

## The Importance of Athletics and Athleticism in the Classical Spartan Army

*Patrick Clancy*

### Abstract:

The Spartans were a feared and organized fighting force on the ancient battlefield. They treated hoplite warfare as a skill, or *technē*, honed through athletics training and discipline to become proficient hoplite warriors. This paper will examine how the Spartans used athletic competitions to train for warfare. Additionally, this research will examine how the Spartans were molded from an early age by their culture, via their state-sponsored upbringing known as the *paideia*, to value discipline, athletic competition, and traits associated with athleticism for later use in their hoplite phalanx.

### Introduction

The Spartan army was a feared and organized fighting force on the ancient battlefield.<sup>1</sup> The Spartan citizens or Spartiates, who led the army, effectively weaponized their culture's affinity towards athleticism, athletics, and discipline for use in the hoplite phalanx.<sup>2</sup> To clarify the terms, athletics being the sports, competitions, or activities performed by athletes. Athleticism, as being the natural qualities possessed by an athlete such as strength, speed, agility, as well as overall mental and physical fitness. Additionally, for athleticism, the qualities previously mentioned can be understood as important in the realms of both demonstrated performance as well as perceived

---

<sup>1</sup> Echeverría 2011, 71–72; Konijnendijk 2018, 179–180; Thuc. 5.10.8; 5.72.4; Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.17, 4.4.11, 7.1.31.

<sup>2</sup> Cartledge 2001, 14, 22–23; Lazenby 2012, 19; MacDowell 1983, 23–27. Spartiate was a term used to differentiate full Spartan citizens from various non or modified citizen subclasses that existed within Sparta and their Perioikic neighbors in Lakedaemon.

ability.<sup>3</sup> The Spartans took their training for hoplite warfare seriously enough to make it the primary concern of their citizens. For the Spartans, warfare was something that could be learned through discipline, and practiced as a skill, or *techne* (τέχνη).<sup>4</sup> While there has been debate on whether or not the Spartan army constituted as a professional army, one thing was certain; until their major loss at Leuktra in 371 BCE Sparta was the only polis that even bothered to train with labor intensive efforts (φιλοπονίαις) for gymnastic contests (γυμνικοῖς ἀγῶσι) and for war (πολεμικοῖς) at all.<sup>5</sup> This athletic training allowed the Spartans to be effective on the battlefield as they had discipline to maintain their formations within the phalanx and, when lines failed or became disorganized, the Spartans could trust in each other's athletic ability to fight.<sup>6</sup>

What was included in Spartan hoplite training? Xenophon states that the Spartans did not overlook any detail and that they trained twice a day on campaign, where they focused on important muscle groups such as their legs, arms, and neck equally.<sup>7</sup> However, when discussing physical preparation for warfare the only convention seems to be athletic training; weapons drill does not appear to be as important as physical stamina.<sup>8</sup> Military formation practice may have been needed for when Spartiates led non-Spartiate forces, which frequently occurred.<sup>9</sup> Xenophon, in his *Lakedaemonian Politeia*, states that Spartan military maneuvers for rearranging their phalanx were difficult for non-Spartans.<sup>10</sup> While military formation drilling likely occurred in some fashion, it does not appear to be the case that Spartans spent all their time in arms drill or practicing maneuvers.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the daily Spartan campaign regimen likely consisted of a combination of both formation drilling and exercise, as it

<sup>3</sup> Christesen 2018, 545; Lorenz *et al.* 2013, 542–545.

<sup>4</sup> Hodkinson 2020, 335, 359; Thuc. 1.121. This sentiment is echoed by the Corinthians who knew the Peloponnesian League navy would eventually learn the techniques needed to become superior at sea.

<sup>5</sup> Arist. *Pol.* 8.1338b–1339a; Bardunias, 2016, 81; Hodkinson, 2020, 335–356; Richer, 2018, 535; see Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.23; *Lac.* 12.7.

<sup>6</sup> Humble 2006, pp. 219–229.

<sup>7</sup> Xen. *Lac.* 5.8–9, 12.5–7.

<sup>8</sup> Konijnendijk 2018, 61; Hodkinson 2020, 354–355; Humble 2006, 224–225; Diod. 17.11.4; Pl. *Leg.* 1.633a–c; Thuc. 5.80.3; Xen. *An.* 1.2.10, 4.8.25–28, 5.5.5; *Cyr.* 1.2.18; *Mem.* 3.5.15, 3.12.1–5; *Vect.* 4.52.

<sup>9</sup> Humble 2006, 222; Konijnendijk 2018, 43, 46, 53; Lazenby 2012, 30–31, 32; Thuc. 4.80.5, 5.66.3–4; Xen. *An.* 1.2.17–18, 4.3.26, 4.6.6; *Cyr.* 2.3.21, 8.5.15; *Lac.* 11.6. Konijnendijk notes Xenophon's frequent usage of παράγω 'to lead past', which he believes likely formed a part of Spartan formation drill for their wheeling maneuver. Thucydides informs readers that most Spartiates were given a command at some point during their careers. Their education, which will be discussed in greater detail later was to mold them into military leaders to command over non-Spartiates as well as Spartiates and thus, they were leaders leading other leaders.

<sup>10</sup> Xen. *Lac.* 11.5–7.

<sup>11</sup> Bayliss 2020, 51; Lazenby 2012, 5, 35; Lewis 2023, 26, 34. Lewis notes that Cretan training differed from Spartan, as the Cretans focused on technical bow skills for hunting while Spartans were primarily hoplite soldiers.



did with the forces led by Iason of Pherai.<sup>12</sup> Xenophon does not give specifics on which athletic exercises were used on campaign however, this research will include possible athletic competitions throughout which may have been beneficial to, or potentially employed by, the Spartan army for the purposes of military training.

The Spartans may have viewed extensive arms drill or high levels of weapon proficiency as largely pointless, as Xenophon relates that it should be natural or instinctive.<sup>13</sup> This natural adeptness at handling weapons may have been interpreted by the Greeks as *arete*, which was a general excellence that also carried strong athletic connotations.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the Greeks, and in particular the Spartans, may have recognized natural athleticism or weapons aptitude as *arete*.<sup>15</sup> A soldier's natural *arete*, or athleticism, may have led him to be perceived as a more competent warrior as they would have been a competent athlete. Indeed, many athletic competitions in Ancient Greece could be classified as "war games" not only by the presence of arms and armor, but also by the nature of the competitions themselves.<sup>16</sup> Plato believed athletic training was sufficient for warfare training and that war games such as armored gymnastic contest should be held monthly to test preparedness.<sup>17</sup> According to Plato, certain training, such as upright wrestling, promoted grace, strength, and health all of which were universal as well as practical for hoplite warfare.<sup>18</sup> Plato's description of *pyrrhic*, or armored, dancing seems to fit this theory of athletic movement being relevant to hoplite warfare since the dance involved moves that mimicked actions to avoid blows from spears and missiles by jumping, crouching, retreating, and advancing.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, this may illuminate why the Spartans, who were described as 'cicadas'

---

<sup>12</sup> Hodkinson 2020, 350; Konijnendijk 2018, 41–42; Thuc. 5.69; Xen. *Hell.* 6.1.5–6.

<sup>13</sup> Konijnendijk 2018, 70. (Xen. *Cyr.* 2.3.10).

<sup>14</sup> Christesen 2012, 231; Golden 1998, 238–239; Konijnendijk 2018, 58–60; Reid 2017, 42; 2020, 16. The definition of arete was not unanimously agreed upon by everyone and debate on the virtue excellence existed then just as it can be applied to many things now the same is true then.

<sup>15</sup> Lehmann 2009, 198. Discusses how the Spartan system of athletic training based on *arete* over *techné* could not keep up when others began training in athletics for Olympic games.

<sup>16</sup> Bayliss 2020, 52; Burstyn 1999, 29; Cawkwell 1989, 378; Golden 1998, 26–27; Miller 2004, 142, 148–149; Reed 1998, 1–7. According to Reed, those games included: the *hoplitodromos* race in full armor, pyrrhic dancing, the *euandria* beauty or masculine contest, and the *hoplomachia*. Miller believes *hoplitodromos* may have been more of a show than actual militarism as athletics however, the peripheral connection is undeniable which may have been the point the ancient Greeks may have wanted.

