

# The warriors of ancient sparta

[History](#), [Ancient History](#)



The Warriors of Ancient Sparta Sparta, also known as Lacedaemon, was an ancient Greek city-state located primarily in the present-day region of southern Greece called Laconia. Life was very different in ancient Sparta than it was in the rest of ancient Greek city-states. The Spartans were proud, tierce, capable warriors. No great works of art came out of Sparta. But the Spartans, both men and women, were tough, and the Greeks admired strength.

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 built weapons for the Spartans. In Greek mythology the founder of the city was Lacedaemon, a son of Zeus, who gave his name to the region and his wife's name to the city.

Sparta was also an important member of the Greek force which fought in the Trojan War. Indeed, the Spartan king Menelaos started the war after the Trojan prince Paris kidnapped his wife Helen, offered to Paris by the goddess Aphrodite as a prize for choosing her in a beauty contest against fellow goddesses Athena and Hera. Helen was said to have been the most beautiful woman in Greece and Spartan women in general enjoyed a reputation not only for good looks but also spirited independence.

All healthy male Spartan citizens participated in the mandatory state-sponsored education system, the Agoge, which emphasized obedience, endurance, courage and self-control, but more on that later. Spartan men

devoted their lives to military service, and lived together well into adulthood. A Spartan was taught that loyalty to the state came before everything else, including his family. The Helots, whose name means "captives," were fellow Greeks, originally from Laconia and Messenia, who had been taken over by the Spartans and turned into slaves.

The Spartans' way of life would not have been possible without the Helots, who did all the day-to-day tasks and unskilled labor required to keep society going: They were domestic servants, farmers, military attendants and nurses. Unlike such Greek city-states as Athens, a center for the arts, learning and philosophy, Sparta was focused on a warrior culture. Male Spartan citizens were allowed only one occupation: to be a soldier. This lifestyle began early. Spartan boys started their military training at age 7, when they left home and entered the Agoge. The boys lived collectively under grim conditions.

They were subjected to continual physical competitions (which could involve violence), given little to no rations and expected to become skilled at stealing food, among other survival skills. Spartans, who were outnumbered by the Helots, often treated them cruelly and repressively in an effort to prevent uprisings. Spartans would humiliate the Helots by doing such things as forcing them to get drunk on wine and then make fools of themselves in public. (This practice was also intended to demonstrate to young people how an adult Spartan should never act, as self-control was a prized trait. Methods of abuse could be far more extreme: Spartans were allowed to kill Helots for being too smart or too fit, among other reasons. The teenage boys who

demonstrated the most leadership potential were selected for participation in the Crypteia, which acted as a secret murder of those who were troublemakers. At age 20, Spartan males became full-time soldiers, and remained on active duty until age 60. 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. 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. 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. In part to attract mates, females engaged in athletic competitions, including javelin-throwing and wrestling, and also sang and danced competitively. As adults, Spartan women were allowed to own and manage property. Additionally, they were typically unencumbered by domestic responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning and making clothing, tasks which were handled by the helots.