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## Ancient Sparta: Military, Religion And Funerary Customs

Ancient Sparta is uniquely important in the ancient world, and is a civilisation worthy of study by historians. It will be seen through an investigation that the land-based military wonder of ancient Sparta and the funerary and religious customs were the most important aspect of their civilisation. The ancient Greek polis of Sparta revolved around strength and its land-based military. All aspects of its society were geared towards protecting this system, including training of the young, and how people were treated when they died. Sparta was a closed city-state that used war as its purpose.

Ancient Sparta was a city state in Laconia, on the Peloponnese peninsula in Greece. According to Ancient.eu. (N.d.) Sparta was founded around 900 BCE the city state was sacked by the Visigoths in 396 CE. The military based polis reached the height of its power in 404 BCE after its victory against Athens in the second Peloponnesian war (Jarus, 2017). Sparta or Spárti was one of what grew to be over 1,000 city-states. These city-states, or polis, were the community structure of ancient Greece. Each city-state was organized with an urban centre and the surrounding countryside. The polis were often identified by characteristics such as large outer walls built for protection, as well as a public space that included temples and government buildings. The temples and government buildings were often built on the top of a hill, or acropolis. The majority of a polis's population lived in the city, as it was the centre of trade, commerce, culture, and political activity. Each city state differed greatly from the other mainly due to different governing philosophies and interests. For example, "Sparta was ruled by two kings and a council of elders. It emphasized maintaining a strong military, while Athens valued education and art" (National Geographic Society, 2019).

Sparta had one of the world's most unique militaries mainly due to their formations used in battle, who was allowed to become a part of the military and how they would go about training these soldiers. The male Spartan citizens of Sparta were allowed only one occupation: a soldier. They were indoctrinated into their military training at age 7 (History, 2019). The boys learned to read and write no more than was necessary. "Otherwise their whole education was aimed at developing smart obedience, perseverance under stress and victory in battle. So, as they grew older, they intensified their physical training, and got into the habit of cropping their hair, going barefoot and exercising naked. From the age of twelve they never wore a tunic and were given only one cloak a year. Their bodies were rough and knew nothing of baths or oiling" (Bedson, Easton, and Van Noorden. 2009). "The constant military drilling and discipline of the Spartan's made them skilled at the ancient Greek style of fighting in a phalanx formation" (HISTORY. 2019). According to Mark, J (2012) the Greek Phalanx was one of the most effective and enduring military formations in ancient warfare. And has been generally associated with Greek Warfare strategy, the name itself being from the Greek for 'finger.' It was a close-rank, dense grouping of warriors armed with long spears and interlocking shields. The Greek Hoplite soldier provided his own weapon (a seven- or eight-foot spear known as a 'doru') and shield as well as breast plate, helmet and greaves. There was no official 'training' for a Greek Hoplite and it was the responsibility of the individual commander to make sure his troops could fight in a unified form.

Sparta's funerary and religious customs that intertwine with their military based lifestyle.

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Sparta's military is often influenced by their religious customs especially when examining their military based lifestyle. Ancient Spartans, like the rest of the Greek city states, has a polytheistic religion meaning they believed in many gods. The Olympians were the main gods of the time, the king of which was the all mighty Zeus who most other dieties were connected to by blood. The Spartans believed the gods were to be obeyed and respected without question and were often mocked by other city-states for their religiously devoted lifestyles. The gods were fitted with each state of the Greek empire and groups of people in a unique way, to serve different purposes for different states. Athena for example, the goddess of love, was in ancient Sparta considered and worshipped as a warrior, which complimented perfectly the Spartan attitudes to not only fighting but also their equality towards women. Other Greek city states also had patron gods who supposedly represented their lifestyle, mantra and ethics. Apart from their patron goddess Athena the spartans also worshipped other war-based gods such as Ares and other gods such as Apollo. Their praise of the gods, their acceptance and belief of their mightiness, and their celebration in festivals throughout the year highlights just how celebrated they were by Sparta. (Legendsandchronicles.com. 2013). After the death of a spartan soldier his body was wrapped in a red or scarlet cape, often the same cape they would wear to war. The body would then be buried in the ground and a headstone placed upon it. Fallen Spartan soldiers were also often buried on the battlefield despite the symbolic tradition of carrying their corpses home, due to the difficulty transporting what was often large numbers of bodies long distances. Small, simple headstones were used in the case of the fallen in battle, with the inscription 'in war' chiselled into the surface .The majority of Spartan graves were unmarked and without any headstones, in fact there were only two circumstances in which a headstone was given to a Spartan. Only Spartan women who had died in childbirth and men who had died in battle were given a headstone or marked grave.

It can be concluded that military, religion, and funerary customs were the most important aspects of ancient Sparta. This ancient Greek polis revolved around strength and its land-based military. All aspects of its society were geared towards protecting this system including training of the young, and how people were treated when they died. Sparta was a closed city-state that used war as its purpose.

## Reference List

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