<sup>17</sup> Reed 1998, 2; Plat. *Leg.* 8.830.

<sup>18</sup> Plat. *Leg.* 636a, 795e–796e, 7.796a, 814d, 832e–833a.

<sup>19</sup> Bayliss 2020, 52; Cartledge 2001, 177; Goulaki-Voutira 1996, 3–4; Miller 2004, 139–140; Reed 1998, 4–5, 24–25, 27 (cf. Crowley 2012, 218); Plat. *Leg.* 7. 815a. Plato even suggests the women should partake in gymnastics and music so if the need to defend the city arose, they would be able to grab shield and spear to raise a defence (Plat. *Leg.* 7.806a–b). Reed notes that the dance was more often displayed with spears rather than swords, this may be the dances particular association with Athena and her preferred weapon.



always ready for choral dance, were the most adept polis at hoplite warfare for so long and why they needed to maintain their physical fitness throughout their lives.<sup>20</sup>

A physical and musical group-oriented activity such as *pyrrhiche* likely helped the Spartans activate the “neural components that comprise the social brain” which greatly increases cohesion and synchronicity among members of a group.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the Spartans were already highly regimented and synchronized with each other through their strong social bonds which likely increased their coordination and aptitude for the type of movements needed to excel in phalanx combat.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Lucian directly notes that the Spartans love for choral dance aided in their military excellence as their musicality and rhythm facilitated orderly marching.<sup>23</sup> Another armored athletic war game, known as the *hoplomachia*, was an armed duel possibly for both single competitions and team events.<sup>24</sup> This event was viewed to have particular use for when phalanx lines were broken.<sup>25</sup> As the Spartans had such a cultural focus on athletics and warfare, they apparently did not even have a need for *hoplomachoi*, or drill instructors.<sup>26</sup> The Spartans were already well versed in *hoplomachia* as the physical endurance and the flexibility were the same demands required for their hoplite training.

However, not all athletic activities, even if they featured armor, were useful towards military applications.<sup>27</sup> For example, Plato notes that Spartan women were heavily into athletics however, they were never expected to fight.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Plato, Xenophon, and Aristotle all dismissed heavy athletics as having no practical applications outside of the sport.<sup>29</sup> Contemporary research into exercise and the transference of athletics demonstrates that “being good at one thing does not usually mean that one will be equally skillful in other tasks, even those that are superficially similar.”<sup>30</sup> Good athletes do not always make good soldiers. However, the opposite transference is true as it appears good soldiers are more likely to be good athletes.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Bardunias 2016, 82; Bayliss 2020, 52–53, 82; Christesen 2012, 201, 239–240; Kagan / Viggiano, 2013, 43; Konijnendijk 2018, 58. Miller 2004, 139–140; Ath. 14.632–633.

<sup>21</sup> Burstyn 1999, 24; Gordon 2020, 2, 6–7; Krentz 1985, 58.

<sup>22</sup> Christesen 2012, 217, 221; Konijnendijk 2018, 67; Reed 1998, 26, 28.

<sup>23</sup> Luc. *Salt.* 10–11.

<sup>24</sup> Reed 1998, 38–39; Homer. *Il.* 23.800–820; Plat. *Leg.* 8. 830, 833d–e.

<sup>25</sup> Reed 1998, 40.

<sup>26</sup> Plat. *Lach.* 181d–183d.

<sup>27</sup> Golden 1998, 28; Hodkinson 2020, 354; Konijnendijk 2018, 173; Lehmann 2009, 195; Plat. *Leg.* 7.796a; Plut. *Mor.* 192cd, 788a; Tyrtaeus fr. 12; Xen. *Mem.* 2.1.28.

<sup>28</sup> Konijnendijk 2018, p. 63; Plat. *Leg.* 806a–b.

<sup>29</sup> Konijnendijk 2018, 63–64; Arist. *Pol.* 8.1338b; Plat. *Leg.* 7.796a; Xen. *Symp.* 2.17.

<sup>30</sup> Jarvis 2006, 160.

<sup>31</sup> Dayton 2006, 53–54; Diod. Sic. 12.9.5–6; Hdt. 6.36, 6.92, 8.47, 9.75; Paus. 7.27.5–7; cf. 6.8.6; Plut. *Vit. Lyc.* 22.4; *Mor.* 639e.



Thus, heavy athletics were likely not the main training regimen of the Spartan's and likely they were more focused on speed, stamina, and bodyweight strength.<sup>32</sup>

The clearest example of the importance of athletics as well as athleticism in the Spartan army comes in the Spring of 395 BCE when Agesilaus stopped at Ephesus.<sup>33</sup> Agesilaus specifically stopped there to have his men train in athletics and prepare the bodies, as well as the spirits of his soldiers, for the upcoming campaign (σώματα καὶ τὴν γνώμην παρασκευάζοιντο).<sup>34</sup> They trained themselves in the gymnasia for the “ways of war” (πολεμικὰ ἀσκοῖεν) and practiced obedience (πειθαρχεῖν δὲ μελετῶεν).<sup>35</sup> While Xenophon does not give specifics on exercises, he does note that the gymnasia was full of men exercising (παρῆν ὅρᾱν τὰ μὲν γυμνάσια πάντα μεστὰ ἀνδρῶν τῶν γυμναζομένων) and that prizes were given to hoplites who had the best bodies (ὀπλιτικάῃς... ἄριστα σωμάτων ἔχου).<sup>36</sup> While special units like peltasts, archers, and cavalry practiced their specific skills like archery, javelin throwing, and horsemanship it appears that non-specialists, such as hoplites, simply had to look physically fit; their appearance was enough of an indication of their skill level. Thus, a Spartan who was seen as overweight or out of shape, such as Naucrides, would have been viewed as a possible liability for his lack of athleticism, dedication, or discipline<sup>37</sup>. Indeed, Agesilaus likely knew the power of physical perception when he paraded naked Persian captives around the camp at Ephesus as the Spartans saw these defeated men as pale and soft, or out of shape. Thus, the Spartans perceived their enemy as unused to toil or weak.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, Spartans who were perceived to be in better shape may have been selected for more prestigious positions within the Spartan army.<sup>39</sup> This cannot be more evident than in how Spartiate Olympic victors were given places of honor to fight alongside the king leading them in battle.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Ath. 14. 630e–631b; Philostr. *Gym.* 1, 9, 19, 58; Xen. *Lac.* 5.9

<sup>33</sup> Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.16–20.

<sup>34</sup> Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.20

<sup>35</sup> Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.18

<sup>36</sup> Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.16

<sup>37</sup> Ath. 12.550d–e; Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.36; *Lac.* 4.7, 5.8, 7.3. Footnote 282 of the Olson translation states Naucrides was an ephor in 404/3 and may be the Naucrides Xenophon discussed in his *Hellenika*. Athenaeus also states his father's name confirming him to at least be a Spartiate.

<sup>38</sup> Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.19.

<sup>39</sup> Xen. *Hell.* 3.2.18.

<sup>40</sup> Bardunias 2016, 79; Christesen 2018, 552; Golden, 1998, 76; Plut. *Vit. Lyc.* 22.4, *Mor.* 639e. Christesen notes “A few, spectacularly successful, Spartan Olympic victors literally became objects of worship.”



