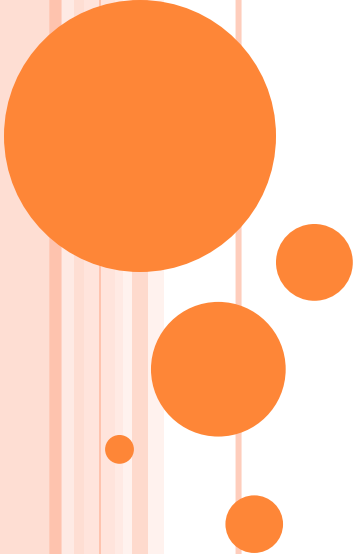


RHETRA DISCUSSION ROUND-UP

- Single Document: need to look at word choice/phrasing
 - Not definite, but similar
- Lycurgus
 - Exists?
 - Mythical origins as lawgiver
 - Fits in a pattern with other early law givers
 - Trips to other states
 - Late naming of Lycurgus (not in Tyrtaios)
 - Role of Theopomus and Polydorus
- Role of Kings/Gerousia
 - What is normal evolution of a state?
 - Assembly -> Elders -> Kings?
 - How does this relate to a single document?
 - Balanced Constitution (see Polybius, Aristotle)





SPARTA: AN EXTRAORDINARY CITY

Lecture 5: Sparta Women

WOMEN IN THE GREEK WORLD

- The common image of women in the Greek world is that of the Athenian upper class woman.
- This common image is of women who never leave the house and spend their days weaving.



ARCHAIC VIEWS OF WOMEN

Even so Zeus who thunders on high made women to be an evil to mortal men, with a nature to do evil. And he gave them a second evil to be the price for the good they had: whoever avoids marriage and the sorrows that women cause, and will not wed, reaches deadly old age without anyone to tend his years, and though he at least has no lack of livelihood while he lives, yet, when he is dead, his kinsfolk divide his possessions amongst them. And as for the man who chooses the lot of marriage and takes a good wife suited to his mind, evil continually contends with good; for whoever happens to have mischievous children, lives always with unceasing grief in his spirit and heart within him; and this evil cannot be healed.

Hesiod, *Theogony* 604-12



SEMONIDES' VIEW OF WOMEN

Another type is from a bee. Good luck in finding such a woman! Only she deserves to be exempt from stinging blame. The household that she manages will thrive; a loving wife beside her loving man, she'll grow old, having borne illustrious and handsome children; she herself shines bright among all women. Grace envelops her. She doesn't like to sit with other women discussing sex. Zeus gratifies mankind with these most excellent and thoughtful wives. But by the grim contrivances of Zeus all these other types are here to stay side by side with man forever. Yes, Zeus made this the greatest pain of all: Woman.

Semonides 7.84-98

http://www.stoa.org/diotima/anthology/sem_7.shtml

THE “TYPICAL” ATHENIAN UPPER CLASS WOMAN

Hearing that the boy was at my house, he came there at night in a drunken state, broke down the doors, and entered the women's rooms: within were my sister and my nieces, whose lives have been so well-ordered that they are ashamed to be seen even by their kinsmen.

Lysias 3.6



ATHENIAN MARRIAGE

When I, Athenians, decided to marry, and brought a wife into my house, for some time I was disposed neither to vex her nor to leave her too free to do just as she pleased; I kept a watch on her as far as possible, with such observation of her as was reasonable. But when a child was born to me, thence-forward I began to trust her, and placed all my affairs in her hands, presuming that we were now in perfect intimacy.

Lysias 1.6



TRAINING OF WIVES

“Of course not, no more than I would have you buy children to train as agricultural labourers; but horses and human beings alike, I think, on reaching a certain age forthwith become useful and go on improving. I can also show you that husbands differ widely in their treatment of their wives, and some succeed in winning their co-operation and thereby increase their estates, while others bring utter ruin on their houses by their behaviour to them.”

“And ought one to blame the husband or the wife for that, Socrates?”

“When a sheep is ailing,” said Socrates, “we generally blame the shepherd, and when a horse is vicious, we generally find fault with his rider. In the case of a wife, if she receives instruction in the right way from her husband and yet does badly, perhaps she should bear the blame; but if the husband does not instruct his wife in the right way of doing things, and so finds her ignorant, should he not bear the blame himself? Anyhow, Critobulus, you should tell us the truth, for we are all friends here. Is there anyone to whom you commit more affairs of importance than you commit to your wife?”

TYPICAL WOMAN?

- There is no such thing as a typical woman in Athens.
- Even within the upper classes, there are differences in how women are treated and how they are presented to other men.
- For the lower classes of course, it is impossible to assume that women did not exit the house or did not contribute in the personnel of the *oikos*.



