CLASSICAL KINGDOMS

Chapter 29: Sparta - The Austere Guardians of Laconia

A. "Setting the Stage" Introduction

Welcome, young historians, to the rugged land of Laconia, nestled in the southern Peloponnese of ancient Greece. Here, amidst formidable mountains and alongside the life-giving Eurotas River, rose a city-state unlike any other in the Hellenic world: Sparta. While other Greek *poleis* (city-states) explored diverse paths of art, philosophy, and commerce, Sparta dedicated itself with an almost singular focus to military excellence, discipline, and unwavering obedience to the state. This chapter will journey back to the Archaic Age, exploring how Sparta, up to around 500 BC, forged its unique and often "extreme" culture.

We will uncover how its geography shaped its destiny, how powerful myths provided a bedrock for its society, and how a legendary lawgiver named Lycurgus reputedly engineered a system that produced the most feared warriors of the ancient world. We will also examine the remarkable, and in many ways unique, role of women in this austere society. As we explore Sparta, we will encounter profound lessons in duty, sacrifice, and the immense power of societal structure in shaping human lives. Understanding Sparta is crucial not only for its own fascinating story but also for its stark contrast with other Greek states, like Athens, and for the enduring questions it raises about freedom, order, and the purpose of a community—themes that echo throughout the development of Western Civilization.

B. Main Narrative Body

Learning Objective 1: Understand how Laconia's geography and Sparta's mythological foundations shaped its unique development and military focus.

The story of Sparta is deeply intertwined with the land it occupied and the powerful myths that its people believed. These two forces—geography and mythology—worked together to set Sparta on a distinct path, fostering a culture that valued strength, resilience, and a deep connection to a heroic past.

The Laconian Landscape: A Natural Fortress

Sparta was located in Laconia, a region in the southeastern part of the Peloponnesian peninsula. [1] This area was like a natural fortress. To the west stood the towering Taygetus Mountains, with peaks reaching over 2,400 meters (nearly 7,900 feet). [1] To the east, the Parnon mountain range provided another rugged barrier. [2] These mountains made Laconia difficult to invade. [2]

Flowing through the valley between these mountains was the Eurotas River, Sparta's main source of fresh water. [2] The land in the Eurotas valley was fertile, good for farming olives and citrus fruits, and for raising animals. [3] This agricultural richness was vital, but it was the protective embrace of the mountains that truly shaped Sparta's early character. Because they felt secure within their mountain-ringed valley, the Spartans, for much of their early history, did not build massive defensive walls around their city, unlike most other Greek *poleis*. [2] They famously said their "walls were made of men," meaning their strong army was their best defense. This geographical security allowed Sparta to develop its unique, inward-looking society, focused on creating those "walls of men." Their landlocked position also naturally steered them towards becoming a dominant land-based military power. [2]

(Insert Map Placeholder: A map showing the ancient Mediterranean World from Carthage to Babylon with the caption “The Classical World”)

Mythical Ancestors: Gods and Heroes

The Spartans believed their origins were tied to the greatest heroes and even the gods.

- **Hercules and the Heracleidae:** A central belief was that the Spartans were descendants of the Heracleidae, the children and descendants of Hercules (Herakles), the strongest of all Greek heroes. [7] Legend told that Hercules himself had once restored a Spartan king, Tyndareus, to his throne. [8] Later, his descendants returned to claim the Peloponnese as their birthright. This heroic lineage gave the Spartans a sense of divine favor and a right to rule. It also explained one of their most unusual customs: having two kings. Myth said that Aristodemus, a great-great-grandson of Hercules, had twin sons, Eurysthenes and Procles, who were to rule jointly, establishing the two royal lines, the Agiads and the Eurypontids. [7]
- **Pelops and the Peloponnese:** The entire peninsula where Sparta was located, the Peloponnese, was named after another great hero, Pelops. [9] His story was one of divine intervention, a dramatic chariot race to win his bride Hippodamia, and a tragic curse that affected his descendants. [9] The Spartan kings, including the

famous Menelaus, were considered descendants of Pelops through his son Atreus. [9] This linked Sparta to a powerful, ancient dynasty that held sway over the region's mythical past. (Note: A later Spartan king was also named Pelops, but he was part of the historical Eurypontid dynasty and not the primary mythological figure. [10])