## Discipline on the Battlefield

Were the Spartans good soldiers? Yes. Often, their reputation did much of the work and caused enemies to flee before fully engaging with the entire Spartan phalanx.<sup>41</sup> The Spartan army was not invincible, and frequently actually quite vulnerable. Their training was almost entirely dedicated to perfecting hoplite warfare with large decisive set-piece battles and often ignored the other types of warfare that occurred.<sup>42</sup> The Spartans practiced extreme discipline which gave them *eutaxia*, or good order, something that was paramount for hoplite victory.<sup>43</sup> The hierarchical system of officers and organization had the most qualified in the front and those behind them simply had to follow; typically, this was done in a slow organized and rhythmic march (ῥυθμοῦ βαίνοντες) accompanied by the *aulos* flute.<sup>44</sup> For the Spartans, orders could be given from *polemarchs* or other high-ranking officers, the Spartans could give revised orders, as well as observations could be noted by less-senior officers and taken under consideration by those leading the phalanx.<sup>45</sup> Only the Spartans were capable of handling multiple or revised orders; something that can be directly attributed to their training in discipline. Indeed, the Spartan *eutaxia* was envied, and to teach this battlefield *techne* to other *poleis* the Spartans employed physical exercise.<sup>46</sup> This all may not seem revolutionary, however, it was extraordinary compared to the unorganized phalanxes of non-Spartan armies.<sup>47</sup>

The Spartans were efficient soldiers and they highly valued physical courage, though not at the expense of order and discipline, as courage that endangered the phalanx was seen as selfish and dangerous.<sup>48</sup> The Spartans had a major emphasis on caution and exercise of discipline in the phalanx, which is most apparent in the general trend that the Spartans did not often pursue fleeing enemies.<sup>49</sup> When the opposing phalanx was broken and turned, this is when the greatest number of soldiers were killed, so naturally, even the Spartans still sought to pursue and inflict damage upon

<sup>41</sup> Echeverría 2011, 71–72; Konijnendijk 2018, 179–180; Thuc. 5.10.6–8; 5.72.4; Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.17, 4.4.11, 7.1.31.

<sup>42</sup> Bolmarcich 2005, 12; Cartledge / Spawforth 2002, 3; Crowley 2012, 2; Hdt. 1.56, 1.66, 7.204; Konijnendijk 2018, 101, 169–170; Lazenby 2012, 3–4, 148–149; Millender 2016, 162–163. Hdt. 1.56, 1.66; Plut. *Vit. Ages.* 31.2; Xen. *Hell.* 2.2.23, 5.1.31–35, 6.4.15, 7.5.15–27.

<sup>43</sup> Crowley 2012, 49, 52; Lazenby 2012, 72; Hdt. 7.208, 9.57; Thuc. 4.126

<sup>44</sup> Hodkinson 2020, 350, 353; Konijnendijk 2018, 222; Lazenby 2012, 30–31, 35, 38; Hdt. 9.57; Thuc. 5.66.4, 5.70; Xen. *Lac.* 11.5–8.

<sup>45</sup> Konijnendijk 2018, 146, 148; Thuc. 5.65.2–3; Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.22.

<sup>46</sup> Pontier 2020, 324; Xen. *Ages.* 1.26–27; *An.* 3.1.38; *Lac.* 8.1; *Hell.* 3.4.16–18 5.3.17, 3.4.16–18.

<sup>47</sup> Crowley 2012, 39, 117; Thuc. 5.66.2; Xen. *Lac.* 11.4.

<sup>48</sup> Powell 2020, 9; Hdt. 9.71.

<sup>49</sup> Dayton 2006, 83–84; Echeverría 2011, 72–73; Krentz 2013, 137; Lazenby 2012, 158; Marlantes 2011, 102; Paus. 4.8.11; Thuc. 5.73 (cf. Thuc. 2.91, 4.126–127); Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.31, 7.5.13. However, this discipline was not always guaranteed even if it was the standard. Marlantes makes a note that the NVA (North Vietnamese army) was very well disciplined and withdrew in order, making them exceedingly difficult to pursue.



their enemies.<sup>50</sup> Hoplite battle focused on endurance and waiting for the opponent to show weakness, and then, when weakness or disorder was shown, exploiting that weakness. The real skill of hoplite battle became apparent when the lines were broken and individuals were able to showcase their own abilities.<sup>51</sup>

Beyond being disciplined, Herodotus described the Spartans as knowing how to fight well (μάχεσθαι ἐξέπιστάμενοι), particularly in reference to their feigned retreats.<sup>52</sup> This maneuver is when the Spartans moved as if they were retreating which in turn signaled to the Persians to push the offensive, as soldiers were most vulnerable while retreating in disorder. However, the Spartans were able to reorganize their lines and catch the Persians pursuing and in disorder. There is no record of them using this tactic in other battles after Thermopylae yet, but that does not mean Herodotus' record is inaccurate. The Spartan battle plan may have involved "hit and run" tactics where they raced out from behind the Phocian wall to quickly attack the Persian forces. After a brief skirmish, the Spartans would dash back behind the wall to seek protection against the overwhelming Persian archers. However, once the Persians were more acquainted with these tactics, the Spartans may have been able to feign their retreats and catch the Persians off-guard, as they would have been rushing in disarray to seek vengeance on the attacking Spartans.<sup>53</sup> The Spartans were often associated with deceptive military tactics, thus, this strategy is within the realm of possibility for what they may have utilized to optimize their chances against an enemy which vastly outnumbered their forces.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, with this tactic of running for short clashes and returning behind the Phocian wall, Herodotus' account of the battle lasting all day long is also more plausible.<sup>55</sup>

Spartiate discipline and athleticism allowed the Spartan army to perform formations on a moment's notice with no practice, just as they did in 418 BCE at Mantinea I.<sup>56</sup> It is clear by the refusal of Hipponoidas and Aristocles to follow Agis' command to perform the *anastrophe* maneuver that this was not something that had been performed before.<sup>57</sup> They were willing to put their lives on the line by disobeying a direct order because they thought it could not be done. What was the *anastrophe*

<sup>50</sup> Dayton 2006, 84–85; Echeverría 2011, 71–72; Konijnendijk 2018, 189–194, 205; Viggiano and van Wees 2013, 66; Thuc. 1.106.1–2, 3.108.2–3, 4.96.7–8; Xen. *Ages.* 2.12; *Hell.* 3.5.19, 4.3.19.

<sup>51</sup> Ducat 2006, 144.; Harwood *et al.* 2014, 285; Lazenby 2012, 46. Harwood *et al.* notes that an ego-oriented athlete placed in a team environment would exert maximal effort provided they were able to stand out from others to demonstrate their abilities for their teammates and against their opponents. As the Spartans were highly competitive with each other they surely would want to demonstrate their abilities against their enemies on the battlefield in front of their mess mates within their *enomotia*.

<sup>52</sup> Bayliss 2020, 17; Cartledge 2006, 145; Hodgkinson 2020, 350; Hdt. 7.211.3.

<sup>53</sup> van Wees 2018, 36–37, 49.

<sup>54</sup> Konijnendijk 2018, 91–92, 94, 139, 147, 224; Hdt. 6.79. Xen. *An.* 4.6.14–16; *Hell.* 4.4.10

<sup>55</sup> Hdt. 7.210.2

<sup>56</sup> Thuc. 5.71–74.

<sup>57</sup> Lazenby 2012, 132–133, 157; Konijnendijk 2018, 148.



maneuver and why was it so difficult as well as dangerous? The first iteration of the *anastrophe* formation is recorded at Mantinea I in 418 BCE, Agis sought to mitigate the loss of his own left while still seeking to outflank the Athenians on his right. The hoplite phalanx had a general tendency to shift to its respective right.<sup>58</sup> He ordered the two sections on the left, the Sciritae and Brasideians, to stretch out and prevent from being overtaken on their left by the Mantinean right. Then, he commanded two *polemarchs*, Aristocles and Hipponoidas, to take their *lochoi* from the right of the phalanx, which had more men, and wheel their troops around to the sections on the left and middle of the phalanx as those sections had been stretched thin. However, Aristocles and Hipponoidas refused to move their men to the thinned sections and Argives were able to breach the Spartan phalanx. Despite the breach, the Spartans were able to defeat the Athenian section on their right, shift enough men to the middle to provide a sufficient depth of shields to reform their phalanx, and aid their lines on the left to defeat the Mantineans.<sup>59</sup>

The *anastrophe* maneuver was used either in combination with, or separately from, *cyclosis*, which was the encirclement around the opposing phalanx.<sup>60</sup> Only the Spartans were able to successfully complete the *anastrophe* maneuver. Cleon, the Athenian *strategos*, attempted a similar wheeling maneuver at Amphipolis with Athenian troops for a retreat, which Brasidas was able to disrupt.<sup>61</sup> Additionally, the Thessalians were also unsuccessful in an attempt of a similar wheeling formation against Agesilaus.<sup>62</sup>

The *anastrophe* maneuver was not always a guaranteed success for the Spartans as this tactic failed at Corcyra in 372 BCE and was likely what led the Spartans to be especially vulnerable at Leuktra in 371 BCE.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, Thucydides even called it an inferior tactic; he believed the Spartans were only able to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat at Mantinea because they had greater courage.<sup>64</sup> Thucydides' mention of courage here is interesting. Perhaps Thucydides meant the Spartans had immense desire to succeed which led the Spartans to even try this maneuver. This desire likely stemmed from wanting to risk everything to clean the stain of disgrace from the loss at Sphacteria in 425 BCE.<sup>65</sup> Thucydides focused on courage, as the *anastrophe* was daring, but courage was not all the Spartans needed. Beyond courage, the Spartans

<sup>58</sup> Thuc. 5.67-73.

