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ΣΠΑΡΤΙΑΤΑΙ THE SPARTANS



ΣΠΑΡΤΙΆΤΑΙ: The Spartans

The Spartans (referred to as Spartiates once citizenship has been achieved) are arguably the best warriors who ever walked the earth. Here's an overview of who these men are.

Virtues:

Physical fitness, mental strength, and simplicity of soul define the man. The typical and ideal Spartiate is also **humorous, humble, simple, brave, courageous**, and always **thinks positively** (one guy who was not selected to be part of the 300 was nevertheless happy to know that Sparta actually had 300 guys better than him!)

Key terms in Ancient Greek to define Spartans are: **ἀρετή** (**arete**: competence together with character), **ἀνδραγαθία** (**andragathía**: manly virtue), **Καρτερία** (**kartería**: endurance), and **ἐγκράτεια** (**enkrateia**: self-control).

Appearance:

Appearance revolves around physical fitness rather than clothing and accessories. Spartans wear a full beard and long hair, a sign of a free man, which makes the handsome better-looking and the homely more frightening.

Leadership:

Spartan Leaders essentially lead by example. This results in their men admiring them, better understanding their own weaknesses, trying their best to resemble them, and ultimately being more than willing to die by their side to honor them. Such style of leadership leads to superior battlefield successes.

The typical Spartan leader first distinguishes himself by his physical strength and fitness, as well as his athletic performances. In a culture where the male body is celebrated, such features bring admiration from his peers beyond the needs for strength and physical shape required for combat readiness.

The Spartan leader also rises above the pack through his ability to sustain pain and extreme duress. While having their back lashed for example, peers worry less about actual pain than their ability to sustain such physical distress for as long as possible, building a state of mind required of future leaders. Spartans also demonstrate exceptional courage under actual combat situations, and an incredible concern for their peers.

Such state of mind is best described by the Spartan's rule that excuses without penalty any warrior who loses his helmet or breastplate during a battle, but **strips of his citizenship the combatant who loses his shield**. The helmet and breastplate is for the warrior's own protection, while **the shield is for the protection of the whole line**.

Confronted with the skills and valor of their leader, the Spartans clearly face their own limitations and understand how much better their leader is in matters such as sports, combat, or endurance to pain and physical duress. Not only this leads them to admire their leader, but it also prompts them to train and perform to the best of their abilities in the hope of trying to match the exceptional skills of their leaders. Their commitment to their leader is also reinforced with the leader's inclination to share every misery with the rest of his peers. This includes enduring the elements, pain, lack of food, and absolute misery like the rest of his peers. An extremely important factor considering that men sharing misery usually gets closer to each other, leading to better cohesion.

The Spartan's acknowledgement of their leaders' superior skills, character, virtue, physical fitness, and appearances leads to an admiration and commitment to honor them with their life. They see their duty as having to fight to the last breath, to protect, or at worse, honor their peers and leaders. Considering the self conservation instinct, and thus the fear of death, is probably the biggest problem on the battlefield, **Spartans who have achieved a cohesion level that goes beyond death demonstrate exceptional and superior battlefield successes**.

Military Structure (to late 5th Century B.C.):

- **Enōmotía (enomotia: platoon): 32 men** (4 rows of 8 men deep). Usually members of two **συσσίτιον** (syssition, or unit: 16 men) assigned to enomotia.
- **Pentekostis (company): 128 men** (4 enomotiai). Commanded by Pentekonter.

- **Λόχος (lókhos: battalion): 512 men** (4 pentekosteis). Commanded by **Λοχαγός (lochagos)**.
- **Army: 3,584 men** (7 lókhos).

Military Structure (4th Century B.C.):

- **Enōmotía (enomotia: platoon): 24 men** (2 rows of 12 men deep). Usually members of two **συσσίτιον** (syssition, or unit: 12 men) assigned to enomotia.
- **Pentekostis (company) 48 men** (2 enomotiai). Commanded by Pentekonter.
- **Λόχος (lókhos: battalion): 96 men** (2 pentekosteis). Commanded by **Λοχαγός (lochagos)**.
- **μόρα (mora: division): 384 men** (4 **Λόχοι**). Commanded by ptolemarch.
- **Army: 2,304 men** (6 morae)

Chain of Command:

Orders are given directly by the king to the **ptolemarchs**, to be passed throughout the lower officers to the troops.