- **The Trojan War Connection: Menelaus and Helen:** Sparta played a starring role in the Trojan War, the most famous tale of the Greek heroic age. Menelaus, the king of Sparta, was married to Helen, whose beauty was legendary. [7] When the Trojan prince Paris abducted Helen (or, as some stories say, she eloped with him), Menelaus, with his brother Agamemnon (king of Mycenae), launched the great Greek expedition to Troy to bring her back. [11] Menelaus fought bravely in the war, even dueling Paris. [11] The memory of Menelaus and Helen was so strong in Sparta that a shrine, the Menelaion, was built in their honor near the city. [2]

These myths were more than just stories for the Spartans. They were a source of pride, a justification for their rule and customs (like the dual kingship), and a constant reminder of the heroic virtues—courage, strength, and determination—that every Spartan was expected to live up to.

Learning Objective 2: Describe the rigorous Agoge system for Spartan boys and the unique upbringing and roles of Spartan girls and women, highlighting how these contributed to the state's military and social structure.

Spartan society was engineered from the ground up to produce citizens wholly dedicated to the state's strength and stability. This meticulous shaping began in infancy and followed distinct, demanding paths for boys and girls, all designed to contribute to Sparta's unique military and social fabric.

Forging the Spartan Warrior: The Agoge – An Extreme Upbringing

The absolute heart of Spartan male development was the *agoge*, a state-mandated education and training system of unparalleled rigor and intensity. [13] The word *agoge* itself means "raising," as one might raise livestock for a specific purpose, highlighting the state's utilitarian approach to its male youth. [14] Instituted by the legendary Lycurgus, its singular aim was to transform boys into peerless soldiers whose primary loyalty was to Sparta and their comrades, eclipsing even family ties. [13]

- **Birth and Infancy: The First Test:** A Spartan boy's life was subject to state scrutiny from his very first breath. Newborn male infants were reportedly inspected by the elders of their tribe. If a child was deemed weak, deformed, or otherwise unlikely to develop into a capable warrior, tradition holds that he was left to die by exposure on the slopes of Mount Taygetus. [14] Some accounts even

mention a test where the baby might be dropped into wine, with excessive crying seen as a sign of weakness, though this specific detail may be an exaggeration. [14] Regardless of the exact methods, this early eugenic selection underscored the state's ruthless commitment to martial fitness from the outset.

- The Paides (Ages 7–14/18): Entry into the Pack: At the age of seven, a Spartan boy was removed from his home and family to begin the agoge. 14 He became known as a paides (boy) and was organized into an agelē ("pack" or "herd") with other boys his age. 14 These groups lived, trained, and slept together in communal barracks under the strict supervision of an older, accomplished youth leader called an eirēn (who was himself a product of the agoge) and an overarching state official, the paidonomos or "boy-herder," who oversaw the entire system. 14
  Education during this stage included basic literacy—just enough reading and writing to "serve their turn"—as the overwhelming emphasis was on physical and martial development. 14 Days were filled with relentless physical conditioning, endurance events, and athletic competitions like running and wrestling. 14 They also participated in choral dances, which instilled rhythm, coordination, and group cohesion. 15
  Life was deliberately harsh. Boys were forced to go barefoot in all seasons to toughen their feet and improve agility. 14 From the age of twelve, they were issued only a single item of clothing, a rough cloak (himation), intended to last the entire year, regardless of weather. 15 They had to construct their own beds from reeds plucked by hand—without the aid of a knife—from the banks of the Eurotas River, making for a deliberately uncomfortable resting place. 14
  One of the most infamous "extreme facts" of the agoge was the systematic underfeeding of the boys. 14 This was not mere neglect but a calculated strategy to encourage them to steal food for themselves and their group. 14 Success in theft, demonstrating cunning, stealth, and resourcefulness, went unpunished. 14 However, if a boy was caught in the act—a sign of clumsiness or lack of skill—he was severely beaten, not for the act of stealing itself, but for the failure of being caught. 14 This brutal practice aimed to cultivate essential survival skills for a soldier.
  Verbal discipline was also paramount. Boys were taught "Laconism," the art of speaking briefly, wittily, and directly to the point—a verbal austerity that mirrored their physical existence. 15 They were also expected to endure teasing and learn to poke fun at peers, fostering resilience. 15
- **The Paidiskoi (Ages 15–19): Transition and Mentorship:** As a boy entered his mid-teens, he became a *paidiskos*. [15] Physical training and athletic competitions continued with even greater intensity. [15] It was often during this period, sometimes as early as age 12, that a *paidiskos* might enter into an institutionalized pederastic