<sup>59</sup> Bardunias 2016, 108, 166, 169. Lazenby 2012, 36-37; Thuc. 5.67.1, 5.68.3, 5.71-73.

<sup>60</sup> Bardunias 2016, pp. 166-167; Echeverría 2011, 65-66; Thuc. 3.108, 4.96, 5.73; Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.21, 5.4.40, 6.2.21, 6.5.18. The *anastrophe* did not always require *cyclosis* as the phalanx's right did not need to engulf the left of the opposing phalanx.

<sup>61</sup> Konijnendijk 2018, 54; Thuc. 5.10.4.

<sup>62</sup> Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.6-7.

<sup>63</sup> Bardunias 2016, 169; Konijnendijk 2018, 148; Lazenby 2012, 37; Plut. *Vit. Pel.* 23.1-2; Xen. *Hell.* 6.2.20-23, 6.4.8-13.

<sup>64</sup> Thuc. 5.72, 5.75.

<sup>65</sup> Lazenby 2012, 160.





employed their athletic training and discipline to be in the correct spots quickly enough to successfully complete this tactic at least twice.<sup>66</sup>

## Disciplined Upbringing: The *Paideia*

How was it that the Spartan army was the only hoplite force disciplined enough and physically fit enough to perform difficult movements such as the feigned retreats and *anastrophe*? The Spartan army was more disciplined, and Spartiate soldiers were more athletic than other *poleis* due mainly to the fact that they received extensive athletic and cultural training from their upbringing. The Spartiates were taught discipline, shame, obedience to authority, and self-control in their upbringing as those qualities were believed to make their citizens more soldierly as well as more fit to lead on the battlefield.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, Brasidas notes the listed qualities are the true marks of a good soldier.<sup>68</sup> Sparta, during the Classical period, was one of the few Greek *poleis* that had a state-mandated schooling system, known commonly as the *agoge*, but more accurately the *paideia*.<sup>69</sup>

The primary attendees of the Spartan upbringing were sons of fathers who were Spartiates. The goal was to train those future Spartan citizens as hoplites who were educated in Spartan cultural and martial affairs.<sup>70</sup> Completion of the *paideia* was mandatory to earn citizenship status in Sparta which afforded privileges such as: being granted a farm or estate known as a *kleros*, not having to toil on said *kleros* for a living, leisure time, and voting privileges in the Spartan assembly.<sup>71</sup> Work in Sparta was done

---

<sup>66</sup> During Mantinea II in 418 BCE (Thuc. 5.71–74) and before the battle of Mantinea II in 370 BCE to avoid being flanked (Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.18).

<sup>67</sup> Ducat 2006, 143; Hdt. 7.104; Millender 2016, 171; Plat. *Leg.* 1.663a–e; Richer 2009, 91–99; Xen. *Lac.* 2.2.

<sup>68</sup> Thuc. 5.9.9.

<sup>69</sup> Cartledge 2001, 85; Ducat 2006, 69; Kennell 1995, 113–114; Lewis 2023, 26, 34; Strabo 10.4.16–20. It should be noted Xenophon never calls Spartan education the *agoge* he uses παιδεύω. The term *agoge* is Hellenistic as opposed to Hellenic. Additionally, most of our evidence of the *agoge* “curriculum” do come to us from Hellenistic and Roman sources. There has been much debate about the “curriculum” (see Ducat and Kennell) however, the sources all agree of the importance of the physical education. Lewis highlights Strabo’s description of Cretan schooling which has many similar features to the Spartan *paideia* and possibly derived from the Cretan schooling. The Cretan education was also likely mandatory, given the similarities to the Spartan *paideia*.

<sup>70</sup> Cartledge 2001, 14; Lazenby 2012, 19. Spartiate was a term used to differentiate full Spartan citizens from various non or modified citizen subclasses that existed within Sparta and their Perioikic neighbors in Lakedaemon.

<sup>71</sup> Bayliss 2020, 44, 51; Cartledge 2001, 34; Figueira 1984, 101; Hodkinson 2000, 65–71, 394; Xen. *Lac.* 7.1–6, 10.7. Hodkinson notes that classical authors do not mention how the land was inherited and expresses doubt regarding Plutarch’s claim that *kleroi* are inherited at birth (Plut. *Vit.* Lyc. 16). The author agrees with this skepticism and does not believe that 9,000 equal plots were automatically given to Spartan citizens. However, to retain Spartiate status, land was required to produce raw materials used for the mess tax and thus to be a Spartiate one had to have land. Hodkinson theorizes that a Spartiate needed at least 10 hectares to produce enough to fulfill mess dues.



by Helots, who were hereditarily enslaved Greeks.<sup>72</sup> This freedom from labor in turn supplied Spartiates with both time and funding for an aristocratic lifestyle focused on athletics and warfare.<sup>73</sup> I believe this is efficiently highlighted by Plutarch: “It was by not taking care of the fields, but of ourselves, that we acquired those fields.”<sup>74</sup>

Spartan citizenship was not guaranteed even for those born into the citizen class. Future Spartiates were required to graduate from the *paideia* and be elected into a *philitia* (dining club), as well as pay mess dues.<sup>75</sup> Those who failed to meet the aforementioned conditions would not become Spartiates and were therefore unable to share in all the ‘good things’ which came from citizenship.<sup>76</sup> Additionally, those who showed cowardice on the battlefield were shamed as tremblers (*treantes*) and were also excluded from the benefits of citizenship. Xenophon informs us that *treantes* were not picked for wrestling partners, when teams for ball games were decided cowards would be picked last, and in choral dancing cowards would be driven away to a shameful position.<sup>77</sup>

The Spartans placed a great cultural emphasis on athletics they ensured that culture was passed down through their schooling. This was not unheard of and, although the *paideia* was uniquely Spartan, it had a comparable generalized

<sup>72</sup> Bayliss 2020, 38–39; Christesen 2012, 225; Plut. *Vit. Lyc.* 28.5.

<sup>73</sup> Bayliss 2020, 111; Cartledge 2001, 24; Christesen 2012, 225; 2018, 551; Figueira 2020, 274; Kennell 1995, 13; Plut. *Vit. Lyc.* 28.5; *Xen. Lac.* 7.2.

<sup>74</sup> Hanson 2013, 260; Plut. *Mor.* 217a.

<sup>75</sup> Figueira 1984, 106; 2004, 53; 2020, 272; Hodkinson 2000, 66, 190, 210, 347, 400; Lazenby 2012, 31; Arist. *Pol.* 1271a26–37, 1272a13–16; *Xen. Lac.* 7.3. Even the Spartan kings attended the public mess (*Xen. Lac.* 15.4). Agis once requested to eat privately and was fined (Plut. *Vit. Lyc.* 12.3).

<sup>76</sup> Cartledge 2001, 14, 87–88; Christesen 2012, 199; 2018, 545; Ducat 2006, 149, 156; Plut. *Mor.* 238e; *Xen. Lac.* 3.3.

