Greek newcomers. At Sparta the enslaved population was called helots, and on Crete, Klarotai. In Thessaly the Penestai were the subjected people, and in Eastern Locris, the Wökikitai. When the Corinthian colonists founded the city of Syracuse in Sicily, they enslaved the native Killyroi in the vicinity of the new town and used them as farm workers. A similar fate befell the Mariandynians on the southern shore of the Black Sea at the hands of the colonists of Heraclea Pontica.

Native Slaves. Few details are known about any of these subjected people, except for the helots, who were an integral part of the Spartan state. As natives their class was self-perpetuating, and so differed fundamentally from the chattel slaves. Moreover, they were employed mainly as laborers on the farms of their masters and as domestic servants. They are often called serfs in modern studies, which is misleading because the special reciprocal relations between a medieval lord and his serf did not exist in antiquity.

Sources:

SPARTA

Distinct Characteristics. Sparta differed markedly from all other Greek states in several crucial respects. First, it remained a monarchy of a peculiar kind: two kings ruled at the same time during Sparta's entire history as an independent state. Secondly, Sparta was never governed by tyrants. Thirdly, the social and economic system attributed to Lycurgus was unique in the Greek world, and in fact in all of recorded history.

Backward Region. Sparta was a hybrid of the Archaic “ethnos” or unincorporated state and city-state, sharing some features of both. The territory of Sparta, including Messenia, was one of the largest and among the most fertile in Greece. Its economic base was agriculture, without even the smallest admixture of export and import trade, at least in the Classical Period (480–323 B.C.E.), or of manufacture beyond what was needed domestically. In this sense Sparta remained backward for most of the fifth and fourth centuries. Like some ethnios-type states Sparta was not a great colonizer, the only place of some significance founded by her being Tarentum in southern Italy. Sparta was also not receptive to foreigners, and in fact was quite xenophobic. On the other hand, Sparta resembled a city-state like Athens; she had a central government, was the head of a military and political alliance, the Peloponnesian League, and played a dominant role in the politics and history of Greece.

Three Categories. With respect to its social structure the Spartan population was divided into three main categories. At the top stood the Spartans proper, full citizens who called themselves equals or peers and who were also known as Spartiates, to distinguish them from other Spartans like the “Dwellers Around.” The Spartiates were not all exactly equal; a small minority of them formed an aristocracy whose members were wealthier than the rest of the equals and had more social and political clout. Another segment of the Spartiates were called the “inferiors,” perhaps because their income, for whatever reason, was less than that of the other peers. Nevertheless, as a body the peers constituted an egalitarian elite, whose members owned all the land. They did not, however, work their land themselves, nor did they work at any other productive occupations. Instead, they spent all their time in physical exercise and military drill, and also in the governance of the state, as members of the Spartan assembly and senate. The Spartiates furnished the executive of the state, the two kings who were the commanders in chief of the army and were the chief religious officials of Sparta, and the five Ephors or “Overseers,” who ran the state from day to day.

Perioikoi. Below the elite Spartiates stood a class known as Perioikoi (“Dwellers Around”). The Perioikoi were true Spartans: together with the Spartiates they constituted the
entire free Spartan folk. Both groups spoke the same Greek
dialect and were included in the official designation of
the Spartan state, the Lacedaemonians. The Perioikoi were in
no way the subjects or dependents of the Spartiates. Like
the Spartiates, they served in the army as heavily armored
infantry, or hoplites, and they could participate in the
Olympic Games, to which only free citizens were admitted.
One of "the Seven Wise Men," Cheilon, came from a Perioikic
town, while the poets Xenodamus and Philoxenus came from the Perioikic island of Cythera.

Poor Lands. The mass of the Perioikoi were small land-
owners: after they occupied Laconia the Spartiates assigned
the less productive land to them, while keeping the best
fields for themselves. Forcing their weaker fellows to live
on the poorer land was the Spartan version of colonization
due to overpopulation: instead of being sent to live in new
settlements overseas the Perioikoi were relegated to land in
the hills or on the periphery of the country.

Differences. There was, however, an essential difference
between Spartiates and Perioikoi. The Perioikoi had no
political rights; they could not attend the popular assembly
or hold political office. In all matters of domestic and for-
gn policy they had to abide by the decisions of the Spar-
tiates. The political disqualification is probably to be
explained by the fact that the distances between their
homes and the political center of Sparta made it difficult
for the Perioikoi to attend the assembly until they eventually
lost their political rights through default.