XENOPHON, *ON THE CONSTITUTION OF THE LACEDAIMONIANS* 1.3

First, to begin at the beginning, I will take the begetting of children. In other states the girls who are destined to become mothers and are brought up in the approved fashion, live on the very plainest fare, with a most meagre allowance of delicacies. Wine is either withheld altogether, or, if allowed them, is diluted with water. The rest of the Greeks expect their girls to imitate the sedentary life that is typical of handicraftsmen -- to keep quiet and do wool-work. How, then, is it to be expected that women so brought up will bear fine children?



A COMEDIAN'S VIEW OF SPARTAN WOMEN

LYSISTRATA:

Welcome Lampito!

Dear Spartan girl with a delightful face,
Washed with the rosy spring, how fresh you look
In the easy stride of your sleek slenderness,
Why you could strangle a bull!

LAMPITO:

I think I could.

It's frae exercise and kicking high behint.

Aristophanes *Lysistrata* 77-82

THE ATHENIAN VIEW OF SPARTA

- From Aristophanes, it is clear that the common Athenian view of Spartan women was one of strength and athleticism.
- This made Spartan women very different from women in other parts of the Greek world.
- However, this may be part of an Ionian-Dorian cultural divide.



EARLY SPARTAN WOMEN

- From the little information surviving (mainly the poems of Alkman), in the archaic period, Spartan women appear to be no different from women in other parts of the Greek world.
- They take part in religious festivals and have associations of their own; something similar is known for archaic Lesbos.



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EXERCISE AND CHILD BEARING

XENOPHON, *ON THE CONSTITUTION OF THE LACEDAIMONIANS* 1.4

But Lycurgus thought the labour of slave women sufficient to supply clothing. He believed **motherhood to be the most important function of freeborn woman**. Therefore, in the first place, he insisted on **physical training for the female** no less than for the male sex: moreover, he instituted races and trials of strength for women competitors as for men, believing that if both parents are strong they produce more vigorous offspring.



PLUTARCH, *LIFE OF LYCURGUS* 14

But even to the women Lycurgus paid all possible attention. He made the maidens exercise their bodies in running, wrestling, casting the discus, and hurling the javelin, **in order that the fruit of their wombs might have vigorous root in vigorous bodies and come to better maturity, and that they themselves might come with vigour to the fullness of their times, and struggle successfully and easily with the pangs of child-birth.** He freed them from softness and delicacy and all effeminacy by accustoming the maidens no less than the youths to wear tunics only in processions, and at certain festivals to dance and sing when the young men were present as spectators.



PLUTARCH, *LIFE OF LYCURGUS* 14

Nor was there anything disgraceful in this scant clothing of the maidens, for modesty attended them, and wantonness was banished; nay, rather, it produced in them habits of simplicity and an ardent desire for health and beauty of body. It gave also to woman-kind a taste of lofty sentiment, for they felt that they too had a place in the arena of bravery and ambition. Wherefore they were led to think and speak as Gorgo, the wife of Leonidas, is said to have done. When some foreign woman, as it would seem, said to her: **"You Spartan women are the only ones who rule their men,"** she answered: **"Yes, we are the only ones that give birth to men."**



WOMEN, COMPETITION AND SPORT

Bibasis was a kind of Lakonian dance, in which prizes were awarded not only to children but also to girls; one had to leap and touch the buttocks with one's feet, and the jumps were counted, hence the inscription in honour of one of these girls: "Who once did a thousand at bibasis, the most ever done".

Pollux 4.102



WOMEN AND THE OLYMPIC GAMES

Archidamus left sons when he died, of whom Agis was the elder and inherited the throne instead of Agesilaus. Archidamus had also a daughter, whose name was Cynisca; she was exceedingly ambitious to succeed at the Olympic games, and was the first woman to breed horses and **the first to win an Olympic victory. After Cynisca other women, especially women of Lacedaemon, have won Olympic victories, but none of them was more distinguished for their victories than she.**

Pausanias 3.8.1



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SPARTAN COURTSHIP/SEX

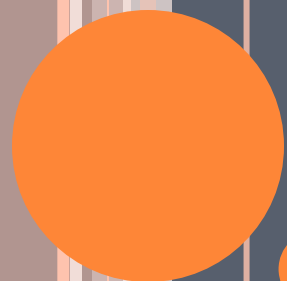
PLUTARCH, *LIFE OF LYCURGUS* 14

There they sometimes even mocked and railed good-naturedly at any youth who had misbehaved himself; and again they would sing the praises of those who had shown themselves worthy, and so inspire the young men with great ambition and ardour. For he who was thus extolled for his valour and held in honour among the maidens, went away exalted by their praises; while the sting of their playful raillery was no less sharp than that of serious admonitions, especially as the kings and senators, together with the rest of the citizens, were all present at the spectacle.