<sup>77</sup> *Ath.* 14.632; Bayliss 2020, 32; Cartledge 1981, 94–96; Christesen 2012, 193–194; Christesen 2018, 546, 560; David 2004, 32–36; Ducat 2006, 123, 240; Golden 1998, 29; Guttman 2004, 23–24; Hodkinson 2000, 228; Humble 2006, 224–227; MacDowell 1983, 44; Millender 2016, 176–177; Pomeroy 2002, 18, 23, 36–37; Pl. *Resp.* 3.412b; Plut. *Vit. Lyc.* 14.3; *Xen. Lac.* 1.4, 9.3–6; *Mem.* 3.7.1; cf. *Cyr.* 1.5.10. MacDowell notes that some Spartiates who lost their status after surrendering at Sphakteria were still able to run for elected offices thereby regaining their Spartiate status. Thus, it is unclear if a loss of status was ever permanent or on a case-by-case situation where a transgression could be overlooked. There are limited examples of Spartiates who were charged with cowardice, but they include Aristodemus, who was dismissed by Leonidas before the final day of Thermoplye was one (*Hdt.* 7.229–232, 9.71), Aristocles and Hipponoidas who were polemarchs that refused Agis’ anastrophe order at Mantinea I (*Thuc.* 5.71.2–72.1). Aristocles and Hipponoidas, although they were not given the official title of tremblers, they were banished from Sparta as they were believed to have refused the order of Agis out of cowardice (δόξαντας μαλακισθῆναι). Humble notes that fear of cowardice led many notable Spartans to prefer dying in battle rather than facing their peers as a possible coward: Mindaros (*Xen. Hell.* 1.1.17–22), Peisandros (4.3.12), Anaxibios (4.8.32–39), Kallikratidas (1.6.32), Mnasippos (6.2.22–23), and king Kleombrotos (6.4.5). It is important to note that this did not happen often on *en masse* in Sparta. Even in their two most notable loss at Sphakteria, where Spartiates were taken prisoner there were instances of temporary citizenship loss and fines (*Thuc.* 5.34), but there does not appear to be any permanent loss of Spartiate status for the defeated troops. However, David notes that due to everything involved in a loss of citizenship status, even if it were not permanent that its absence would still be greatly felt.



“curriculum” to that of the other Hellenic educations. Studies centered around transmitting cultural knowledge and values such as virtue (*andria*), and courage or excellence (*arete*).<sup>78</sup> Although reading and writing (*grammata*) were taught in the upbringing, the Spartan focus was on molding their future hoplite soldiers through an athletic (*gymnic*), and musical education (*mousike*) with poetry, song, and dance.<sup>79</sup>

There were three age classes in the *paideia* during the Classical era. The first two were: *paides* (from ages seven until either twelve or fourteen) and *paidiskoi* (from ages twelve or fourteen until either eighteen or twenty). The cultural and athletic training was established during the *paides* age group and then intensified during the *paidiskoi* class. The third age group, *hebontes* (from ages eighteen until either twenty or thirty), had less of an educational aspect, as they were similar to citizens on probation who began utilizing what they had learned in their upbringing to the hoplite battlefield.<sup>80</sup>

The *paideia* began with the *paides* age class where education shifted from their private homes into the public.<sup>81</sup> Their athletic warrior training began when they were introduced to hunting, which Xenophon believed promoted many life lessons, instilled discipline, encouraged endurance through physical hardship, provided exercise, and in general prepared for military service.<sup>82</sup> After moving on from the *paides* boys age group came the *paidiskoi* group, when boys became “boyish.” They experienced quasi-military discipline and even began sleeping in barracks with all the other Spartiates until they graduated from the *hebontes* age class.<sup>83</sup> The athletic games became more competitive and violent to prepare them for the role of soldiers in their society.<sup>84</sup> One such game was *sphairromachia/ episkyros*, where teams tossed and caught a ball while

<sup>78</sup> Bardunias 2016, 91.

<sup>79</sup> Bayliss 2020, 84–85; Cartledge 2001, 47–48, 82, 85; Christesen 2018, 546–547; 2019, 31. Dova 2020, 107; Ducat 2006, 119, 121, 123–124, 132; Richer 2018, 532. Spartan literacy has been an ongoing debate. The consensus seems to agree that Spartans would have been functionally literate especially since Spartans had a chance at serving in the ephorate however, they were primarily an oral culture which stressed brevity of speech. (Hdt. 3.46, 4.77; Homer. *Il.* 3.2.14; Pl. *Prt.* 342e; Plut. *Vit. Lyc.* 19.1).

<sup>80</sup> Christesen 2012, 200; 2018, 545; Ducat 2006, 103, 183; Humble 2004, 239, 241; Kennell 1995, 34–39. Plut. *Vit. Lyc.* 25.1; Richer 2018, 527–528; Xen. *Lac.* 1.5. The debate on how age classes were determined, what markers signified shifts into other age classes, and even the existence of age classes have contemporary scholars divided. However, I chose to report these age classes as they fit towards general developmental markers of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. It does not seem to me that the Classical Spartans, known for their laconic speech and thought, would have multiple age classes like in the Hellenistic (14–20 years) and Roman (16–20 years) *agoge* iterations.

<sup>81</sup> Christesen 2019, 1, 17, 127; Ducat 2006, 84–85, 125–126; Figueira 1984, 96. Education before the formal Spartan upbringing may have been likely led by a boy’s mother however, their father may have also played a large role in their upbringing as well as evidence like the Damonon stele shows Damonon seems to have been very involved with his son’s upbringing and shared immense pride in his son’s victories as much as his own.

<sup>82</sup> Anderson 1985, 37, 26–27; Thuc. 3.15; Xen. *An.* 1.5.1–7; *Cyn.* 2.1

<sup>83</sup> Cartledge 2001, 14, 86; Christesen 2018, 546; Ducat 2006, 86, 91–96, 103–104.

<sup>84</sup> Christesen 2012, 235; Miller 2004, 148.



forcing each other behind a line forming something of a combination of American football, rugby, and net-less volleyball.<sup>85</sup> The violent athletics continued with *Platanistas*, the Grove of Plane Trees, which may have started during the Hellenistic period. Pausanias described this “game” as a mock war with punching, kicking, biting and eye gouging.<sup>86</sup> These mock battles involved significant risk of injury and even death, but that was the point. It may have been designed to push the *paidiskoi* into competing to develop their warrior nature as early as possible.<sup>87</sup>

Once graduating from the *paidiskoi* age group came the *hebontes* age group, where their education formally ended, and their focus shifted from learning athletics and culture to utilizing their athletic prowess while serving in the Spartan army.<sup>88</sup> The *hebontes* were often the best soldiers, likely due to their greater athletic potential at this age.<sup>89</sup> After completing the *paideia*, members from the *hebontes* age group, needed to be unanimously accepted into a *philitia*, which was possibly comprised of fifteen to thirty men from mixed age groups.<sup>90</sup> *Hebontes* needed to demonstrate their valor, reliability, and dedication to the Spartan way of life as there is evidence that each *philitia*, or a few closely linked *philitia*, made up a military unit known as an *enomotia*.<sup>91</sup>

Xenophon described the *hebontes* age group as reaching the prime of life with the strongest spirit of rivalry. This made their sections in the chorus and their athletic contests the finest to watch.<sup>92</sup> In fact, the level of rivalry was so strong that *hebontes*

<sup>85</sup> Bayliss 2020, 83; Christesen 2012, 201, 238; 2018, 547; Golden 1998, 9; Miller 2004, 147–148; Xen. *Lac.* 9.5. Xenophon also informs us that this game was not just played by *paidiskoi*, but also by *hebontes* and full Spartiates demonstrating that this game was still played by warriors. This may have been started as an introduction to the boys and a reminder to the men during peace time.

<sup>86</sup> Paus. 3.14.10. Christesen 2012, 202; Crowther 1990, 199; Golden 1998, 9; Kennell 1995, 25, 45, 55–59, 111, 138; Pomeroy 2002, 14.

<sup>87</sup> Ducat 2006, 57.

<sup>88</sup> Bardunias 2016, 81–82; Cartledge 1977, 17; Christesen 2012, 200–201; 2018, 546; Ducat 2006, 95, 99–101; Lazenby 2012, 35; Arist. *Pol.* 1256b 23–6; Plat. *Leg.* 823b–824c; Philostr. *Gym.* 7–8; Plut. *Mor.* 639e; Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.16–18, 5.4.13; *Cyn.* 7.1, 8.11.