Helots. The third large class of people living in Sparta,
the helots, were the descendants of the Bronze Age
(3000–1100 B.C.E.) or Mycenaean Age (1600–1200)
Greeks, whom the Dorian Spartans subjugated when they
occupied Laconia. The Greeks regularly referred to them
as slaves, but the helots were quite different from the chattel slaves in other states. They certainly were not free-
men, but they were not, strictly speaking, the property of
individual Spartans, who were not allowed to buy or sell
them. Nor could they be freed, except by the state. The
helots, in short, belonged to the whole community. As an
indigenous people not imported from outside, the helots
were self-perpetuating: they had their own families and
their own possessions, which were handed down from
generation to generation. Equally importantly, the helots
had their own religious cults and celebrated at least one
religious festival of their own. In sum, the Helots pos-
sessed all the normal human institutions except freedom.
As a result they were a privileged group as servile classes
go; the ancient sources quite correctly describe their con-
dition as "between slavery and freedom."

Farming. The main activity of the helots was the culti-
vation of the farms belonging to their masters: they were
the food producers of the Spartans, to whom they delivered
a fixed quota of their crops. Beyond that the helots formed
the labor force of craftsmen, vendors, fishermen, and trans-
port workers who produced the other necessities of life, as
for example the shoes known for their high quality
throughout Greece. Finally, the helots also served in the
Spartan army, at times forming sizable contingents in
expeditionary forces.

Lycurgan Social Order. The entire population of Sparta
was most profoundly affected by a regime, instituted at
some time in the seventh century and attributed to the law-
giver Lycurgus, which governed daily life with a strictness
and regularity unknown elsewhere in history. This regime,
which determined the economic and social structures of
Sparta for centuries to come, consisted of three parts: auster-
ty, education, and discipline.

Austerity. The main component of Lycurgus's auster-
ty program was the regulation of consumption. Spartans
were required to eat moderately; in effect they were put
on strict rations of what was generally unappetizing food.
Occasionally, as a relief from their dreary diet, the citizens
were allowed to supplement it with venison from hunting
expeditions. More abundant fare was also available during
religious festivals. To ensure against overindulgence in
food Lycurgus instituted the so-called common messes.
Spartan men were required to contribute a ration of food
to the mess and to take their meals there together for
most of their adult life. The consumption of alcohol was
also rationed. Drinking to excess during meals and at
sumpsoia (drinking parties) was greatly frowned upon.
Besides limiting consumption the common messes also
had the purpose of maintaining the solidarity and morale
of comrades in arms. At times they were also a venue for
entertainment after dinner.

Dress Code. A series of rules regulated the dress of chil-
dren and women and the personal appearance of the men.
Adult males were expected to wear a standard type of gar-
ment made of coarse wool having the same color. Any
attempt to decorate the drab cloak was met with the sever-
est public censure. Specific rules regulated the heads of hair
and beards of all adult males. The Spartans, in effect, had
to wear a uniform; an adult male could always be recog-
nized by his clothes and appearance alone. Women were
required to obey certain specific regulations prohibiting the
use of such things as cosmetics, perfumes, and dresses,
appropriate only for prostitutes.

Property. A Spartan could not build a sumptuous house
for his family. In addition, he was forbidden to make free
bequests or gifts of land and to own silver and gold. The
possession of money was frowned upon; Sparta resisted the
introduction and use of coinage longer and more stub-
bornly than any other Greek community. One or two of
the rules about personal property proved untenable in the
long run and were repealed in the fourth century. If the
purpose of the rest was to prevent the accumulation of great
wealth, they were ineffective. It was especially the women
who became rich by inheriting from their parents and,
when widowed, often from more than one husband.

Education. Young Spartans had virtually no family life.
At age seven or eight boys had to leave their families and
came to live together in barracks, where they underwent
the training and instruction known as the agoge. While in
the *agōgē* the young Spartans were divided into several age groups, each supervised by a person who was somewhat older than his charges. The Spartans had discovered an important truth: young people accept instruction and orders more willingly from someone close to them in age than from older men; they also more readily take a younger supervisor as their role model than an older one. During the years of their training the boys and teenagers were kept on a strict diet. Their rations were so small that they were encouraged to supplement them by stealing, an activity in which they learned stealth, slyness, dexterity, self-reliance, and endurance, all qualities highly prized by the Spartans and believed by them to foster self-discipline and self-control in a person. If they were caught stealing, the boys were beaten. Any violation of the discipline of the *agōgē* was punished promptly, usually by a thrashing. Flogging, especially of the young males, was commonplace at Sparta. Not all of it was punishment; ritualistic beatings of youngsters was a part of a religious festival in honor of the goddess Orthia, who is identified with Artemis.

