

Spartan social structure- importance

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Explain the Social Structure of Sparta and its Significance in Spartan Society

Good morning According to historical accounts, the Spartan constitution was created around the 750th C BC, by the great lawgiver, Lycurgus.

The new system established a social structure that maintained a military power of Sparta and kept the conquered Messenians in cheque. Xenophon, writing 4th Century BC, recognised Lycurgus as the Spartan lawgiver. At the bottom of the social ladder were the helots. The Helots were state owned serfs from conquered Greek states, who would work on Spartan kleros. Their duty was to supply a fixed annual produce to their Spartan masters. The Helots were believed to have outnumbered their Spartan masters by at least 10 to 1. This placed great fear on the Spartans who controlled the Helots under a strict regime.

Relations between the helots and Spartans were hostile. Thucydides remarked that " Spartan policy is always mainly governed by the necessity of taking precautions against the helots. " According to Myron of Priene of the middle 3rd century BC, They " receive a stipulated number of beatings every year regardless of any wrongdoing, so that they would never forget they were slaves. " Each year, the Ephors declared war on the helots and the Krypteia slaughtered many. The Spartan Military system depended on the helots to cultivate and maintain the Spartan Kleros. The helots were the property of the state and could thus be called upon for services as light armed troops during a war. The helots were enlisted to add numbers to the Spartan army.

They were significant in the fact that they were the foundations of Spartan society. They supplied the whole Spartan society with food and assisted in conflicts and wars. Spartan men had to make a monthly contribution to the syssition. This came from the produce taken from the helot workers. The contribution allowed the Spartans to stay in the military mess, tying the functions of the helots into the maintenance of militaristic factors of the Spartan society. The helots caused a fear of rebellions resulting in a fierce military training so as to quell the rebellions swiftly. Next up the social ladder were the inferiors.

These were the illegitimate children of Spartiate fathers and helot mothers, helots freed for some courageous act or for service to the state, the adopted playmates of Spartan boys and the Spartan peers and cowards who had lost citizenship. It is unclear how they survived in Spartan society but some records suggest that they could own land and pay contribution to the Spartan state. The Perioekoi, lived in scattered villages in Sparta and were believed to have been a buffer zone against escaping Helots. They lived in self-governing communities but had to pay homage to Sparta. They had local citizenship but had no role in formulating the Spartan policy. They were not allowed to marry Spartans and if they conflicted with one, the Ephors would play judge. The perioekoi were significant as they controlled most economic aspects of Spartan society.

They were engaged mainly in mining, manufacture and commerce. All mineral and marine resources of Sparta were in control of the Perioekoi. It was the Perioekoi who manufactured the weapons that kept the Spartan

military in operation. A major obligation for the Perioekoi communities was their military service. They did not undergo the same training system as Spartans but were expected to provide hoplites during a war. Herodotus writes of the Persian wars that the Spartans “ sent a force of 5000 spartiate men to Plataea accompanied by 5000 picked Lacedaemonian troops drawn from outlying towns”. The Peroiekoi oversaw the economic functions of the Spartan society allowing the Spartiate men to focus on military training and maintaining a militaristic society.

Spartan women had much better lives than their Athenian counterparts. They could not hold public office or vote but were able to mingle freely with their men. They were trained rigorously, usually with the men, so as to be able to produce healthy and strong babies. The women held about 40% of Sparta’s land and wielded significant economic control. The main job of Spartan women was to be fit and healthy so as to produce fierce warrior children. They trained with the men, so as to encourage a harder workout and maintained the household whilst men concentrated on military training. At the top of the Spartan social structure were the homoioi or Spartiates.

These men were full blooded citizens of Sparta and were the elite group in Spartan society. The main criteria for belonging in the citizen class was membership and the sharing of common meals in the syssitia, being able to prove that he was descended from the sons of Herakles or the conquerors, ownership of Kleros and successful completion of the agoge. The Spartan men lived a life of loyalty and obedience to the state. The men were forbidden to engage in farming, trade and industry but were rather supported by the

state, each having a kleros and helots to work it. The Spartan men were at the top of the social structure and thus held power over all the other classes. They were significant in the social structure group in Spartan society as they maintained the defence and security of the state through the agoge. The agoge, allowed an effective military system to be developed in the Spartan society.

The purpose of the system was to create fearless and loyal Spartan warriors, developing a victorious army that was highly significant in Spartan society and creating a powerful defence force that could also quell any rebellions. The Spartan system required, as stated by Plutarch, that "... as boys reached the age of seven ...

their whole education was aimed at developing smart obedience, perseverance under stress, and victory in battle". The men maintained the strength of the nation. Their importance on the social ladder was that they kept the other peoples in their place. The governing powers made sure to keep the Spartan system the way it was, which eventually led to their downfall. The Spartan social structure was highly significant in the Spartan society. The structure was designed to maintain a militaristic society with each class making a contribution to the maintenance of a powerful nation. The Helots provided food for the Syssition and Spartan men and also added numbers during a war.

The Inferiors were believed to have owned land and may have supplied the society with produce. The Periokoi maintained the Spartan trade and economy, so that the Spartan men did not get distracted from their primary

military focus. They supplied the Spartan army with their weaponry and were required to add troops to the Spartan army during a conflict. The Spartan women also trained with the men, so as to encourage a harder workout and have a fit body to produce healthy warriors. The Spartan men trained constantly so as to keep the nation's military strength one of the Strongest. They also ran the government to continue the militaristic system implemented. The social structure in Sparta was based on the strength of the nation's military power and was designed to keep the helots under the control of the Spartans and to maintain a strong warrior force.

Thankyou