<sup>89</sup> Ducat 2006, 104, 354–346; Hodkinson 2020, 354–355; Konijnendijk 2018, 100, 135; Lazenby 2012, 49, 70, 156. Thuc. 4.33.2, 4.125.3; Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.16–18, 4.4. 16–17, 4.5.13–16, 4.6.10–11, 5.4.40. It should be noted that early *hebontes* may have been placed in the rear along with the oldest/ experienced soldiers (who would also prevent others from retreating prematurely). They were not placed in the front ranks until they were more battle tested.

<sup>90</sup> Bayliss 2020, pp. 54–57; Cartledge 2001, 14, 87–88; Christesen 2019, 8, 101, 143; Dalby 1997, 12; Figueira 1984, 97; Giugliano 2001, 49; Kennell 1995, 124, 130; Lazenby 2012, 17–18, 68–69; Xen. *Lac.* 5.5. The *philitia* was particularly Spartan. *Syssitia* or *andreia* could also be used to describe dining clubs and were relevant in other societies, particularly Crete, however, with the Spartans we believe the *philitia* carried military significance in their organization of the *enomotiai*.

<sup>91</sup> Ducat 2006, 105; Lazenby 2012, 17–18, 51, 146. Pl. *Leg.* 1.633a–c. Plato had his Spartan interlocutor connect the common mess meals with athletics and stated that they were both in the service of creating better warriors.

<sup>92</sup> Xen. *Lac.* 4.1–2, 4.7, 5.8.



frequently would get into fist fights with each other.<sup>93</sup> They were competing so vigorously not only to be elected into a *philitia* and to become citizens, but also to be selected as a member of the elite knights (*hippeis*) or possibly even the secretive *crypteia*; all of which were selected on merit.<sup>94</sup> An indicator of that merit was certainly athletic performance, since athletics, or the perception of athleticism, were major factors in how the Spartans selected troops for certain positions.<sup>95</sup>

## Sport Psychology and Conclusion

I believe Sport Psychology, which is the study of psychological basis, processes, and effects of sport in the forms of competition, recreation, education, and health can be a useful tool in examining how the Spartans may have thought and felt about athletics within their societal roles.<sup>96</sup> The Spartan upbringing was expressly designed to condition and model the behavior of the boys in attendance, as children tend to copy the sport related behavior of their role models who, in this situation, included the warriors they were intended to replace.<sup>97</sup> Through observation, reproduction, repetition, and reinforcement future Spartiates were constantly influenced by peers and adults through shared interest and inclusion in sport to value athletics.<sup>98</sup> The Spartans may have at least partially understood that athletics had a great impact on child development just as we understand athletics can exert influence over “fitness, social and physical competence, moral development, aggression, and education” as well as encourage “dedication, courage, discipline and perseverance.”<sup>99</sup>

The *paideia* may have even sought to imbed Spartans with some of the same personality traits displayed by successful athletes such as “aggression, coachability, conscientiousness, determination, drive, emotional control, guilt proneness, leadership, mental toughness, self-confidence, and trust.”<sup>100</sup> Spartans were brought together as individuals to become cohesive team members to fulfil goals through physical education, principally becoming hoplite warriors.<sup>101</sup> They were encouraged to

---

<sup>93</sup> Christesen 2012, 235; Ducat 2006, 16–17; Xen. *Lac.* 4.6.

<sup>94</sup> Ducat 2006, 57, 171, 282, 287–288, 293–294, 296–297; Cartledge 2001, 88; Hodkinson 2000, 258; Plat. *Leg.* 1.633a–e; Richer 2018, 526–527, 529–532; Xen. *Lac.* 4.1–6; *Hell.* 5.4.32. Sphodrias performed all the duties required of a *pais*, *paidiskos*, and *hebon*; thus, performing duties (which may have been athletic) during the Spartan upbringing increased one’s merit or standing within Spartan society. Indeed, even the *paidonomos* was possibly selected due to his sound mind (*σωφρονέστατον*) and warlike nature (*μαχημώτατον*) which Richer equates to physical fitness (Plut *Vit. Lyc.* 17.2).

<sup>95</sup> Plut. *Vit. Lyc.* 22.4; *Mor.* 639e; Xen. *Hell.* 3.2.18, 3.4.16–20.

<sup>96</sup> Jarvis 2006, 1,

<sup>97</sup> Jarvis 2006, 36, 38.

<sup>98</sup> Crowley 2012, 9; Jarvis 2006, 36–37, 40, 41–42, 55.

<sup>99</sup> Jarvis 2006, 46, Kao 2019, 1.

<sup>100</sup> Jarvis 2006, 20.

<sup>101</sup> Kao 2019, 3–4; Millender 2016, 171.



compete with each other to learn, develop respect amongst peers, and foster “team spirit while integrating personal and social responsibilities.”<sup>102</sup>

During their upbringing, future Spartiates were in athletic competition against each other, which can create division, as demonstrated by the *hebontes* fist fights and sabotage for positions.<sup>103</sup> However, under proper guidance, which those in the *paideia* received in the form of constant surveillance,<sup>104</sup> athletes can be educated on the shared goals of a team where the competitive spirit can be harnessed to push individuals as well as team members to excel.<sup>105</sup> By pushing each other to be better and excel they likely formed bonds as teammates striving for the same goals: to stay alive on the battlefield, to demonstrate their athletic *arete* in front of their comrades as well as enemies on the battlefield, and to preserve their way of life in Sparta.<sup>106</sup> The Spartans did everything in groups, no one was by themselves and this created immense social pressure, but also cohesion.<sup>107</sup> They were educated together, lived together in communal barracks from ages fourteen to thirty, hunted together, ate their meals together, participated in athletics together, as well as fought and died together.<sup>108</sup> This social cohesion was further enforced through athletics and likely this led to Spartiates seeing each other not only as fellow citizens, but also as teammates.<sup>109</sup> This is best stated by a quote attributed to Paedareus who, after not being picked as a member of the three hundred *hippeis*, was cheerful and rejoiced that the state (Sparta) had three hundred citizens better than himself (δι' ὃ τι συγχαίρω τῇ πόλει τριακοσίων κρείττονάς μου πολίτας ἐχούσῃ).<sup>110</sup>

Athleticism improved individual Spartan hoplite performances and provided social acceptance. Those successes in turn improved their social and physical cohesion with each other.<sup>111</sup> Spartans were given extrinsic motivation to prove themselves in athletics by obtaining prestigious positions such as citizenship, to be a member of the revered *hippies* or *crypteia*, and to fight alongside the king after Olympic victory.<sup>112</sup> Additionally, they were given intrinsic motivation as they likely enjoyed their leisure time being filled with athletic activities.<sup>113</sup> Since the Spartan culture held athletics to

<sup>102</sup> Kao 2019, 11.

<sup>103</sup> Xen. *Lac.* 4.6

<sup>104</sup> Millender 2016, 173–174. Xen. *Lac.* 2.2, 2.5, 2.10–2.12, 6.2

<sup>105</sup> Christesen 2012, p. 231; Smith 2015, 1–2, 11; Standage and Vallerand 2014, 268–270.

<sup>106</sup> Harwood *et al.* 2014, 285.

<sup>107</sup> Christesen 2012, 225–227; Ducat 2006, 169.

<sup>108</sup> Cartledge 2001, 14; Thuc. 3.15; Xen. *An.* 1.5.1–7; *Cyn.* 2.1; *Lac.* 2.2, 2.5, 2.10–2.12, 5.5–7, 6.2, 9.3–6, 11.7.

<sup>109</sup> Christesen 2012, 119, 193–194, 201–202, 224, 245–247; Golden 1998, 71.

<sup>110</sup> Plut. *Mor. Apoph.* 60.

<sup>111</sup> Chow and Feltz 2014, 304; Crowley 2012, 7, 16; Elkins 2009, 1002; Gordon 2020, 1; Jarvis 2006, 96–97; King 2007, 640–643.

