

SPARTAN EDUCATION

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

HISTORIAN J.T. HOOKER, 1980

A father had no right to decide whether to rear his newly born son or not. He was obliged to take the baby to the elders of his tribe for inspection. If they were satisfied that he was strong and healthy, they gave it back to the father to be brought up ... A Spartiate's son was nurtured by his parents until he was only seven years old. At that age he was removed from his family and, from his eighth to his twenty-first year, he was educated by the state according to a rigorous discipline. The state-controlled education, or agoge, occupied a central place in the Spartan system.

An important magistrate, the Warden of the Boys, was appointed to take charge of the agoge. His authority over the boys resembled that of a general over an army ... Immediately on his beginning the agoge, the seven-year old boy was enrolled in one of the 'troops' captained by one of the boys, whose orders the rest had to obey. Only the rudiments of reading and writing were taught; instruction consisted for the most part in ... obedience, bodily fitness and courage to conquer in battle. At the age of twelve a boy's regimen became even more severe ... Boys were encouraged to go out and steal food for the mess, but if caught stealing they were whipped.

PLUTARCH, C. 100 CE

The Spartans learned to read and write for purely practical reasons; but all other forms of education they banned from the country. Moreover, the young men were required not only to respect their own fathers and to be obedient to them, but to have regard for all the older men, to make room for them on the streets, to give up their seats to them, and to keep quiet in their presence.

The boys of Sparta were lashed with whips during the entire day at the altar of Artemis Orthia, frequently to the point of death, and they bravely endured this, cheerful and proud, vying with one another...as to which one of them could endure being beaten for the longer time and the greater number of blows. And the one who was victorious was held in special repute. This competition is called 'the flagellation' and it takes place each year.

MODERN SCHOLARS, 2010

The duty of the State and its educational program was to create the perfect citizen who demonstrated a deep sense of political, military and social duty, bore weapons for the defence and the glory of his city, governed its affairs, complied with its rules and maintained its values and traditions. Spartan education thus shaped the model of the citizen-soldier. In addition, compliance to the accepted models of behaviour became subject to constant control, which comprises the totality of rewards and sanctions with which society regulates individual behaviour. Thus, the attitude and behaviour of Spartan children was constantly supervised by the Paidonomos¹, the Ephors, the elderly and women.

The relationship developed between a child and an adult male in fact contributed to the child's gradual integration into adult society. Emphasis was placed, therefore, on the process of socialization via the association of children with the older members of the community, during which attendance at political discussions played an important role.

¹ Official supervising the education and training of boys and adolescents

SOURCE 1

*J.T. Hooker,
The Ancient Spartans
(London: J.M. Dent
and Sons Ltd., 1980)*

SOURCE 2

*Plutarch, Moralia: The Ancient
Customs of the Spartans,
c. 100 CE.*

SOURCE 3

*Metaxia Papapostolou,
Pantelis Konstantinakis,
Costas Mountakis,
Kostas Georgiadis,
'Rites of Passage and their
role in the socialisation of the
Spartan Youth' in Choregia
vol. 6, no. 1 (2010), 43-52.*

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HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Using Sources 1–3 and your own knowledge, respond to the following:

1. How does each source characterise the raising of Spartan youth?

2. Explain the purpose of education as expressed by each of the sources.

3. Use the evidence to compare childcare in Sparta to childcare in Athens.
