

Notes on Quiz #3: Sparta and the Art of War

1. To ensure an ideal warrior culture, Spartans practiced all of the following EXCEPT:
 - a. physical training of all boys from age 7 onward
 - b. inspection of male infants, exposing the unfit in the wilderness to die
 - c. an expectation that men remain fit and ready to fight through age 60
 - d. ensuring plenty of leisure for study and writing poetry to create the most well-rounded soldiers

All boys who survived the weeding out of the unfit as infants were removed to the barracks at age 7 to undergo a collective education by the state designed to train (or brain-wash, depending on your point of view) each succeeding generation in the all-importance of training to become invincible warriors. The education was built entirely around building the endurance and training necessary to live and fight as idealized hoplite warriors in harsh and unforgiving conditions. The boys were expected to become tough and cunning. They continued this training up through the age of thirty, remaining in the barracks even if they got married, as they were allowed to do after 20. The shared experience, on small band and larger groups that shared a mess and quarters, fostered loyalty, solidarity, and cooperativeness, as important to a hoplite warrior as skill in fighting and the ability to endure hardship. The agoge did not educate boys in arts, science, or anything else besides the skills necessary to become a Spartan warrior. As such it reflected the Spartan culture's fixed perception that any pursuit but war was a distraction that could debase an individual Spartan and weaken and make vulnerable Sparta herself.

2. The helots were
 - a. protective armor worn over the shin
 - b. hereditary slaves of the Spartan state
 - c. elected officials in charge of the blacksmiths
 - d. a form of gastrointestinal disruption

The helots were state-owned serfs. In origin they were the conquered peoples of Laconia and neighboring Messenia, subdued early in Sparta's history and permanent "prisoners of war." Each helot family farm provided a fixed amount of food year-round for a Spartan warrior, freeing the Spartans from the distractions of managing land, laborers, and produce. The helot families retained for their own use anything beyond what was levied, which is why they are at least nominally considered serfs and not slaves. — The Spartan system was heavily dependent on the helots. Because they greatly outnumbered the Spartan citizenry, which was restricted to the warrior elite (the homoioi), the Spartans were constantly alert to the dangers of uprising among the helots and feared marching their armies too far from home. To reinforce their status as prisoners of war, young Spartans were required to literally hunt helots as part of their training. Helots were also paraded before the young warriors drunk and humiliated to train them to think of helots as an inferior class.

3. The "mixed constitution" of the Spartan government included all of the following EXCEPT:
 - a. Two kings with military, religious, and judicial powers
 - b. Five men elected to keep an eye on the kings
 - c. A high priest who could overturn any law
 - d. A council of old men

The Spartan government included two kings (mainly leaders of armies), an assembly of soldiers, a council of elders (man over 60 retired from military service), the ephors whose main role was to make sure the kings upheld the law.

4. Spartan women

- a. were educated, exercised outside, and were well nourished
- b. wore elaborate cosmetics
- c. lived in the barracks with their husbands
- d. held the political offices so the men could focus on training as warriors

Spartan women were intended to be the first trainers of children and were generally educated; some were literate. Xenophon praised the Spartans for nourishing their girls as well as their boys, for it was unusual among the Greeks to do so. This differentiation in nourishment could exist even for suckling newborns. Xenophon also approved of the Spartan custom of encouraging women to exercise so that they could maintain a good physical condition for motherhood.

5. The Spartans called themselves

- a. the krytea (the secret police)
- b. the homoioi (men of equal status)
- c. the perioeki (the dwellers nearby)
- d. the malakians (the jerks)

Spartan society was based on the hoplite phalanx, where all participants were of equal importance. Thus the Spartans referred to themselves as fellow hoplites—the men of equal status.

Optional Extra Credit

EC. What is “the Spartan mirage”?

Among both ancients and later writers in medieval and modern times, the purity of Spartan society — their unchanging pursuit of perfection — presented a compelling alternative to the wrenching turmoil experienced by less conservative societies enduring the constant and unpredictable upheavals associated with social, political, and economic “progress.” Writers thinking along these lines, which might include anyone from Athenians who admired the Spartans (like Xenophon) to Renaissance writers like Machiavelli to Victorian classicists dismayed by change in their own times, will tend to greatly idealize both the Spartans and their system. This effect is reinforced by the paucity of surviving testimony from the Spartans themselves.