relationship with a young adult male Spartan, an accomplished warrior known as an *erastes* (older lover/mentor). [15] The younger boy was the *eromenos* (beloved/protégé). Ancient sources like Plutarch described this mentorship as having an instructive and character-building motive, fostering virtues and integrating the youth into adult society. [15] Xenophon, however, presented a contrasting view, asserting that Lycurgus's laws strictly prohibited sexual relationships with the boys, acknowledging this was unusual compared to other Greek city-states. [15] Regardless of the precise nature of its erotic component, this mentorship was a key feature of Spartan social bonding. The *erastes* often played a crucial role as a sponsor, helping to facilitate the *eromenos's* eventual entry into the same *syssition* (common mess hall) where all adult Spartiate men dined. [15] During this phase, a youth's primary loyalty began to shift from his *agelē* to the *syssition*. [15]

- The Hēbōntes (Ages 20–29): The Full Warrior: At the age of twenty, a young Spartan graduated from the ranks of the paidiskoi and became a hēbōn, now also referred to as an eirēn (the same term used for the youth leaders of the agelai). 15 He was now considered a full warrior, eligible for military service in the front lines and responsible for helping to train younger boys. 15 If he had demonstrated sufficient leadership qualities throughout his arduous training, he might be selected to command an agelē himself, thus perpetuating the cycle of the agoge. 15

  Full citizenship rights, including the right to marry and participate in the assembly, were typically granted around the age of thirty, upon the formal completion of the agoge. 14 Even after marriage, however, Spartan men continued to live in their barracks and dine in their syssitia until a much later age, prioritizing communal military life over private domesticity. 14

The overarching goal of the *agoge* was to instill a specific set of virtues deemed essential for the Spartan state: absolute and unquestioning discipline, unwavering obedience to superiors and the laws of Sparta, supreme courage (especially the willingness to stand and fight to the death), the capacity to endure extreme hardship and pain without complaint, unshakeable loyalty to Sparta and one's fellow soldiers above all other ties, and an ingrained ethos of self-sacrifice for the good of the collective. [13] The singular vocation and social expectation for a Spartiate male was to be a warrior. All other forms of labor were performed by others, freeing the Spartiate class for a life of constant military training and service. [18] This extreme system, praised by philosophers like Plato and Aristotle for its effectiveness in producing disciplined citizens [14], was crucial for maintaining control over the vastly outnumbered helot

population and for projecting Spartan military power.

Mothers of Warriors: The Unique Upbringing and Roles of Spartan Girls and Women

In a striking departure from the norms of most other ancient Greek city-states, Spartan girls and women experienced a unique upbringing that emphasized physical fitness, education, and a significant degree of social and economic autonomy. [17] Their development, like that of the boys, was fundamentally geared towards serving the needs of the state, primarily by producing and nurturing future generations of strong Spartan warriors and capable women.

- State-Supervised Education and Physical Prowess: Unlike in Athens, where a woman's life was largely confined to the household (oikos) and female education was minimal and private, Spartan girls began a formal, state-supervised education around the same age as boys, typically between six and seven years old. 16 This education was often conducted in public spaces, sometimes even in temples alongside boys. 19 It included literacy, meaning Spartan women were often more literate than their counterparts in other Greek poleis. 19
  A defining and "extreme" aspect of their upbringing was rigorous physical education. 16 Girls participated actively in activities such as wrestling, gymnastics, javelin and discus throwing, and foot racing. 16 They were also taught combat skills, partly to enable them to defend themselves and their homes, especially since the men were often away on military campaigns or training. 19 This physical training was often conducted publicly, and Spartan girls and women were known to exercise scantily clad or even naked, sometimes in the presence of boys and men—a practice that would have been deeply shocking and unacceptable in most other Greek societies. 19 The explicit rationale behind this was eugenic: Spartans believed that strong, healthy women would produce strong, healthy children, particularly the robust male offspring needed for Sparta's army. 16
- **Cultural and Practical Training:** Beyond physical training, Spartan girls received cultural instruction, learning poetry (like that of Alcman), music, and dance, which served to preserve Spartan traditions, commemorate heroes, and instill civic values. [19] Competitions were held to encourage excellence in these areas. [19] They were also taught public speaking and encouraged to be confident in expressing themselves. [19] While their education was broader than in other *poleis*, it also incorporated essential domestic skills such as weaving, spinning, and household management. [19] An interesting aspect of their practical education was instruction in feeding, breeding, training, and riding horses, animals that held significant

symbolic value in Spartan society. [19]

