Marathon and Thermopylae, while archaeology at Orthia, Amyclae and the Menelaion broadens the social evidence.

Archaic culture: Alcman, Tyrtaeus, Laconian pottery, bronzes and ivory work show that early Sparta was an important artistic and musical centre. Chapters by Calame, Pipili and Prost in *A Companion to Sparta* summarise the evidence.

The agoge: Xenophon, *Spartan Society*, is the earliest extended source. Ducat 2006 and Kennell 1995 analyse the changing evid-

ence. Roman-period rites cannot be projected unchanged into the classical period.

Professional soldiers: Van Wees rejects the orthodox description of Spartiates as specialised full-time soldiers, emphasising fitness, basic drill, organisation and command. The book adopts that narrower formulation.

Thermopylae: Herodotus VII is the primary account for the coalition, the three hundred, Thespians, Thebans and the final defence. Numbers and motives, especially for the Thebans, require caution.

Sphacteria: Thucydides IV.38 records 292 prisoners, including 120 Spartiates. The event is unusually well documented and directly connected by Thucydides to surprise at Spartan surrender.

Victory and Persian finance: Thucydides VIII and Xenophon, *Hellenica*, show the Persian financial and political support behind the Spartan naval effort. Lysander's personal network was part of the victory and the post-war tension.

Leuctra and Messenia: Xenophon, Diodorus and Plutarch provide narratives of the defeat and aftermath. Luraghi 2008 is central for the reconstruction of Messenian identity and liberation.

4. How It Actually Works

Bronze Age Laconia: The palace at Ayios Vasileios and the Menelaion have revised the region's prehistory. Recent archaeological

syntheses are found in Cavanagh 2018 and the relevant chapters of *A Companion to Sparta*.

Dorian migration: The Return of the Heraclidae is a later explanatory tradition. Archaeology does not support one clean invasion date or complete population replacement.

Messenian Wars: Tyrtaeus is the nearest early witness. Pausanias and later authors provide detailed narratives that cannot be treated as contemporary campaign history.

Peloponnesian alliance: The label Peloponnesian League is modern. Allies retained institutions and participated in decisions, while Sparta supplied leadership. The degree of control varied by moment and member.

Earthquake and revolt: Thucydides I gives the main historical outline. Casualty numbers in later tradition are inflated or uncertain. Luraghi analyses the revolt's role in the formation of Messenian identity.

Imperial period: Cartledge and Spawforth 2002 trace Hellenistic and Roman change. Kennell shows how later agoge performances maintained civic memory rather than preserving classical practice untouched.

Source method: The section follows the source hierarchy in Kennell 2010, Cartledge 2002 and *A Companion to Sparta*. Ancient admiration, hostility and chronological distance are treated as evidence conditions, not reasons for automatic rejection.

5. What People Get Wrong

Infant exposure: Plutarch, *Lycurgus* 16, is the principal source for civic inspection and the *Apothetae*. No contemporary classical text verifies a systematic cliff-killing programme. Wider Greek exposure practices do not prove the Spartan procedure.

Military education: Xenophon describes discipline and social formation. Van Wees and Hodkinson challenge the professional-soldier model. Later Roman rites at Orthia belong to a changed institution.

Thermopylae coalition: Herodotus VII names the initial contingents and those present at the end. Modern commemoration has consistently privileged the Spartan number over allied participation.

Money and wealth: Hodkinson 2000 is the controlling modern study. The iron-money story is late and symbolic; private property, equestrian expenditure and Persian finance are secure.

Lycurgus: Plutarch himself begins by admitting uncertainty. The lawgiver is best treated as a focus for constitutional memory, not the securely dated author of every institution.

6. Use It

Analogy: The lenses are analytical rather than claims that modern organisations reproduce Spartan institutions. The economic, legal and religious differences are too large for direct policy borrowing.