PLUTARCH, *LIFE OF LYCURGUS* 15

For their marriages the women were carried off by force, not when they were small and unfit for wedlock, but when they were in full bloom and wholly ripe. After the woman was thus carried off, the bride's-maid, so called, took her in charge, cut her hair off close to the head, put a man's cloak and sandals on her, and laid her down on a pallet, on the floor, alone, in the dark. Then the bride-groom, not flown with wine nor enfeebled by excesses, but composed and sober, after supping at his public mess-table as usual, slipped stealthily into the room where the bride lay, loosed her virgin's zone, and bore her in his arms to the marriage-bound. Then, after spending a short time with his bride, he went away composedly to his usual quarters, there to sleep with the other young men. And so he continued to do from that time on, spending his days with his comrades, and sleeping with them at night, but visiting his bride by stealth and with every precaution, full of dread and fear lest any of her household should be aware of his visits, his bride also contriving and conspiring with him that they might have stolen interviews as occasion offered. And this they did not for a short time only, but long enough for some of them to become fathers before they had looked upon their own wives by daylight. Such interviews not only brought into exercise self-restraint and moderation, but united husbands and wives when their bodies were full of creative energy and their affections new and fresh, not when they were sated and dulled by unrestricted intercourse; and there was always left behind in their hearts some residual spark of longing and delight.



MARRIAGE

XENOPHON, *ON THE CONSTITUTION OF THE LACEDAIMONIANS* 1.5-6

He noticed, too, that, during the time immediately succeeding marriage, it was usual elsewhere for the husband to have unlimited intercourse with his wife. The rule that he adopted was the opposite of this: for he laid it down that the husband should be ashamed to be seen entering his wife's room or leaving it. With this restriction on intercourse the desire of the one for the other must necessarily be increased, and their offspring was bound to be more vigorous than if they were surfeited with one another. In addition to this, he withdrew from men the right to take a wife whenever they chose, and insisted on their marrying in the prime of their manhood, believing that this too promoted the production of fine children.



XENOPHON, *ON THE CONSTITUTION OF THE LACEDAIMONIANS* 1.7-8

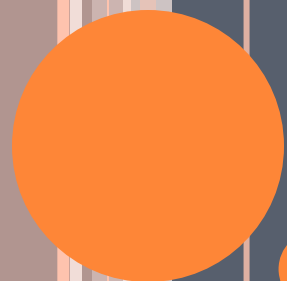
It might happen, however, that an old man had a young wife; and he observed that old men keep a very jealous watch over their young wives. To meet these cases he instituted an entirely different system by requiring the elderly husband to introduce into his house some man whose physical and moral qualities he admired, in order to beget children. On the other hand, in case a man did not want to cohabit with his wife and nevertheless desired children of whom he could be proud, he made it lawful for him to choose a woman who was the mother of a fine family and of high birth, and if he obtained her husband's consent, to make her the mother of his children.



XENOPHON, *ON THE CONSTITUTION OF THE LACEDAIMONIANS* 1.9

He gave his sanction to many similar arrangements. For the wives want to take charge of two households, and the husbands want to get brothers for their sons, brothers who are members of the family and share in its influence, but claim no part of the money.





CHILDREN

PLUTARCH, *LIFE OF LYCURGUS* 15

For example, an elderly man with a young wife, if he looked with favour and esteem on some fair and noble young man, might introduce him to her, and adopt her offspring by such a noble father as his own. And again, a worthy man who admired some woman for the fine children that she bore her husband and the modesty of her behaviour as a wife, might enjoy her favours, if her husband would consent, thus planting, as it were, in a soil of bountiful fruitage, and begetting for himself noble sons, who would have the blood of noble men in their veins. For in the first place, **Lycurgus did not regard sons as the peculiar property of their fathers, but rather as the common property of the state, and therefore would not have his citizens spring from random parentage, but from the best there was.** In the second place, he saw much folly and vanity in what other peoples enacted for the regulation of these matters; in the breeding of dogs and horses they insist on having the best sires which money or favour can secure, but they keep their wives under lock and key, demanding that they have children by none but themselves, even though they be foolish, or infirm, or diseased; as though children of bad stock did not show their badness to those first who possessed and reared them, and children of good stock, **contrariwise, their goodness.** The freedom which thus prevailed at that time in marriage relations was aimed at physical and political well-being, and was far removed from the licentiousness which was afterwards attributed to their women, so much so that adultery was wholly unknown among them.

PLUTARCH, *LIFE OF LYCURGUS* 16

Nor was it in the power of the father to dispose of the child as he thought fit; he was obliged to carry it before certain triers at a place called Lesche; these were some of the elders of the tribe to which the child belonged; their business it was carefully to view the infant, and, if they found it stout and well made, they gave order for its rearing, and allotted to it one of the nine thousand shares of land above mentioned for its maintenance, but, if they found it puny and ill-shaped, ordered it to be taken to what was called the Apothetae, a sort of chasm under Taygetus; as thinking it neither for the good of the child itself, nor for the public interest, that it should be brought up, if it did not, from the very outset, appear made to be healthy and vigorous.