- **Path to Motherhood and Social Standing:** Motherhood was considered the primary and most honorable role for a Spartan woman, a direct contribution to the state's strength. [16] The societal value placed on this was so high that a woman who died in childbirth was accorded the same honor as a man who died in battle: she could have her name inscribed on a gravestone, a rare distinction. [16] Spartan girls typically married relatively late by ancient standards, usually around the age of eighteen or twenty, after completing their training and passing a test of their skills and fitness. [16] Failure in this test could lead to social demotion. [19] Men were often in their mid-twenties or thirties at marriage. [16] This later age of marriage for women likely contributed to healthier mothers and infants. A final phase of their training reportedly focused on enhancing motherhood skills and even personal beauty, as physical appearance was considered important for marriage. [19]
- **Remarkable Autonomy and Influence:** Perhaps the most striking aspect of Spartan women's lives was the considerable degree of freedom, autonomy, and influence they possessed. [18] They could legally own and inherit property in their own right. The philosopher Aristotle critically noted that women in Sparta had come to own as much as two-fifths of all the land. [16] This economic independence, derived from dowries and inheritance, granted them agency unknown to most Greek women. [16] With Spartiate men dedicating their lives to military service and communal living, women were often the de facto managers of estates and household affairs, effectively becoming "household rulers." [17] They were renowned for their outspokenness, sharp wit, and confidence. [18] Their attire, shorter and less restrictive tunics (*peplos*), reflected their active lifestyles and was considered daring by other Greeks. [16] Spartan women even competed in and won events at the Olympic Games, like Cynisca, who bred and trained chariot horses. [16]

The "freedoms" and robust training afforded to Spartan women were not primarily about individual liberation in a modern sense. Rather, they were a calculated state strategy. [19] Empowered, educated, and physically fit women were essential for managing the home front, overseeing the agricultural estates that sustained the warrior class, ensuring the eugenic production of strong heirs, and instilling foundational Spartan values in young children. The famous maternal exhortation to a son departing for battle—"Return with your shield or on it" [18]—epitomizes this role in ideological transmission. Their entire upbringing was designed to make them effective contributors to the unique and demanding Spartan state.

Technology & History: The Iron Currency of Sparta

> One of the most unusual "technologies" adopted by Sparta, attributed to Lycurgus, was its currency. Instead of using gold or silver coins like other Greek states, Sparta used heavy, cumbersome iron bars or spits (*obeloi*). [13] The idea behind this was to make wealth difficult to accumulate, hide, or carry. It discouraged luxury, theft, and bribery, as large amounts would be needed for any significant value. This "anti-wealth" technology aimed to keep Spartans focused on military virtue and austerity rather than material gain, reinforcing the core values of their society. It was a deliberate choice to shape behavior and maintain social equality (among Spartiates).

Learning Objective 3: Explain the structure of Spartan government, the significance of Lycurgus and the Great Rhetra, and how this system maintained stability and order.

The unique society of Sparta was governed by an equally unique political system, traditionally attributed to a wise lawgiver named Lycurgus and his set of laws known as the Great Rhetra. This system was designed for stability and the preservation of the Spartan way of life.

Lycurgus: The Legendary Lawgiver

Lycurgus is a figure shrouded in some mystery; scholars debate whether he was a real person or a symbol of a long period of reform, perhaps in the 9th or 8th century BC. [13] Regardless, Spartans revered him as the architect of their society. [13] Legend says he traveled, studied other governments (like that of Crete), and then received divine approval for his new laws from the Oracle of Delphi. [13] The Oracle reportedly hailed him as "dear to Jove" and possibly a god himself, giving immense authority to his reforms. [20] These reforms are said to have included the *agoge*, the common messes (*syssitia*), the land redistribution (though this is debated), and the introduction of iron currency. [13] His goal was *eunomia*—good order and lawful government.