The Spartan mirage: The term is associated with François Ollier and later Spartan scholarship. Powell and Hodkinson 2002 move beyond treating the mirage as pure fiction by examining how real features were selected and frozen.

Victory as stress: The reading of 404 as an institutional stress test draws on the contrast between traditional citizen structures and the naval, financial and administrative demands documented in Xenophon and modern histories.

7. Terms

Terminology: Greek terms are transliterated in common Anglicised forms. Definitions are period-sensitive. Several status labels, especially *mothax* and *hypomeion*, remain disputed and should not be treated as fixed legal codes.

8. Go Deeper

Selection: Kennell supplies the narrative, Plutarch the influential ancient construction, Hodkinson the major socio-economic argument and Cartledge the regional method. Together they expose rather than reproduce the single timeless Sparta.

Bibliography

Primary sources in translation

Aristotle. *Politics*. Translated by C. D. C. Reeve. Hackett Publishing, 1998.

Diodorus Siculus. *Library of History*, Volume VII: Books 15.20–16.65. Translated by Charles L. Sherman. Harvard University Press, 1952.

Gerber, Douglas E., editor and translator. *Greek Elegiac Poetry: From the Seventh to the Fifth Centuries BC*. Harvard University Press, 1999.

Herodotus. *The Histories*. Translated by Robin Waterfield. Oxford University Press, 1998.

Plutarch. *On Sparta*. Translated by Richard J. A. Talbert. Revised edition. Penguin Classics, 2005.

Thucydides. *The Peloponnesian War*. Translated by Martin Hammond. Oxford University Press, 2009.

Xenophon. *A History of My Times*. Translated by Rex Warner, revised by George Cawkwell. Penguin Classics, 1979.

Xenophon. *Hiero the Tyrant and Other Treatises*. Translated by Robin Waterfield. Penguin Classics, 2006.

Modern works

Cartledge, Paul. *Sparta and Lakonia: A Regional History 1300–362 BC*. Second edition. Routledge, 2002.

Cartledge, Paul, and Antony Spawforth. *Hellenistic and Roman Sparta: A Tale of Two Cities*. Second edition. Routledge, 2002.

Ducat, Jean. *Spartan Education: Youth and Society in the Classical Period*. Translated by Emma Stafford, P. J. Shaw and Anton Powell. Classical Press of Wales, 2006.

Esu, Alberto. *Divided Power in Ancient Greece: Decision-Making and Institutions in the Classical and Hellenistic Polis*. Oxford University Press, 2024.

Hodkinson, Stephen. "Land Tenure and Inheritance in Classical Sparta." *Classical Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (1986): 378–406.

Hodkinson, Stephen. *Property and Wealth in Classical Sparta*. Duckworth and Classical Press of Wales, 2000.

Hodkinson, Stephen, and Anton Powell, editors. *Sparta: Beyond the Mirage*. Classical Press of Wales, 2002.

Hodkinson, Stephen, and Anton Powell, editors. *Sparta and War*. Classical Press of Wales, 2006.

Kennell, Nigel M. *The Gymnasium of Virtue: Education and Culture in Ancient Sparta*. University of North Carolina Press, 1995.

Kennell, Nigel M. *Spartans: A New History*. Wiley–Blackwell, 2010.

Lewis, David M. *Greek Slave Systems in their Eastern Mediterranean Context, c. 800–146 BC*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

Luraghi, Nino. *The Ancient Messenians: Constructions of Ethnicity and Memory*. Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Powell, Anton, editor. *A Companion to Sparta*. Two volumes. Wiley-Blackwell, 2018.

Powell, Anton, and Stephen Hodkinson, editors. *The Shadow of Sparta*. Routledge, 1994.

Van Wees, Hans. "Professionalism, Specialization, and Skill in the Classical Spartan Army." In *Skilled Labour and Professionalism in Ancient Greece and Rome*, edited by Edmund Stewart, Edward Harris and David Lewis. Cambridge University Press, 2020.