Formation:

Enomotiai march behind each other in a big row. Before the battle, they position themselves behind their leader to form a phalanx of four columns (each column being 4 rows and 8 men deep). 2 meters are kept between each column. The last troops walk towards the left front to close the gap between the column and to close ranks, hence becoming ready for battle. Olympic game winners, as a honor, are placed in first position.

A Spartan **ἐραστής (erastes: typically older and more experienced mentoring military Mate)** and **ἐρώμενος (erōmenos: typically younger less experienced mentored military Mate)** may find themselves close together in the battlefield at their discretion, but their deliberate posting side by side is not part of the Spartan military organization.

Equipment:

Helmet is in the Corinthian style, with a crest. **ὄπλον (hoplon: round Shield)**, is marked with letter lambda. Spear is long thrusting and about 3 meters in length. Short stabbing sword (designed for close quarter combat deemed more honorable) is worn on the right side, and is attached to a belt around the waist. Protective corselet is also

worn over a cloth tunic covering the upper body. Greaves protect the lower legs. Finally, a red cape is a distinct feature of Spartan warriors.

War:

Before battle, a goat is sacrificed. Everyone is instructed to put on garlands, and the pipers are to play "Kastor's Air".

Frequent campaigns against the same foes are banned, in order to prevent them from getting used to defending themselves. Enemies who surrender are spared, and only those staying in the way are killed.

War is considered a reprieve from the demands of every day life, as it involves less training, less scrutiny and less punishment.

Death:

Execution is by strangulation or hanging. Unless it is another Spartan, in which case it may occasionally be by sword. Suicide is by self-starvation as it shows the highest degree of determination and self control: not an impulsive reaction but a deliberate act.

Burials can take place anywhere with no restriction. Body is wrapped in red cloak and olive leaves. No name on grave plate, except in the case of a man who has died in combat or a woman who has died while giving birth. 11 days of mourning. On 12th day, mourners are to sacrifice to Demeter and abandon their grief.

War gods:

Spartans are devoted to the twin gods **Κάστωρ (Kastor)** and **Πολυδεύκης (Polydeuces)**, as a symbol of their connection to their military partner specifically, and their peers more generally.

Education and Training:

0 to 6 years old: Children of both sexes play together. Care is provided by mother. No formal education.

7 to 18 years old - παῖδες (Paides): At 7, compulsory education begins. Boys are removed from nurse/mother/parents and placed in dormitories in the **ἀγωγή (agōgē)**,

along with boys of same age born between two fixed points (celebration of the major annual festivals: the **Hyakinthia**, **Karneia** and **Gymnopaïdiai**). Boys are separated into age groups, and then **bouai** within age groups.

Education is designed to develop smart obedience, perseverance under stress, and victory in battle. The most intelligent boy with the best judgment and toughest fighting spirit becomes the leader. Other boys watch him, learn from him, and receive punishments from him.

Troop of boys overseen by **παιδονόμος (paidonómos)**. **Paidonómos** chose a leader for each troop, called **εἰρήν (eiren**: two years older than boys in current class) who has the most discretion and fighting spirit. Boys are pushed by **eiren** to fight in order to see their characters, boldness, and courage.

Each year class is given its own name, and is subjected to constant surveillance. Progress from one class to another requires successful undergoing of competitive tests and rituals.

Eiren commands the troops, combats etc... and uses the boys as servants while in his quarters. After evening meal, asks boys to sing and asks other important questions such as who is the best, or who is not a good citizen. Answers has to be reasoned, supported by arguments, while breve and concise. Bite on the thumb for wrong answer, or failure to answer question sufficiently laconically (snappily and wittily). Other punishments include a beat up when caught stealing provisions, or lashes of the whip if caught stealing anything else. **Eiren** may have to justify himself if punishment seems inappropriate (not enough or too much). Any Spartan adult is also allowed to punish children, and children are expected to show respect. This includes walking among adults in the streets of Sparta with their eyes on the floor, and their hands under their coat.

Boys wear one **ἱμάτιον (himation**: cloak), no shoes, and are allowed only a few baths (they are still required to wash), limited massage and oiling. Hair is cropped.

Until age 12, boys study reading and writing (not more than necessary), music (songs that praise those who died for Sparta, condemning those who didn't, and wishing to be brave), as well as physical exercise.

From age 12, training intensifies, including constant physical and sport competitions in gymnasium. Always naked as to not hide any potential physical weakness, while emphasizing on fitness. This includes running, wrestling, as well as throwing the discus

and javelin. Boys also undergo increasingly difficult survival training. Starting with having to cut reeds from the banks of the River Eurotas, with their bare hands, to fill mattresses to serve as beds. In winter, they add thistledown and mix it into the mattress for warmth.