> **Primary Source Spotlight: The Oracle's Blessing for Lycurgus**
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> According to the historian Herodotus, when Lycurgus entered the temple at Delphi, the Pythia (the priestess) declared:
>
> *"Oh! thou great Lycurgus, that com'st to my beautiful dwelling, Dear to Jove, and to all who sit in the halls of Olympus, Whether to hail thee a god I know not, or only a mortal, But my hope is strong that thou a god wilt prove, Lycurgus."* [20]
>
> This divine endorsement was crucial. It meant that the laws Lycurgus

established were not just human ideas but were sanctioned by the gods, making them sacred and incredibly difficult to challenge or change. This helped ensure the long-lasting stability of the Spartan system.

The Great Rhetra: Sparta's Constitution

The Great Rhetra was the name for the Spartan constitution, believed to have been given by Lycurgus. [13] Unusually, Lycurgus is said to have forbidden it from being written down, intending for the laws to live in the character of the citizens. [20] It outlined a "mixed constitution," blending elements of monarchy, oligarchy (rule by a few), and democracy (rule by the people) to create balance. [13]

The Machinery of Spartan Government

- **Dual Monarchy (Two Kings):** Sparta had two kings simultaneously, from two hereditary families, the Agiads and the Eurypontids. [13] This was explained by the myth of Hercules' twin descendants. [7] The kings were military commanders and chief priests, but their power in Sparta was limited. [17]
- **The Gerousia (Council of Elders):** This was the main oligarchic body, consisting of 28 men over the age of sixty, elected for life by the assembly, plus the two kings (making 30 total). [13] The Gerousia prepared laws for the assembly and acted as a high court. [13]
- **The Ephors (Overseers):** Five Ephors were elected annually by the assembly from all Spartan citizens between 30 and 60 years old. [17] This was a powerful office, open to the entire *damos* (citizen body) and thus highly sought after. [21] Ephors presided over the assembly and Gerousia, had broad judicial powers in civil cases, supervised the *agoge*, managed foreign policy, and could even challenge, arrest, or depose the kings. [17] They swore a monthly oath to uphold the kings' office, provided the kings upheld the laws. [21] Plato even called them "tyrants" because of their extensive authority. [21]
- **The Apella (Assembly):** All male Spartan citizens over thirty could attend the Apella. [13] It voted on laws proposed by the Gerousia (usually by shouting) and elected Ephors and Gerousia members. [13] However, it couldn't propose laws or debate extensively, limiting its democratic power compared to Athens. [18]

This system of checks and balances—kings checking each other, Ephors checking kings and Gerousia, Gerousia advising and guiding—was designed to prevent any one part from becoming too powerful and to ensure the state remained stable and true to its traditions. [13] This stability, while making Sparta resistant to change, was a hallmark of its strength for centuries.

Learning Objective 4: Compare and contrast the societal values, political systems, and early interactions with the Persian Empire of Sparta and Athens around 500 BC.

By 500 BC, Sparta and Athens stood as the two most influential city-states in Greece, yet they were worlds apart in their values, governance, and outlook. Their early encounters with the rising Persian Empire also highlighted their differences.

Sparta vs. Athens: Two Hellenic Worlds

Feature	Sparta	Athens
Government	Oligarchic: Dual Kings, Gerousia (elders), powerful Ephors. [17]	Nascent Democracy: Assembly (Ekklesia) with debate, popular juries. [18]
Core Values	Discipline, obedience, military valor, austerity, state first. [17]	Emerging ideas of freedom (for citizens), participation, debate. [18]
Society	Closed, militaristic, rigid social structure (Spartiates, Perioikoi, Helots). [18]	More open, value on trade, arts, philosophy developing. [18]
Men's Role	Lifelong warrior, communal living (*syssitia*). [13]	Diverse: politics, trade, farming, arts; military service expected. [18]
Women's Role	Educated, athletic, owned land, significant household autonomy. [18]	Largely domestic, limited education, few public rights or property. [18]
Economy	Agrarian (helot labor), iron currency, anti-commercial. [13]	Trade, crafts, silver coinage, developing naval power. [18]
Individualism	Suppressed in favor of the collective. [17]	Increasingly valued (for male citizens). [18]

