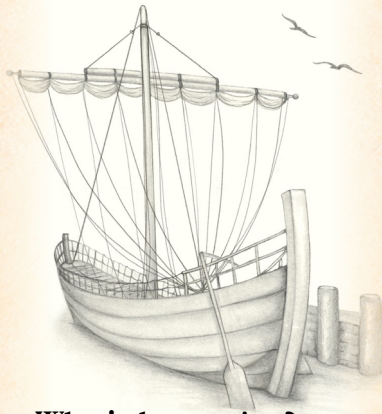




Historically Speaking

Volume 4, Number 6 June 2025

Spartans



What's happening?

I continue to work on Amon as well as Ecstasy Through Agony; The Writer's Odyssey. Amon is growing increasingly complex as my research leads me to find more historical persons to include in the story. It is a serendipitous and unplanned consequence of the choice I made early on for the dates of the book. Name changing is presenting a challenge as at least three characters change names. This is true of the historical characters as well as my fictional character. I do not know how that is going to eventually work out, but it is an interesting challenge.

Sparta was a warrior society in ancient Greece that reached the height of its power after defeating rival city-state Athens in the Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.). Spartan culture was centered on loyalty to the state and military service. Spartan boys entered a rigorous state-sponsored education, military training and socialization program. Known as the Agoge, the system emphasized duty, discipline and endurance. Although Spartan women were not active in the military, they were educated and enjoyed more status and freedom than other Greek women.

Sparta, also known as Lacedaemon, was an ancient Greek city-state located primarily in a region of southern Greece called Laconia. The population of Sparta consisted of three main groups: the Spartans, or Spartiates, who were full citizens; the Helots, or serfs/slaves; and the Perioeci, who were neither slaves nor citizens. The Perioeci, whose name means “dwellers-around,” worked as craftsmen and traders, and made weapons for the Spartans.

All healthy male Spartan citizens participated in the compulsory state-sponsored education system, the Agoge, which emphasized obedience, endurance, courage and self-control. Spartan men devoted their lives to military service, and lived communally well into adulthood. A Spartan was taught that loyalty to the state came before everything else, including one's family.

Unlike such Greek city-states as Athens — a center for the arts, learning and philosophy — Sparta was centered on a warrior culture. Male Spartan citizens were allowed only one occupation: soldier. Indoctrination into this lifestyle began early.

Spartan boys started their military training at age 7, when they left home and entered the Agoge. The boys lived communally under austere conditions. They were subjected to continual physical, competitions (which could involve violence), given meager rations and expected to become skilled at stealing food, among other survival skills.

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The teenage boys who demonstrated the most leadership potential were selected for participation in the Crypteia, which acted as a secret police force whose primary goal was to terrorize the general Helot population and murder those who were troublemakers. At age 20, Spartan males became full-time soldiers, and remained on active duty until age 60.

No one soldier was considered superior to another. Going into battle, a Spartan soldier, or hoplite, wore a large bronze helmet, breastplate and ankle guards, and carried a round shield made of bronze and wood, a long spear and sword. Spartan warriors were also known for their long hair and red cloaks. Those cloaks helped conceal the blood from battle wounds. Just before battle, the Spartans would often stand in view of the enemy calmly combing their long hair to 'psyche out' the enemy.

The Spartans' constant military drilling and discipline made them skilled at the ancient Greek style of fighting in a phalanx formation. In the phalanx, the army worked as a unit in a close, deep formation, and made coordinated mass maneuvers.

adapted from History.com



Spartan women had a reputation for being independent-minded, and enjoyed more freedoms and power than their counterparts throughout ancient Greece. While they played no role in the military, female Spartans often received a formal education, although separate from boys and not at boarding schools.

The word "spartan" means self-restrained, simple, frugal and austere. The word laconic, which means pithy and concise, is derived from the Spartans, who prized brevity of speech.

Helen of Troy was actually Helen of Sparta, queen of that city and married to Menelaus who became king after the death of Tyndareus. Helen was identified as the biological daughter of Zeus who took on the form of a swan and raped Leda, wife of Tyndareus, as she bathed in a pond.



In popular culture, ancient Spartan hoplites are virtually always portrayed as fighting with shields decorated with the Greek letter lambda (Λ). This letter, of course, stands for Λακεδαίμων (Lakedaímōn), which was the most common name in antiquity for the Greek polis (i.e., "city-state") that included that settlement of Sparta.

In historical reality, Greek hoplites, including Spartan hoplites, were expected to provide their own equipment and they could decorate their shields however they wished. Although there is evidence to suggest that a few Spartans probably did choose to decorate their shields with the letter lambda, the vast majority seem to have decorated their shields with other symbols, geometric designs, and images.