Spartan youths are encouraged to steal their food. If they are caught, however, they are severely punished. This is designed to force them to be more discreet the next time, and to develop the art of stealth.

Although formal education ends at age 18, young men (age 18 to 20) receive more training until age 20, with a 2-year assignment to the army as a non-fighter.

Selection to be part of the **κρυπτεία (Krupteia)** also takes place. Youths are chosen among the brightest and the best. They are only equipped with one dagger and small rations. By day, they hide, rest and sleep. By night, they kill any helot in their way, as well as the ones seen as a threat to Sparta, either because of their intelligence, physique, or strength.

Education Milestones:

- Boy becomes a **rhobidas** at age 14
- Boy becomes a **promikizomenos** at age 15
- Man becomes a **mikizomenos** at age 16 - Must take male partner (**kasen**).
- Man becomes a **propais** at age 17
- Man becomes a **pais** at age 18 - Formal education is completed.
- Man becomes a **melleiren** at age 19 - Assignment in army as non-fighter.
- Man becomes a **homoioi** (full citizen) and an **eiren**, at age 20.

Unit (Common Mess):

Admission to **τὰ συσσίτια (syssitia)**: unit, also referred to as common mess) immediately takes place upon becoming a **ὅμοιοι (homoioi)**: full citizen). Each member of the **syssitia** takes a piece of bread, and, in silence, throws it into a **kaddichos** (bowl) carried on his head by a servant. Peers in favor of admitting newcomer throw the bread as it is. Peers against admitting newcomer squeeze it hard with their hands. Only one peer against admission is sufficient for not accepting newcomer as everybody must be pleased with each other's company.

Phiditia (Monthly contribution required of each **homoioi**):

- 1 μέδιμνος (**medimnos**, about 52 liters) of barley-meal
- 8 χοῦς (**chous**, about 26 liters) of wine
- 5 μνᾶ (**minas**, just over 2 kg) of cheese
- 5 half μνᾶ (about 1 kg) of figs
- Small sum of money for fish and meat
- Share of first fruits or hunting.

All citizens, whatever their wealth or age, take their meals together with other men in their **syssitia** (unit). Exception is for Spartiates coming back late from hunting, or who had to make a sacrifice, in which case, they can eat at home.

No drinking to the point of drunkenness, only to quench one's thirst, and wine is typically mixed with water. **Kothon** is the drinking cup, with a lid that would trap dirt present in the water, allowing the drinker to get cleaner water. Additionally, Spartans never eat too much and are always more or less hungry after a meal. The goal is to train for duress, but also to show food as a fuel for physical performance rather than a pleasure. Main food includes the μέλας ζωμός (**melas zōmos** or **black broth**: pork cooked in its own blood, with vinegar and salt), and barley bread. Meat was left by the elders to the younger ones. Political discussions take place during meals. Members make fun of each other and tell jokes without being indecent, and they learn to accept to be the object of a joke and criticism.

Secrecy in a **syssitia** is paramount, and is part of Spartan life. Accordingly, the oldest member indicates the door to each person entering and says: "Not a word goes out through these".

(Bi)Sexuality:

The young Spartan is not involved, as he grows up, in a simple opposition between sexual love for women and sexual loyalty to the males of his own unit. A Spartan can in fact enter into four relationships: first, loyalty to the males of his age group, with whom he competes for the recognition of his male virtues, and with whom he may have frequent and casual homosexual relations; secondly, the much more intense **erastes-eromenos** relationship (although, unlike elsewhere in the greek world, with smaller age differences and not involving prepubescent boys); thirdly marriage; and fourthly, an **erastes-eromene** relationship with an unmarried girl, consummated anally.

For Spartans, homosexual relationships fulfill a need for personal relationships of an intensity not found in marriage. As a matter of fact, Spartans have different words to qualify various intensity of emotional attachment (which we could refer to as love in

today's standards). The connection with the highest possible intensity is between two warriors, and by far exceeded any other emotional attachment, including to one's wife, or even attachment from a mother to her child. The emotional connection offered by **erastes** to **eromenos** is greater than that of all his family and friends put together. The **erastes** is expected to win the love of the **eromenos** by his value as an example and by the patience, devotion and skill which he displayed in training the **eromenos**. **Erastes** is even responsible for a deficiency in courage displayed by his **eromenos**, and is even normally punished for the shortcomings of his **eromenos**. **Erastes** serves as substitute older brother/young father and role model.

