

C. The Life of a Spartan

1. Youth

- a) Male Spartans were raised by their mother only until age seven.
- b) At seven, they were taken from their families and enrolled in a public school system where they would live and be educated along with others their age until they were twenty.
- c) The three subjects in Spartan school were physical education, music, and poetry.
- d) The students were deliberately underfed, so they would have to steal food to survive. This encouraged them to develop the traits of a thief, such as speed, stealth, and cunning, which were deemed important to a warrior as well.
- e) The training became gradually more intense, until the final two years, when the young men were taught the art of war and they prepared to join the army.

2. Manhood

- a) At age 20, a Spartan male “graduated.” He then joined a “*phiditia*” (a *platoon* of Spartan soldiers). This would be the unit of men he would spend most of his life with for the next ten years.
- b) Only when a Spartan soldier had served in the military for ten years, he earned the right to join the government, and participate in the making of laws for Sparta.
- c) If he survived the next thirty years with distinction, he might be elected to serve as an ephor or a member of the highest aristocratic council serving the kings and ephors.

D. The Life of Spartan Women

1. Spartan girls were also educated by the government, however they did not train to become soldiers. Spartan women had one role only: to manage the land of their families.
2. Spartan men and women did marry, however, the choice of a husband was made by a woman's father, or, if the father was dead, by the government.

E. The Essence of Spartan Government

1. In some ways, as we have seen, Sparta was like a monarchy (or duarchy), and in other ways, like an aristocracy. However, a Spartan “aristocrat” was not taught to seek comfort, privilege, and luxury. In fact, quite the opposite. He was forged into a servant of the government.
2. Every stage of a Spartan's life (from birth!) was controlled by the government, or the “state.”

3. This Spartan government functioned according to a set of laws to which every government agent, including the kings, swore their allegiance. But this does not make Sparta a republic or even a constitutional monarchy. Such terms are reserved for governments where the laws *protect the rights of the citizen against the power of the government*.
4. A system of government in which the individual must live for the state, which controls his life in the name of the “common good,” is known as “communism.”
5. In modern times, the term communism tends to be associated exclusively with communist Russia (the “Soviet Union”), China, Cuba, and North Korea, and with a philosophy called Marxism. But this is *modern* communism. It is not necessary to have a philosophy like Marxism to have a communist government. All you need is the basic premise that the life of the individual is not his own, that he belongs to the government, and his life must be lived in service to the government. This Sparta had as a basic premise. Thus “communism” is the best term to use to describe Sparta.

F. The History of Sparta (c.776-c.500 BC)

1. In the First Messenian War (c.735-715 BC), Sparta conquered its neighbor Messenia.
2. This doubled the territory under Spartan control and greatly expanded the Helot/slave population.
3. After Argos assisted Messenia in a rebellion, Sparta regained control of Messenia through the Second Messenian War (c.682-c.665 BC).
4. Not surprisingly, these are the major known events for the city-state of Sparta in its early/archaic history.
5. Gradually, Sparta conquered others or helped them and made them allies in the “Peloponnesian League.”
6. One way Sparta created allies by assisting the aristocracies of the city-states of Elis and Corinth to regain control of their city-states after they had lost them to tyrannoi. (As we know, the Spartans did the same in Athens, but the Athenians remained independent after that, which was an exception.)
7. Even, Megara, a very close neighbor of Athens, was brought into the alliance.
8. This alliance, which the Greeks called “Sparta and its allies,” was the most powerful military alliance in Greece by 500 BC.