SPARTA GOVERNMENT

Sparta was ruled by two kings. These kings would lead the army in times of war. In addition to the kings, there were five ephors (magistrates) that were elected from aristocratic families. Sparta also had a council that created laws. The council was made up of the two kings and twenty-eight elders. The elders had to be sixty years old or older to qualify for the position. These leaders took the laws to an assembly made up of citizens for an up-or-down vote without discussion or alterations. The only way to become a citizen of Sparta was to be a descendent of the original Doric invaders who settled the city. This requirement caused the number of citizens usually to not exceed six or seven thousand at any time. Non-citizens outnumbered citizens, but they were kept in check by the strong military that the Spartan government had created.

The Spartan government setup had 4 branches. (The whole principle often attributed to Benjamin Franklin of "checks and balances" was clearly already well appreciated by the Spartans.)

1. The two Co-Kings. Two different family lines of limited hereditary monarchs who were kept in check by the other parts of government as well as by each other. One of the two kings was the commander in chief of the army. Which? Aha! That was chosen, on each occasion, by the people – so the co-kings couldn't get too nasty, since they had to compete with each other for the favor of the people. The co-king system also had the advantage of allowing unclarity about succession to be resolved peacefully; in contrast, most single-monarchies such as in England suffered many wars over disputed successions. The kings were also in charge of public roads and were high religious figures.

2. The Gerontes or Gerousia – rich elders. This was a council of 30 consisting of the 2 co-kings plus 28 others each of age≥60 and of noble birth. Held office for the (rest of) their life. Elected by people. Acted as advising body, and court of criminal justice; had "heavy influence on political affairs." Cooperated closely with the Ephors e.g. as co-judges. Had some kind of veto power over actions by assembly.

3. The Ephors. A council with 5 members; supposedly the most powerful branch (combining legislative, judicial, financial, and executive duties, most importantly the latter). They were elected annually and theoretically any Spartan could become an Ephor. Assumed office on the first day of each year (in the Spartan calendar; they knew about equinoxes). Ephors had the power to indict the king. (One king at a time. The king would be indicted, tried before a court consisting of the Ephors and Gerousia [the latter including the other co-king], and if impeached would be de-crowned, or sometimes just fined. At least two kings were thus deposed but at least one was thus-tried but not impeached.) The Ephors also were the supreme court. Two Ephors always went with a king on campaign to control arrogance and to protect the interests of the whole State.

One source said the Ephors existed as early as 757 BC; (the Alexandrians made lists of them) while others claimed they were created about 724 BC to govern while King Theopompus was away conquering Messenia. But Bury, Cartledge, and Huxley agree that they first attained great power (as powerful as the kings) during the 700-600BC century.

4. The Appella or Demos – assembly of the people, held once a month. Every male citizen of age≥30 could participate in the Appella at any time. They did the electing. Also indicated their will on questions of the day (the agenda of those questions was prepared by the Gerontes by a deliberative process; they then were supposed to "stand aloof" to receive the judgment of the people).

The election method was the shout which was actually range voting in essence. Aristotle (Politics) called this "childish," as opposed to something sophisticated and adult like using voting machines and ballots. However, it was unrivaled in its simplicity and transparency – two important virtues – and with a design that theoretically prevents any bias and cheating on the part of the vote counters (provided those counters really were kept in ignorance of what was being voted for when – and even if there was such cheating any major cheat would be immediately apparent to all, which'd plausibly be very dangerous for the cheaters). Historian Paul Cartledge said the Spartan system was presumably "easily manipulated" but didn't say what he meant by that. But actually, I suspect it was Cartledge who was being naive there.

Just how are you going to manipulate it? Bribe voters? Any system would be manipulable in that manner. Tell one faction to shout louder? Opposed factions could also shout louder. Bribe the judges? Due to the unrivaled transparency of the voting, that would be impossible to do without being obvious. Admittedly the system was unfair in that louder, healthier people who could fight their way to the front presumably would get "more votes" – but quite likely the Spartans would just see that as a virtue...

Plus range voting of course has inherent mathematical advantages versus plurality voting, which I think neither Aristotle nor other historians comprehended. So perhaps that whole negative judgment by Aristotle was ill-advised (which wouldn't be the only dumb thing Aristotle said).