Spartan partners and former partners further act in battle and elsewhere under each other's view, or even by each other's side. As a result, they have a special motive for not bringing discredit, or danger, onto themselves or their mates. **Erastes** is also responsible to arm the **eromenos**.

These concepts are formalized when Thebes, inspired by Spartan ideals, and educated by the many campaigns waged against them by the Spartans, forms the elite **ἱερὸς Λόχος** (**Hieròs Lókhos**, also known as the Sacred Band) in 378 B.C. **Pammenes**, a Theban military commander, then advocates an exclusive partner pairing (150 pairs of male partners) as a principle of military organization. It also becomes practice in Thebes for the **erastes** to make his **eromenos** a present of armor when he comes of age.

The Sacred Band played a fundamental role in the **Battle of Leuctra**. They were decimated at the **Battle of Chaeronea** after standing their grounds heroically, prompting the unusual move by the enemy (King Philip II of Macedon) to raise a monument in their honor. When he saw the corpses piled in pairs, and understood who they were, he wept and said: "**Perish any man who suspects that these men either did or suffered anything unseemly.**"

When several Spartans are interested in a younger one, they do not necessarily compete, but may just agree to share him and try to give him as many skills as possible.

Erastai and **eromenoi** exchange pledges of mutual commitment, emotional and otherwise, as well as loyalty, at the tomb of **Iolaos**, considered a sacred place.

Erastes is to be the ideally courageous, resolute and loyal warrior. A paragon of what Spartans call **ἀνδραγαθία** (**andragathia**).

Spartans also regard semen as “the vehicle and special condensation of the soul”. As a result, the **ἀρετή** (**arete**: competence together with character) of the Spartan **erastes** (typically older and more experienced mentoring military partner) is also expected to be transmitted to **eromenos** (typically younger less experienced mentored military partner), through semen.

In addition, sexual acts are seen as an initiation rite into the men’s associations, that is as a rite de passage qualifying the initiate for entry as a full member into the adult male warrior community.

Unmanliness, that is, feminine physique, below average muscular development and abnormal sensitivity to discomfort and privation, as well as expressible in gesture and movement, is highly undesirable in Sparta (in contrast to the rest of Greece). Instead, Spartans value what they see as ideal male qualities: **Strength, speed, endurance and masculinity** - or **qualities as a potential fighter**. Spartans also have much more regard for quality of character than for body features.

This is also reflected in how Spartiates are expected to help or treat friends, They do not need money. They do it with their sweat and their own work.

Adulthood:

As adults, Spartiates watch the younger Spartans and train them. Spartiates are banned from working, which is the responsibility of **ἐῖλωτες** (**helots**). Spartiates’ time is therefore spent in choral dances, festivals, feasts, hunting expeditions, physical exercises and conversation.

Marriage and Procreation:

Spartan men are not required to be married, but they are required by law to procreate by the time they reach the age of 30.

If they elect to marry, custom is to capture women for marriage, when they are in full age to bear children. A bridesmaid takes charge of the captured girl, first shaves her head to the scalp, then dresses her in a man’s cloak and sandals, and lays her down alone on a mattress in the dark. The bridegroom (whom must be sober), first has dinner in his mess with his peers, then he discreetly slips in, undoes her belt, lifts her and carries her to the bed. He has sex and then returns to his mates. All this in complete secrecy as not to be seen entering or leaving the presence of his wife. A husband, especially in the early stages of marriage, is discouraged from being seen as entering

or leaving his wife's presence. The point is to see each other only to conceive, with most of the time to be spent by the husband with his fellow warriors to reinforce cohesion. He is therefore expected to conceal the visits to his wife.

Non-married men at the age of 30 are ordered by the magistrates to parade naked in a circle around the **Ἀγορά (agora: assembly)**, singing a song composed about themselves, saying their punishment is fair because they did not obey the law.

A Spartiate can procreate with women besides his own wife, on the condition that the woman's husband agrees. Similarly, a man too old to have children but married to a younger wife in age of bearing children must select a young Spartiate of whom he admires the quality so he may procreate with his wife.

Women, unlike in any other part of Greece, can do the same sports as men. They are not allowed to have make up, jewelry or to grow their hair long. Women write songs about the type of men meriting them, so the young ones get a sense of ambition and rivalry.

Newborns:

Newborns are washed in wine instead of water to test their constitution. The logic is that epileptic or otherwise ailing children will lose their sense, and their limbs will go stiff, whereas healthy individuals are toughened by the experience.