Sparta was a society built for war and control, especially over its large helot population. [18] Life was austere; even their food was famously simple. [18] Athens, on the other hand, was becoming a bustling center of commerce and early democratic ideas,

where citizens (though still a limited group) had more say in their government and more personal freedoms. [18]

Early Dealings with the Persian Empire

As the 6th century BC ended, the mighty Persian Empire loomed to the east. The first major test of Greek unity came with the Ionian Revolt (499-494 BC), when Greek cities in Asia Minor (Ionia) rebelled against Persian rule. [22]

- **Sparta's Hesitation:** Aristagoras, leader of the revolt, appealed to Sparta for help. [24] King Cleomenes I of Sparta refused. [24] His reasons were practical: Persia was vast and far away, and Sparta's main concerns were maintaining control in the Peloponnese and over the helots. [24] Committing their army to a distant war was too risky. There was also a traditional rivalry between Dorians (like Spartans) and Ionians. [24]
- **Athens Steps In:** Athens, along with the city of Eretria, did send a small force of ships to aid the Ionians. [22] Their forces even helped burn Sardis, a Persian regional capital. [24] Though the revolt was eventually crushed by Persia [22], Athenian involvement angered the Persian King Darius and set the stage for future conflicts, including the famous Battle of Marathon (490 BC). Sparta did not participate in Marathon, citing a religious festival that prevented them from marching. [25]

Around 500 BC, Sparta's foreign policy was cautious, focused on its own security and regional dominance. While it would later play a crucial role in defending Greece from Persian invasions, its initial response to the Ionian crisis showed a pragmatic, if somewhat isolationist, stance compared to the more outward-looking (and perhaps impulsive) Athenians.

> **Biography Brief: Lycurgus of Sparta**
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> Lycurgus (fl. c. 9th-8th century BC, though his exact dates are unknown) is the traditional founder of Sparta's unique laws and institutions. [13] Whether a single man or a legendary figure embodying generations of reform, his name is synonymous with the Spartan way of life. Ancient writers like Herodotus and Plutarch tell of his wisdom, his travels to study other legal systems (especially Crete), and his consultation with the Delphic Oracle, which gave divine sanction to his reforms. [13] He is credited with establishing the *agoge* (the rigorous military training for boys), the *syssitia* (communal dining halls for men), the Gerousia (council of elders), and even the use of iron currency to discourage wealth and luxury. [13] Lycurgus aimed to create

eunomia—a state of good order, discipline, and equality (among citizens). His laws were said to be unwritten, designed to be ingrained in the character of the Spartans. [20] By emphasizing military prowess, austerity, and absolute loyalty to the state, Lycurgus (or the reforms attributed to him) transformed Sparta into the most formidable military power in ancient Greece, a society admired by some for its stability and feared by others for its harshness. His legacy shaped Sparta for centuries, making him one of the most influential lawgivers in history.

C. Concluding Summary

By 500 BC, Sparta had carved out a unique and formidable identity within the ancient Greek world. Its formidable geography and rich mythological heritage laid the groundwork for a society that prized strength and order. Through the rigorous *agoge* for boys and the distinctive upbringing of its women, Sparta engineered a citizenry dedicated to the state, particularly its military needs. Governed by a complex system of checks and balances attributed to the legendary Lycurgus and his Great Rhetra, Sparta achieved remarkable stability, though at the cost of the individual freedoms and cultural dynamism blossoming in rival *poleis* like Athens. As Sparta stood at the dawn of the Classical Age, its interactions with the rising Persian Empire revealed a cautious, self-interested state, yet one whose disciplined warriors would soon prove vital to the very survival of Hellenic civilization. The Spartan experiment, with its emphasis on collective duty and austerity, offers a timeless and often challenging lesson on the diverse ways human societies can organize themselves, a crucial chapter in the unfolding narrative of Western Civilization.