"Legislation" as we know it today, basically did not exist in Sparta, and the few laws they had were memorized rather than written.
What were the objectives of education in Ancient Sparta, and how did education prepare students for their roles in society?

Spartans believed in a life of ‘discipline, self denial, and simplicity,’ and so the purpose of education was, simply, to produce an army. When babies were born, soldiers came to check the child. If it appeared healthy and strong, they would be assigned to a ‘brotherhood’ or a ‘sisterhood,’ however if the baby appeared weak and small, the infant would be left to die on a hillside or taken away to be trained as a slave. It was ‘survival of the fittest’ in Ancient Sparta.

Boys
Male Spartan children were sent to military school at the age of six or seven. They lived with their brotherhood. School courses were very hard and painful for boys, and school was described as a ‘brutal training period.’ Between the age of 18 and 20, Spartan males had to pass a fitness test that consisted of fitness, military ability, and leadership skills. If he didn't pass, he became a person who had no political rights and was not even considered a citizen called a perioidos. If he did pass, he would continue to serve in the military and train as a soldier until he was 60, when the soldier could retire to live with his family.

Girls
Girls were trained in their sisterhood, and were taught physical education. They also started school at the age or six or seven. It is unknown as to whether their school was as rough and hard as the boys’, but some historians believe the two schools were very similar in their objectives, to produce a strong group of women.
At age 18, the Spartan girl also had to pass a fitness test. If she passed, a husband would be assigned to her, and she would be allowed to go home, however if she failed she would also become a perioidos. A woman in Sparta things were very different for citizen women than they were in other Greek cities, where women would stay home most of their lives and be controlled by their husband. In Sparta, women had a lot of free will and were almost as good fighters as the men.

What subjects did students take in Ancient Sparta and why?

In ancient Sparta, reading and writing were not very important, so they were taught as a secondary skill for both boys and girls. Education was very military focused for boys and girls, so most of the skills they learnt in school were combative and war centered.

The boys learnt survival skills and other skills vital to being a soldier. Because the Spartan government wanted Spartans to be tough and strong, they weren't given enough food or clothing, so they were encouraged to steal, but if they were caught they were beaten. That was the Spartan way: Lie, cheat, steal, and get away with it, or else.

For girls, school was also very similar. They were taught physical education, which included wrestling, gymnastics, and combat skills. Spartans believed that healthy women would produce healthy babies. Even though Spartan women never had to join the military or the navy, they grew up to be very strong and very good with combat skills.

Women in Ancient Sparta

Women could own property---and did in fact own more than a third of the land in Sparta---and they could dispose of it as they wished. Daughters inherited along with sons. Unfortunately, when we get down to the particulars there are some gaps in our knowledge. Attempts were made to get rid of the practice of needing a dowry to get married. It is possible that endeavors by fathers to get around the law have led to considerable confusion in our eyes as to what was a gift and what was a dowry. Daughters may have inherited half of what a son inherited; it is also possible that if you combine dowry with inheritance they ended up with a full share of the estate.

Spartan Social Class

The society of Ancient Sparta was divided into three main classes. At the top of society were Spartiate. Following the Spartiate were the perioeci and at the bottom, were the helots.

The Spartiate were like the native Spartans in Sparta. The Spartiate were those who could trace their ancestry back to the original, or first inhabitants of the city. they enjoyed all of the political and legal rights of the state. They were also the only ones who could participate in politics. They served in the military, led the military and ran Sparta.

Underneath the Spartiate were the perioeci. The perioeci were foreigners that divided the Spartiate and helots. Due to this primary function, they had many rights and could own land. Although they had to pay taxes, life was swell for the perioeci. The perioeci also had the right to learn how to read and write. They served in the military, as everyone else did, and were in
charge of the trade and communication with Sparta's neighbors.

At the very bottom of society were the helots. The helots were very disliked by the Spartans. The helots came from what the Spartans call Helos. Helos was south of Sparta, but due to Sparta's growing population, Sparta began to expand its territory when they came to a village (Helos). They invaded this village, killed its inhabitants and took some as prisoners. The helots were used as slaves, but were able to earn their freedom by joining the military. Even if they earned their freedom, they were still treated like dirty helots. A few times each year it became legal in Sparta to kill any helot, even if they were free.