<sup>112</sup> Arist. *Pol.* 1297a29–32; Plut. *Vit. Lyc.* 22.4; *Mor.* 639e; Xen. *Hell.* 3.2.18; *Lac.* 4.1–6.

<sup>113</sup> Jarvis 2006, 136.



such a high standard those who were naturally more athletic likely were more valued members of Spartan society. Perhaps this may have even influenced Spartan reproduction trends, as physically fit mothers were expected to give birth to fit sons and marriages were even open to have other worthy, or possibly athletic, male partners share wives.<sup>114</sup>

The Spartans were shaped by their elders through their upbringing in a similar fashion that drill instructors have with soldiers. They were broken down and built back up from individuals into a cohesive group.<sup>115</sup> In this way, those in the *paideia* learned not only about martial and athletic performance but were also given psychological and spiritual development.<sup>116</sup> Ultimately, their athletic performance would be needed to prepare for the horrors of warfare, as their physical education on hardening the body also sought to temper the mind and master suffering (*pathemata*).<sup>117</sup> The shared hardship created strong bonds and, for the Spartans partaking in the *paideia*, this may have even been seen as a rite of passage.<sup>118</sup> This intense training instilled discipline and physical fitness allowed Spartiates to feel confident that the men beside them all knew how to fight as they underwent the same grueling athletic training.<sup>119</sup> Just as with *arete*, the Greeks believed the physical and spiritual were intertwined and that their athletic competitions helped shape the bodies and minds of soldiers to better prepare them for warfare.<sup>120</sup> The Spartans knew their soldiers needed to be disciplined in the phalanx as mistakes, fatigue, or disorder were known to get soldiers killed.<sup>121</sup>

It is likely that the Spartan upbringing was designed around creating disciplined citizen-soldiers through athletic competition. This cultivated greater affinity towards athleticism within the Spartan populace. The Spartans then took their athletic ability to the hoplite battlefield and performed formations no other army could with ease. Therefore, the Spartan culture promoted athletics and athleticism which played an essential part in the development of the Classical Spartan army.

## Bibliography

Anderson, J. K. (1985), *Hunting in the Ancient World*. Berkley.  
Anglim, S. *et al.* (2002), *Fighting Techniques of the Ancient World 3000 BC–AD 500: Equipment Combat Skills, and Tactics*. New York.

---

<sup>114</sup> Xen. *Lac.* 1.4, 1.6, 1.7–8.

<sup>115</sup> Crowley 2012, 10; Marlanges 2011, 10–12, 14–15, 254; Shay 1994, 39, 40–43, 52.

<sup>116</sup> Bardunias 2016, 102–103; Crowley 2012, 95; Marlanges 2011, 7, 17, 30–32, 40–42, 44; Palumbo / Reid 2020, 197; Shay 1994, 90, 92–93, 151.

<sup>117</sup> Richer 2018, 536.

<sup>118</sup> Kennell 1995, 75.

<sup>119</sup> Humble 2006, 229. Xen. *Lac.* 11.7.

<sup>120</sup> Coulson 2020, 211.

<sup>121</sup> Bardunias 2016, 138; Krentz 1985, 60; Marlanges 2011, 11–12; Thuc. 7.44.



- Bardunias, P. / Ray Jr., F. E. (2016), *Hoplites at War: A Comprehensive Analysis of Heavy Infantry Combat in the Greek World, 750–100 BCE*. North Carolina.
- Bayliss, A. J. (2020), *The Spartans*. Oxford.
- Bolmarcich, S. (2005), Thucydides 1.19.1 and the Peloponnesian League, in: *GRBS*, 45.1, 5–34.
- Burstyn, V. (1999), *The Rites Of Men: Manhood, Politics, And The Culture Of Sport*. Toronto.
- Cartledge, P. (1981), Spartan Wives: Liberation or Licence?, in: *CQ* 31.1, 84–105.
- Cartledge, P. (1977), Hoplites and Heroes: Sparta's Contribution to the Technique of Ancient Warfare, in: *JHS*, 97, 11–27
- Cartledge, P. (2001), *Spartan Reflections*. Berkley.
- Cartledge, P. (2006), *Thermopylae: The Battles that Changed the World*. New York.
- Cartledge, P. (2013), Hoplitai/Politai: Refighting Ancient Battles, in Kagan, D. / Viggiano, G. F. (eds.), *Men of Bronze: Hoplite Warfare in Ancient Greece*. Princeton, 74–84.
- Carreker, D. (2012), *Game Developer's Dictionary: A Multidisciplinary Lexicon for Professionals and Students*, Course Technology. Boston.
- Cawkwell, G. L. (1989), Orthodoxy and Hoplites, in: *CQ* 39.2, 375–389.
- Chow, G. / Feltz, D. (2014), Collective Efficacy Beliefs and Sport, in Beauchamp, M. / Eys, M. (eds.), *Group Dynamics in Exercise and Sport Psychology*. New York, 298–315.
- Christesen, P. (2006), Xenophon's 'Cyropaedia' and Military Reform in Sparta, in: *JHS* 126, 47–65.
- Christesen, P. (2012), Athletics and Social Order in Sparta in the Classical Period, in: *ClAnt* 31.2, 193–255.
- Christesen, P. (2018), Sparta and Athletics, in: Powell, A. (ed.), *A Companion to Sparta*. Hoboken, 543–564.
- Christesen, P. (2019), *A New Reading of the Damonon Stele*. Newcastle upon Tyne.
- Coulson, L. (2020), The Agōnes of Platonic Philosophy: Seeking Victory Without Triumph, in Reid, H. / Ralkowski, M. / Zoller, C. (eds.), *Athletics, Gymnastics, and Agon in Plato*. Sioux City, 211–222.
- Crowley, J. (2012), *The Psychology of the Athenian Hoplite: The Culture of Combat in Classical Athens*. Cambridge.
- Crowther, N. B. (1990), A Spartan Olympic Boxing Champion, in: *AC* 59, 198–202.
- Cuniberti, G. (2020), The Communication of History in Xenophon: The Art of Narration, the Control of Reception and Happiness, in: Powell, A. / Richer, N. (eds.), *Xenophon and Sparta*. Swansea, 161–178.
- Cuyjet, M. J. (2016), *Multiculturalism on Campus: Theory, Models, and Practices for Understanding Diversity and Creating Inclusion*. Sterling.
- David, E. (2004), Suicide in Spartan society, in Figueira, T. (ed), *Spartan Society*. Swansea, 25–46.
- David, E. (2020), Xenophon and the Myth of Lykourgos, in: Powell, A. / Richer, N. (eds.), *Xenophon and Sparta*. Swansea, 203–222.
- Daverio Rocchi, G. (2020), Xenophon's Portrayal of Sparta in the Hellenica, The Lakedaimonion Politeia, and the Agesilaus, in Powell, A. / Richer, N. (eds.), *Xenophon and Sparta*. Swansea, 109–128.