PLUTARCH, *LIFE OF LYCURGUS* 16

Upon the same account, the women did not bathe the newborn children with water, as is the custom in all other countries, but with wine, to prove the temper and complexion of their bodies; from a notion they had that epileptic and weakly children faint and waste away upon their being thus bathed while, on the contrary, those of a strong and vigorous habit acquire firmness and get a temper by it, like steel. There was much care and art, too, used by the nurses; they had no swaddling bands; the children grew up free and unconstrained in limb and form, and not dainty and fanciful about their food; not afraid in the dark, or of being left alone; and without peevishness, or ill humour, or crying. Upon this account Spartan nurses were often bought up, or hired by people of other countries; and it is recorded that she who suckled Alcibiades was a Spartan; who, however, if fortunate in his nurse, was not so in his preceptor; his guardian, Pericles, as Plato tells us, chose a servant for that office called Zopyrus, no better than any common slave...



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WOMEN, PROPERTY AND POWER

ARISTOTLE *POLITICS* 1270A

So the Spartan women are, it is true, responsible for what took place, and therefore manifestly for this mistake among the rest; although for our own part we are not considering the question who deserves excuse or does not, but what is the right or wrong mode of action. But, as was also said before, errors as regards the status of women seem not only to cause a certain unseemliness in the actual conduct of the state but to contribute in some degree to undue love of money. For next to the things just spoken of one might censure the Spartan institutions with respect to the unequal distribution of wealth. It has come about that some of the Spartans own too much property and some extremely little; owing to which the land has fallen into few hands, and this has also been badly regulated by the laws; for the lawgiver made it dishonourable to sell a family's existing estate, and did so rightly, but he granted liberty to alienate land at will by gift or bequest; yet the result that has happened was bound to follow in the one case as well as in the other. **And also nearly two-fifths of the whole area of the country is owned by women, because of the number of women who inherit estates and the practice of giving large dowries; yet it would have been better if dowries had been prohibited by law or limited to a small or moderate amount . . .** But as it is he is allowed to give an heiress in marriage to whomever he likes; and if he dies without having made directions as to this by will, whoever he leaves as his executor bestows her upon whom he chooses.



WOMEN AND PROPERTY

- For Aristotle a major reason of Spartan downfall was the property legislation, which allowed women to amass great wealth.
- Aristotle, unlike other Greek philosophers, found the Spartan regulation of women to be lacking because it gave them too much power.
- However, the Spartan regulations of property do not appear to be unique in relation to the regulations of other Dorian states,
 - ex. Gortyn in Crete.



WAR AND HONOUR

Argileonis, asking some who came from Amphipolis if her son Brasidas died courageously and as became a Spartan, on their beginning to praise him to a high degree, and saying there was not such another left in Sparta, answered, "Do not say so; Brasidas was a good and brave man, but there are in Sparta many better than he."

Plutarch, *Life of Lycurgus* 25



WAR AND HONOUR

Cleomenes went to his house after this exchange, but Aristagoras took a suppliant's garb and followed him there. Upon entering, he used a suppliant's right to beg Cleomenes to listen to him. He first asked Cleomenes to send away the child, his daughter Gorgo, who was standing by him. She was his only child, and was about eight or nine years of age. Cleomenes bade him say whatever he wanted and not let the child's presence hinder him. Then Aristagoras began to promise Cleomenes from ten talents upwards, if he would grant his request. When Cleomenes refused, Aristagoras offered him ever more and more. When he finally promised fifty talents the child cried out, **"Father, the stranger will corrupt you, unless you leave him and go away."** Cleomenes was pleased with the child's counsel and went into another room while Aristagoras departed from Sparta, finding no further occasion for telling of the journey inland to the king's palace.

WAR AND HONOUR

Another woman, as she was handing her son his shield and giving him some encouragement, said: 'Son, either with this or on this'.

Plutarch *Moralia* 241



SUMMARY

- Spartan women lived different lives from the women of the Athenian upper classes.
- In some matters, Spartan women appear to have had more freedom than women in other parts of the Greek world.
- However, the role of the Spartan woman in the oikos and the polis, was not fundamentally different from that of a woman in any other polis.
 - Bear children and manage the household



FOLLOW UP READING

- Cartledge, P. “Spartan Wives: Liberation or Licence?” *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series, Vol. 31, No. 1 (1981), pp. 84-105.
- Hodkinson, S. “Land Tenure and Inheritance in Classical Sparta” *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series, Vol. 36, No. 2 (1986), pp. 378-406.
- Cawkwell, G.L. “The Decline of Sparta” *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series, Vol. 33, No. 2 (1983), pp. 385-400.

