

Sparta

The Agoge

What is the agoge?

- Agoge means EDUCATION in Greek
- The Spartan system was the most comprehensive, and thus it has survived as THE agoge.

7-17 or 7-30?

Hodkinson

- *Paides*: 7-17
- *Paidiskoi*: 18-19
- *Hēbōntes*: 20–29
- Primarily based on Xenophon

Cartledge

- *Paides* only in two stages:
 - 7-12
 - 12-17
- But full citizenship only after age 30.
- Primarily based on Plutarch

The harsh Spartan upbringing

- Of reading and writing, they learned only enough to serve their turn; all the rest of their training was calculated to make them obey commands well, endure hardships, and conquer in battle. Therefore, as they grew in age, their bodily exercise was increased; their heads were close-clipped, and they were accustomed to going bare-foot, and to playing for the most part without clothes. When they were twelve years old, they no longer had tunics to wear, received one cloak a year, had hard, dry flesh, and knew little of baths and ointments; only on certain days of the year, and few at that, did they indulge in such amenities. [7] They slept together, in troops and companies, on pallet-beds which they collected for themselves, breaking off with their hands—no knives allowed—the tops of the rushes which grew along the river Eurotas. Plut. *Lyc.* 16.6

The modest Spartan upbringing

- In the other Greek states parents who profess to give their sons the best education place their boys under the care and control of a moral tutor as soon as they can understand what is said to them, and send them to a school to learn letters, music and the exercises of the wrestling-ground. Moreover, they soften the children's feet by giving them sandals, and pamper their bodies with changes of clothing; and it is customary to allow them as much food as they can eat. [2] Lycurgus, on the contrary, instead of leaving each father to appoint a slave to act as tutor, gave the duty of controlling the boys to a member of the class from which the highest offices are filled, in fact to the “Warden” as he is called. He gave this person authority to gather the boys together, to take charge of them and to punish them severely in case of misconduct. He also assigned to him a staff of youths provided with whips to chastise them when necessary; and the result is that modesty and obedience are inseparable companions at Sparta. Xen. *Lac.* 2.1-2

Hunger and Body in Plutarch

- For the meals allowed them are scanty, in order that they may take into their own hands the fight against hunger, and so be forced into boldness and cunning. This is the main object of their spare diet; a secondary one is to make them grow tall. For it contributes to height of stature when the vitality is not impeded and hindered by a mass of nourishment which forces it into thickness and width, but ascends of its own lightness, and when the body grows freely and easily. Plut. *Lyc.* 17.4

Hunger and Body in Xenophon

- As to the food, he required the prefect to bring with him such a moderate amount of it that the boys would never suffer from repletion, and would know what it was to go with their hunger unsatisfied; for he believed that those who underwent this training would be better able to continue working on an empty stomach, if necessary, and would be capable of carrying on longer without extra food, if the word of command were given to do so: they would want fewer delicacies and would accommodate themselves more readily to anything put before them, and at the same time would enjoy better health. [6] He also thought that a diet which made their bodies slim would do more to increase their height than one that consisted of flesh-forming food. Xen. *Lac.* 2.5

Athenian Boy Lovers?

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MhJfEhIKcmM>



Pederasty in Xenophon

- I think I ought to say something also about intimacy with boys, since this matter also has a bearing on education. In other Greek states, for instance among the Boeotians, man and boy live together, like married people; elsewhere, among the Eleians, for example, consent is won by means of favours. Some, on the other hand, entirely forbid suitors to talk with boys. [13] The customs instituted by Lycurgus were opposed to all of these. If someone, being himself an honest man, admired a boy's soul and tried to make of him an ideal friend without reproach and to associate with him, he approved, and believed in the excellence of this kind of training. But if it was clear that the attraction lay in the boy's outward beauty, he banned the connexion as an abomination; and thus he caused lovers to abstain from boys no less than parents abstain from sexual intercourse with their children and brothers and sisters with each other. [14] I am not surprised, however, that people refuse to believe this. For in many states the laws are not opposed to the indulgence of these appetites. Xen. *Lac.* 2.12-4

Pederasty in Plutarch

- The boys' lovers also shared with them in their honour or disgrace; and it is said that one of them was once fined by the magistrates because his favourite boy had let an ungenerous cry escape him while he was fighting. Moreover, though this sort of love was so approved among them that even the maidens found lovers in good and noble women, still, there was no jealous rivalry in it, but those who fixed their affections on the same boys made this rather a foundation for friendship with one another, and persevered in common efforts to make their loved one as noble as possible. Plut. Lyc. 17.4

The power of music

- In short, if one studies the poetry of Sparta, of which some specimens were still extant in my time, and makes himself familiar with the marching songs which they used, to the accompaniment of the flute, when charging upon their foes, he will conclude that Terpander and Pindar were right in associating valour with music. The former writes thus of the Lacedaemonians:—
- Flourish there both the spear of the brave and the Muse's clear message,
Justice, too, walks the broad streets—
[4] And Pindar says:—
- There are councils of Elders,
And young men's conquering spears,
And dances, the Muse, and joyousness.

None for the Kings

- Leonidas had gained the kingship at Sparta unexpectedly. Since he had two older brothers, Cleomenes and Dorieus, he had renounced all thought of the kingship. Cleomenes, however, died without male offspring, and Dorieus, who had met his end in Sicily, was also no longer alive. The succession therefore fell to Leonidas since he was older than Anaxandrides' youngest son Cleombrotus and had married Cleomenes' daughter. Hdt. 7.205

Brasidas, an extra-ordinary Spartan

- ...not being a bad speaker for a Lacedaemonian...
- Later on in the war, after the events in Sicily, the present valour and conduct of Brasidas, known by experience to some, by hearsay to others, was what mainly created in the allies of Athens a feeling for the Lacedaemonians. [3] He was the first who went out and showed himself so good a man at all points as to leave behind him the conviction that the rest were like him.
- Excerpts from Thucydides

Contempt for the agoge

- And in the matter of education, whereas they from early youth are always undergoing laborious exercises which are to make them brave, we live at ease, and yet are equally ready to face the perils which they face. And here is the proof: The Lacedaemonians come into Athenian territory not by themselves, but with their whole confederacy following; we go alone into a neighbour's country; and although our opponents are fighting for their homes and we on a foreign soil, we have seldom any difficulty in overcoming them. Our enemies have never yet felt our united strength, the care of a navy divides our attention, and on land we are obliged to send our own citizens everywhere. But they, if they meet and defeat a part of our army, are as proud as if they had routed us all, and when defeated they pretend to have been vanquished by us all. Thucydides 2.39 (from the Funeral Oration)

Admiration for the agoge

- For your civic organization is that of an army rather than that of city-dwellers, and you keep your young people massed together like a herd of colts at grass: none of you takes his own colt, dragging him away from his fellows, in spite of his fretting and fuming, and puts a special groom in charge of him, and trains him by rubbing him down and stroking him and using all the means proper to child-nursing, that so he may turn out not only a good soldier. Plato Laws 666e