

III. Archaic Sparta

Sparta is the second most important city-state in Greek history for two reasons. First and foremost, its famed warriors literally saved Western civilization in the Greco-Persian Wars, which we will learn about in detail in the next segment. Without the Spartan participation in that war, Athens and its other allies would not have succeeded, and all the wonders of Greece would have been wiped out before they even came into being. Second, Sparta's government was an intriguing model to the Founding Fathers. There were aspects they did not like, but others they admired, including certain "checks and balances" that we will see in how the power of rulers was limited.

A. Spartan Society

1. Sparta was located on the Peloponnese (the peninsula that sticks out from mainland Greece).
2. In the Dark Ages before **c.776 BC**, it had been settled by Dorian invaders. These Dorians, known as the Spartiatai, became the rulers of the region.
2. The people around Sparta who had been conquered by the Spartiatai were known as the Periokoi. They had no part in the Spartan government, but apart from times of war, they were generally left alone.
3. The conquered people within Sparta itself were slaves. They were known as Helots.

B. Spartan Government

1. Duarchy
 - a) Early in their history, the conquering Spartiatai had belonged to two ruling tribes. Since there were two tribes, they choose to co-operate and have one king from each tribe at the same time.
 - b) According to Spartan tradition, the Spartan king Lycurgus had created a set of laws for the Spartans that limited the power of the kings. Their main responsibility was to lead Sparta in times of war. (One king stayed at home, while the other went to war.) However, even here their power was limited, because both kings had to agree before Sparta would officially go to war.
 - c) Although it is a unique arrangement, it is possible to refer the dual kingship of Sparta using the term "duarchy." However, other features of the Spartan government suggest a better term overall to characterize their system.
2. The Five Ephors
 - a) The two Spartan kings were monitored by five officials known as "ephors."
 - b) The kings swore an oath to the ephors to uphold the laws of Sparta, and in exchange the ephors swore to uphold the authority of the kings.

- c) If a king broke his oath, the ephors could arrest him, and put him on trial.
- d) If anyone from the Spartan population rebelled or conspired against the king, the ephors had the authority to kill them. (In particular, the ephors could order the massacre of Periokoi and Helots, if their numbers were getting too great and they threatened the government in any way.)
- e) The “separation of powers” (or “checks and balances” as Americans call them) between officials in Sparta was similar to the aristocracy of the Eupatrids in Athens. But it also involved a set of laws that the Founding Fathers of the United States called a “constitution.” In a way, then it was a constitutional duarchy, or perhaps a constitutional aristocracy. It’s not easy to choose the name from the foregoing alone, but as we shall see there was a powerful premise at the heart of Spartan government that gives us the answer. *Even the Spartiatai did not have the “right to life” in Sparta!*