A father does not decide if a new born is to be reared. Instead, he brings the baby in his arms to a particular spot called a **λέσχη (lesche)** where the eldest men of his mess sit. If the baby proves to be healthy, well-built and sturdy, they instruct the father to bring it up, and assign the newborn one of the 9,000 lots of land.

If the baby has a problem, or is deformed, he is dispatched to **ἀποθέται (Apothetae: The place of rejection)**, a precipitous spot by **Mount Taygetus**. Spartans consider it is better for both the baby and the state if the child dies if, right from its birth, it is poorly endowed for health or strength.

Newborn are raised by nurses and not the mother. Newborns are wrapped in swaddling clothes to allow free development of physique. Children are trained to eat their food and not be fussy about it, not to be afraid of the dark or being left alone, and not to be prone to temper or crying.

Helots:

Slaves work the land on behalf of their Spartiate masters. They are also used for educational purposes. Such as being forced to drink a lot of pure wine, so youths can see what drunkenness look like. They are also forced to sing vulgar and insulting songs, for the youths to see.

Housing:

Spartan houses are very basic. Ceiling is to be made of wood with an axe. Doors with only a saw. Furniture only includes a table, chair and bed.

Travel:

Spartiates travel at night without a torch, in total darkness. They are, however, not free to travel too far from Sparta in order to avoid them being tempted by what they would see elsewhere.

The Spartan Kings:

Sparta has two king dynasties. The **Agiad** and **Eurypontids** come from the twin descendants of **Heracles**, **Eurysthenes** and **Procles**, whom conquered Sparta two generations after the Trojan war. The name of each dynasty, however, is in reference to the twins' grandsons: **King Agis I**, and **Eurypon**.

Sparta always has two kings simultaneously. The tradition started when **Argeia**, wife of **Aristodemus**, the conqueror of Laconia, had twins and mixed them up deliberately to not privilege one over the other for the throne. As they were both constitutionally equal, they both became kings.

The main privileges of the Spartan kings is **the right to wage war against any country they wish**, as well as two priesthoods, **Zeus Lacedaemon** and **Heavenly Zeus**. It is also their duty to appoint whomever they chose as **προξενία (proxenia**: representatives of foreign states), as well as two **Pythii** (envoys to Delphi). They also sit with the 28 elders of the **γερουσία (Gerusia)**. Spartan kings also decide on matters involving virgin heiresses, public roads, and adoptions of sons.

Kings are accompanied to war by 100 men they have picked for their guard. The kings go first to battle, and return last.

The following privileges are also extended to Spartan kings: they can take as many sheep as they want to battle, and they keep the skins and backs of every animal they sacrifice. In the event of a public sacrifice, the kings take the first seats at the dinner, are served first, receive a double portion of everything, and keep the skins of the animals sacrificed. If they do not come to dinner, they receive two **χοῖνιξ (choinikes)**, just over one liter) of barley, and a **κοτύλη (kotylē)**, about 250cl) of wine at home. They also have special front seats at all games. In addition, every new moon and seventh day of the month, each king is provided with a perfect offering from the treasury of Apollo, as well as some barley, and a quart of wine.

Upon death, horsemen ride all around Laconia announcing the death, and women go around town beating cooking pots. Two persons from each Spartan household (one man and one woman) are required to go into mourning, which involves some type of self-mutilation.

Political System:

γερουσία (Gerusia): Council of 28 male elders + 2 kings. Members must be 60 years or older in order to be elected. The procedure involves locking up judges in a windowless room. Each candidate comes into the room, and the one getting the loudest cheer is selected. Elders sit for life.

The council acts as a criminal court, as well as an impeachment court for the kings as required. It also prepares **rhetai** (motions) for the citizens assembly, and is consulted by the **ephors** for interpretation of the law.

Ἀπέλλα (Apella): Assembly of all adult Spartiates aged 20 or older. Estimated at around 5,000 individuals at the height of Sparta's influence.

The assembly debates all matters, before decision is made by **Gerusia**.

Ἐφορος (Ephors): Elected council of 5 Spartiate 30 years or older. Mandate is for one year only and not renewable.

The Ephors' powers are extensive. They can declare war on helots at their convenience, and order them executed without a trial. They have disciplinary powers on all Spartiates, including magistrates. They were also responsible for all foreign affairs. They also act as a civil court.

Currency:

The Spartan currency consisted of iron bars, to discourage hoarding, and ultimately, the possession of money. Coins were however introduced by Areus I in 339 B.C.