So, Ancient Spartan society contained three main social classes. The Spartiate were those who could trace back their ancestry to the original inhabitants of Sparta. Therefore, they were at the top. Next, were the perioeci. They divided the Spartiate from the helots and were granted many rights. Lastly, were the helots. They were slaves and at the bottom of society.

**ART/CULTURE IN SPARTA**

Looking first at architecture, Sparta was distinguished by its early democracy and prosperity, and by the fact that it was unconquered and unplundered until relatively late in ancient times. In short, its monuments were built early and there was no compulsion to replace them. *We should not forget that the splendor of the Athenian Acropolis is largely a function of the fact that the Persians destroyed all the older temples on the site. As a result, Pericles was able to carry out a comprehensive modernization of the entire Acropolis at the very pinnacle of Athenian power, wealth, and artistic prominence.*

Sparta did have buildings and temples, however, that were greatly admired in their own time. The most significant of these were the Menelaion and the Amyklaion. The Menelaion, which dates from roughly 700 BC, was erected as a monument or temple to Menelaos and Helen. It is located near the remains of a Mycenaean palace – allegedly the palace of Menelaos – dating roughly from the 15th century BC. The Amyklaion was admired by ancient historians as the most significant temple in all Lacedaemon. It was built in Sparta’s Golden Age – the 6th century BC. This temple contained a massive bronze statue of Apollo surrounded by colonnades and stoa. Particularly worthy of mention is also the Spartan Assembly Hall, a monumental stoa built in the mid-6th century and greatly admired by visitors to Sparta. The Persian Stoa, built after the victory over the Persians in the 5th century, was later added as a counterpart on the agora and was also significant. In short, the city of Sparta had a rich, varied, and yet urban character – despite the disparaging remarks made by Thucydides.

Without doubt, Sparta was most renowned in its own time for its poetry, music, and dance. *We know of four Spartan poets and lyricists whose works were admired throughout the ancient world, although only fragments of their work have survived the centuries. We know that people traveled great distances to witness the choral and dance contests of the Spartans at their various festivals, particularly the Gymnopaedia and the Hyakinthia. It is also recorded that the Spartans advanced into battle singing. Yet, as with all ancient Greek music and dance, nothing remains for the modern observer to grasp. It is left to our imagination.*
The Spartan City State (Sparta) produced what is probably the most iconic military in ancient history. The ancient Spartan warriors are known for their bravery, professionalism and skill, a reputation well deserved. At their zenith they proved themselves to be the best of the Greek hoplite warriors, the premier fighting force of their time. Spartan political power peaked from the 6th to 4th century BC; however Spartan military power had its roots much earlier.

At age twenty the men of Sparta moved into the barracks and became full time soldiers. Even if they married, which they were expected to due, they lived in the barracks. Military service lasted until the age of forty, duty in the reserves lasted from forty to sixty years of age. In desperate time's men as old as sixty-five could be called up to protect supplies.

Sparta was known for being the only Greek city without a city wall, a famous saying among Spartans went something like, “Our men are our walls.”

Their primary weapon was a spear around 7-9 feet (2.7 meters) in length called a doru. The doru had a leaf shaped spearhead on the busines end and a spike on the other. The spike, called a “lizard killer” could be used to stand the spear up by planting it in the ground or it can be used to finish off fallen enemies that the formation is moving over. Additionally, if the spearhead broke off the spear could then be spun around and the spike used in its place.

Spartan warriors also carried a short sword, the xiphos, to be used as a secondary weapon and in the crush of battle when only a short weapon could be used effectively. The blade of a xiphos was typically about 2 feet (50-60 cm) long. The blade was shaped like a long leaf and could be used for slashing; however they were usually used for stabbing. The Spartans used an even shorter xiphos than the other Greeks, the blade measuring only 1-1½ feet (30-40cm) long making it even easier to use in tight places. The xiphos could be used to stab at the unprotected groin, armpit or throat of an enemy.

Another secondary weapon available was the kops, a short sword with a heavy curved blade that could be used for hacking away at enemies. Although it had a point that could be used for stabbing the weapon was designed to be used almost like a hatchet. The results of the use of this weapon were gruesome, giving it a reputation as a “bad guys” weapon. In the art of Sparta’s arch rival, Athens, Spartan warriors are often depicted using the kops. (See Spartan Weapons for more details.)

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