- Dayton, J. C. (2006), *The Athletes of War: An Evaluation of the Agonistic Elements of Greek Warfare*. Toronto.
- Dombrowski, D. A. (2020), Four-Term Analogies and the Gorgias: Gymnastics, Agōn, and the Athletic Life in Plato, in Reid, H. / Ralkowski, M. / Zoller, C. (eds.), *Athletics, Gymnastics, and Agon in Plato*. Sioux City, 199–210.
- Dova, S. (2020), On Philogymnastia and Its Cognates in Plato, in Reid, H. / Ralkowski, M. / Zoller, C. (eds.), *Athletics, Gymnastics, and Agon in Plato*. Sioux City, 107–26.
- Ducat, J. (2006), *Spartan Education: Youth and Society in the Classical Period*. Swansea.
- Echeverría Rey, F. (2011), *Taktikè Technè: The Neglected Element in Classical 'Hoplite' Battles*, in: *AncSoc* 41, 45–82.
- Elkins, A. *et al.* (2009), Physiological compliance and team performance, in: *Applied Ergonomics* 40, 997–1003.
- Figueira, T. (2004), The nature of the Spartan kleros, in Figueira, T. (ed.), *Spartan Society*. Swansea, 47–76.
- Figueira, T. (2020), Xenophon and the Spartan Economy, in Powell, A. / Richer, N. (eds.), *Xenophon and Sparta*. Swansea, 261–290.
- Golden, M. (1998), *Sport and Society in Ancient Greece*. Cambridge.
- Gordon, I. *et al.* (2020), Physiological and Behavioral Synchrony Predict Group Cohesion and Performance, in: *Scientific Reports* 10.8484, 1–12.
- Goulaki-Voutira, A. (1996), Pyrrhic Dance and Female Pyrrhic Dancers, in: *RidIM/RCMI Newsletter* 21, 1, 3–12.
- Guttman, A. (2004), *Sports: The First Five Millennia*. Amherst.
- Hanson, V. D. (1989), *The Western Way of War*. New York.
- Hanson, V. D. (2013), The Hoplite Narrative, in Kagan, D. / Viggiano, G. F. (eds.), *Men of Bronze: Hoplite Warfare in Ancient Greece*. Princeton, 256–276.
- Harwood, C. *et al.* (2014). Group Functioning Though Optimal Achievement Goals, in Beauchamp, M/ Eys, M (eds.), *Group Dynamics in Exercise and Sport Psychology*. New York, 279–297.
- Hodkinson, S. (2000), *Property and Wealth in Classical Sparta*. London.
- Hodkinson, S. (2020), Professionalism, Specialization and Skill in the Classical Spartan Army?”, in Stewart, E. / Harris, E. / Lewis, D. (eds.), *Skilled Labour and Professionalism in Ancient Greece and Rome*. Cambridge, 335–361.
- Humble, N. (2006). Why The Spartans Fight So Well, Even If They Are In Disorder: Xenophon's View, in Stephen Hodkinson, S. / Powell, A (eds.), *Sparta and War*. Swansea, 219–234.
- Humble, N. (2004), Xenophon's sons in Sparta? Perspectives on Xenoï in the Spartan Upbringing, in: Figueira, T. (ed.), *Spartan Society*. Swansea, 231–250.
- Jarvis, M. (2006), *Sport Psychology: A Student's Handbook*. New York.
- Kagan, D. / Viggiano, G. F. (2013) The Hoplite Debate, in Kagan, D. / Viggiano, G. F. (eds.), *Men of Bronze: Hoplite Warfare in Ancient Greece*. Princeton, 1–56.
- Kao, C.-C. (2019), Development of Team Cohesion and Sustained Collaboration Skills with the Sport Education Model, in: *Sustainability* 11.8.2348, 1–15.



- Kennell, N. (1995), *The Gymnasium of Virtue: Education and Culture in Ancient Sparta*. Chapel Hill.
- King, A. (2007), The Existence of Group Cohesion in the Armed Forces: A Response to Guy Siebold, in: *Armed Forces & Society* 33.4, 638–645.
- Konijnendijk, R. (2018), *Classical Greek Tactics: A Cultural History*. Leiden.
- Krentz, P. (1985), The Nature of Hoplite Battle, in: *ClAnt* 4.1, 50–61.
- Krentz, P. (2004), Casualties in Hoplite Battles, in: *GRBS* 26, 13–20.
- Krentz, P. (2013), Hoplite Hell: How Hoplites Fought, in: Kagan, D. / Viggiano, G. F. (eds.), *Men of Bronze: Hoplite Warfare in Ancient Greece*. Princeton, 134–156.
- Lazenby, J. F. (2012), *The Spartan Army*. Mechanicsburg.
- Lehmann, C. M. (2009), Early Greek Athletic Trainers, in: *Journal of Sport History* 36.2, 187–204.
- Lewis, D. (2023), The Cretan Way of War – Status, Violence and Values from the Classical Period to the Roman Conquest. In: *JHS* 143, 24–48.
- Lorenz, D. *et al.* (2013), What Performance Characteristics Determine Elite Versus Nonelite Athletes in the Same Sport? In: *Sports Health A Multidisciplinary Approach*, 5.6, 542–547.
- MacDowell, D. (1983), *Spartan Law*. Edinburgh.
- Marlantes, K. (2011), *What It Is Like To Go To War*. New York.
- Millender, E. (2020), Foxes at Home, Lions Abroad: Spartan Commanders in Xenophon's *Anabasis*, in Powell, A. / Richer, N. (eds.), *Xenophon and Sparta*. Swansea, 223–260.
- Miller, S. G. (2004), *Ancient Greek Athletics*. New Haven.
- McGinnis, P. M. (2013), *Biomechanics of Sport and Exercise*. Champaign.
- Palumbo, L. / Reid, H. L. (2020), Wrestling with the Eleatics in Plato's *Parmenides*, in Reid, H. / Ralkowski, M. / Zoller, C. (eds.), *Athletics, Gymnastics, and Agon in Plato*. Sioux City, 185–198.
- Pomeroy, S. B. (2002), *Spartan Women*. Oxford.
- Pontier, P. (2020), Xenophon Presenting Agesilaos: The Case of Phleious, in: Powell, A. / Richer, N. (eds.), *Xenophon and Sparta*. Swansea, 319–342.
- Powell, A. (2020), 'One Little Skytale'. Xenophon, Truth-Telling In His Major Works, And Spartan Imperialism, in: Powell, A. / Richer, N. (eds.), *Xenophon and Sparta*. Swansea, 1–64.
- Quarrie, K. L. / Wilson, B. D. (2010), Force production in the rugby union scrum, in: *Journal of Sports Sciences* 18.4, 237–246.
- Reed, N. (1998), *More Than Just A Game: The Military Nature Of Greek Athletic Contests*. Chicago.
- Reid, H. (2017), Athletes As Heroes And Role Models: An Ancient Model, in: *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 11.1, 40–51.
- Reid, H. (2020), Plato's *Gymnastic Dialogues*, in Reid, H. / Ralkowski, M. / Zoller, C. (eds.), *Athletics, Gymnastics, and Agon in Plato*. Sioux City, 15–30.
- Richer, N. (2009), *Aidos at Sparta*, in Hodkinson, S. / Powell, A. (eds.), *Sparta: New Perspectives*. Swansea, 91–117.



- Richer, N. (2018), Spartan Education in the Classical Period, in: Powell, A. (ed.), *A Companion to Sparta*. Hoboken, 525–542.
- Schwartz, A. (2013), Large Weapons, Small Greeks: The Practical Limitations of Hoplite Weapons and Equipment, in: Kagan, D. / Viggiano, G. F. (eds.), *Men of Bronze: Hoplite Warfare in Ancient Greece*. Princeton, 157–175.
- Shay, J. (1994), *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*. New York.
- Smith, J. (2015), How to Achieve Team Cohesion through Competition in Sport: An Organizational Model, in *The Sport Journal*: <https://thesportjournal.org/article/how-to-achieve-team-cohesion-through-competition-in-sport-an-organizational-model/>.
- Standage, M. and Vallerand, R. J. (2014) Motivation in Sport and Exercise Groups: A Self-determination Theory Perspective, in: Beauchamp, M. / Eys, M. (eds.), *Group Dynamics in Exercise and Sport Psychology*. New York, 259–278.
- Van Wees, H. (2013), Farmers and Hoplites: Models of Historical Development, in: Kagan, D. / Viggiano, G. F. (eds.), *Men of Bronze: Hoplite Warfare in Ancient Greece*. Princeton, 222–255.
- Van Wees, H. (2018), Thermopylae: Herodotus versus the Legend, in Van Gils, L. W. / de Jong, I. / Kroon, C. (eds.). *Textual Strategies in Ancient War Narrative: Thermopylae, Cannae and Beyond*. Leiden.
- Viggiano, G. F. and van Wees, H. (2013), The Arms, Armor, and Iconography of Early Greek Hoplite Warfare, in: Kagan, D. / Viggiano, G. F. (eds.), *Men of Bronze: Hoplite Warfare in Ancient Greece*. Princeton, 57–73.
- Viggiano, G. F. (2013), The Hoplite Revolution and the Rise of the Polis, in: Kagan, D. / Viggiano, G. F. (eds.), *Men of Bronze: Hoplite Warfare in Ancient Greece*. Princeton, 112–133.