D. LEARNING RESOURCES

Key Terms and People:

- **Laconia:** The region in the southeastern Peloponnese where Sparta was located. [1]
- **Eurotas River:** The main river of Laconia, providing fresh water to Sparta. [2]
- **Taygetus Mountains:** A major mountain range forming the western border of Laconia. [1]
- **Heracleidae:** The descendants of Hercules, whom the Spartans claimed as ancestors. [7]
- **Pelops:** Mythical hero after whom the Peloponnese is named; an ancestor of Spartan kings. [9] (Distinct from the later historical King Pelops of Sparta [10])
- **Menelaus:** Legendary king of Sparta, husband of Helen, and a key figure in the Trojan War. [7]

- **Helen:** Wife of Menelaus, whose abduction by Paris led to the Trojan War. [11]
- **Agoge:** The rigorous state-sponsored education and training system for Spartan boys. [13]
- **Paidonomos:** The state official overseeing the *agoge*. [14]
- **Eirēn:** An older youth leader in the *agoge*, or a young man who had completed a stage of it. [15]
- **Syssitia:** The common mess halls where Spartan men ate together. [13]
- **Helots:** State-owned serfs in Spartan territory, primarily Messenians, who formed the agricultural workforce. [13]
- **Lycurgus:** The semi-legendary lawgiver of Sparta, credited with creating its social and political institutions. [13]
- **Great Rhetra:** The unwritten constitution of Sparta, attributed to Lycurgus. [13]
- **Dual Monarchy:** Sparta's system of having two hereditary kings ruling simultaneously. [7]
- **Gerousia:** The Spartan council of elders (28 members plus the 2 kings). [13]
- **Ephors:** Five annually elected magistrates in Sparta who held significant power. [17]
- **Apella:** The assembly of all Spartan male citizens. [13]
- **Ionian Revolt:** An uprising (499-494 BC) of Greek cities in Asia Minor against Persian rule. [22]
- **Cleomenes I:** King of Sparta who refused to send aid during the Ionian Revolt. [24]
- **Aristotle's Golden Mean:** The philosophical concept that virtue lies in finding a balance between two extremes (e.g., courage is the mean between cowardice and recklessness).

Chapter Summary Chart:

Learning Objective	Key Facts/Events	Key People/Concepts
1. Geography & Mythological Foundations	Laconia's protective mountains (Taygetus, Parnon), Eurotas River; unwalled city. [1]	Hercules (Heracleidae) [7], Pelops [9], Menelaus & Helen (Trojan War). [7]
2. Agoge & Role of Women	Rigorous *agoge* for boys (ages 7-30): harsh discipline, military/survival skills, underfeeding, communal living, Laconism. [13] Girls: state education, literacy, intense physical/combat training,	*Agoge*, *Paidonomos*, *Eirēn*, *Syssitia*. Iron currency. [13]

	cultural learning; women owned property, managed estates, outspoken. [18]	
3. Lycurgus, Great Rhetra & Spartan Governance	Lycurgus's reforms, Great Rhetra (unwritten constitution), divine sanction from Delphic Oracle. [13] Mixed government: Dual Monarchy, Gerousia (elders), Ephors (overseers), Apella (assembly). [13]	Lycurgus. [13] *Eunomia* (good order).
4. Sparta & Athens: Contrasts & Early Persian Interactions	Sparta: oligarchic, militaristic, closed, austere. Athens: nascent democracy, trade-focused, more open. [17] Ionian Revolt (499-494 BC): Sparta refused aid; Athens sent ships. [22]	Cleomenes I. [24] King Darius of Persia.

E. COMMAND QUESTIONS

Factual Recall:

1. What were the two main mountain ranges that provided natural defenses for Laconia? [1]
2. At what age did Spartan boys begin the *agoge*, and what was its primary goal? [14]
3. Name the three main components of Spartan government besides the citizen assembly (Apella). [13]

Critical Thinking:

1. How did Sparta's geography and its mythological beliefs reinforce each other to shape Spartan culture?
2. Compare the lives and societal expectations of women in Sparta with those in Athens around 500 BC. Which system do you think offered more "advantages" to women, and why? Consider the different definitions of advantage.

Favorite Applicable Virtue:

1. The Spartans highly valued virtues like courage, discipline, and obedience. Thinking about the stories and societal structures of Sparta, identify one classical virtue (such as courage, justice, prudence/wisdom, or temperance/moderation)

that you believe was either strongly demonstrated by the Spartans OR tragically absent or distorted in their society. Explain your reasoning, perhaps using Aristotle's idea of the "golden mean" (virtue as a balance between extremes). For example, was Spartan discipline a virtuous mean, or did it become an extreme?

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