**Dress Code.** A dress code was prescribed for members of the *agōgē*; it varied according to the age group. Younger boys were required to play in the nude, walk barefoot, and to have closely shaved heads. Later they were allowed only one garment, both in summer and winter. The Ephors inspected the dress of the youngsters daily and punished an improper appearance with a beating. Girls and young women, too, had to abide by a dress code, which appears to have been a little less rigorous. Both sexes were required to exercise; much of their day was spent in physical training. The educational program included choral singing and dancing; youngsters were taught to recite and sing from memory. They also learned the skill of making brief but incisive observations on any topic and to respond to remarks with brief and witty repartees. The males finished their education at age twenty and entered the ranks of the army. They remained on active service, living in army barracks, until they reached the age of thirty. At that point the Spartan could live at home with his wife, but he was expected to continue taking his meals in the common messes.

**Discipline.** The lessons that the Spartans learned in the *agōgē* laid the foundation of the famous discipline of the adult Spartans. The training of Sparta’s youth is regarded by most modern students of Spartan society as having the object of producing militarists slavishly devoted to the autocratic state. Although there is some truth in it, this judgment is an exaggeration. Their schooling did turn the young into strong soldiers obedient to authority and loyal to the state. However, it achieved a host of other beneficial effects as well. The habits ingrained into them in the *agōgē* remained with the Spartans for life. They continued to practice moderation in food and drink and to engage in regular physical exercise well into old age. As a result the Spartans were the healthiest people in Greece, and so capable of enduring great hardships. These two habits, moderation and exercise, formed one of the cornerstones of the discipline. The other cornerstone was their intellectual training. It taught them to be prudent in their domestic affairs and deliberate and cautious in foreign policy. Calm in the face of misfortunes, the Spartans were slow to act, but once embarked on a course of action they became determined and persistent.

**Attributes and Flaws.** The Lycurgan social and economic organization had yet another salutary effect. It masked the differences and distinctions of wealth and pedigree existing among the Spartiates, who could call themselves each others’ peers with a great deal of truth.
Although their equality was not absolute, it reduced rivalry and contentiousness among the peers; seldom, if at all, were there power struggles among them of the sort that occurred in other city-states, including the Athenian democracy. As a result Sparta never experienced tyranny or civil war; for several centuries its political, social, and economic systems proved remarkably stable. Yet the regimentation that achieved this stability came with a price: Sparta produced no philosophers, dramatists, and only a few poets, although her way of life was admired by some Greek thinkers. Spartan frugality also precluded the construction of magnificent temples and public buildings of the sort that many other Greek states were able to build. There was, furthermore, a somewhat darker side to the Lycurgan order than the absence of a vigorous cultural and intellectual life.

Food Consumption. As the farmers supplying food to the Spartiates, the Helots had larger quantities of food at their disposal than their masters. Yet the Helots, like the Spartiates, were required to limit their consumption, for several reasons: first, so as to conform to the official regime of austerity and not arouse envy and indignation in their masters; second, for the reasons of health noted above; and third, because lean, tough people make much better workers and soldiers than soft and corpulent ones. Accordingly the Spartans executed those helots who became overweight. This cruelty and other indignities inflicted on them have been explained as deliberate expressions of contempt for the helots on the part of their powerful masters, who thereby wished to demonstrate to the helots that they were indeed slaves, and as such a separate and inferior people, who must be kept segregated from the society of the Spartans.

Integration. In reality the restrictions of food and most other measures against the helots had exactly the opposite aim: to integrate them into the heavily regimented Spartan society. Like the Spartans themselves, the helots were required to wear garments and caps of animal skin, which amounted to a uniform. Again like their masters the helots were beaten, except that while the Spartan young could receive a thrashing at any time, the helots had to submit only to an annual beating. The daily freedom of movement and action of the helots was also restricted. Just as the Spartans had to be present at all times either in the barracks, the gymnasium, drill square, or mess hall, so also were the Helots required to be at work during the day, and inside their houses after nightfall. Those who violated the curfew were killed if they were caught.

Military Service. These arrangements illustrate that the Helots were subjected to a similar austerity and discipline as the free Spartans. As they also served in the Spartan army, their situation appears to have been similar to that of the Perioikoi: the helots took part in some version of the Spartan agoge, perhaps as low-ranking members of it.

Significance. The Helots were loaded down with a double burden: they had to endure the hardships of slavery while at the same time they were subjected to the rigors of regular Spartan society. The double form of servitude explains an ancient judgment that in Sparta “the slave is most slave.” On the other hand, as participants in the regime of austerity and discipline the helots were treated like the Spartans, and so were regarded as being “between slavery and freedom.”

Classical Period. Sparta's social and economic system remained fundamentally the same in the Classical Period (480–323 B.C.E.), but there were some changes. Beginning at some time during the Second Peloponnesian War (431–404), and perhaps because of the casualties suffered in it, Sparta experienced manpower shortages; in the fourth century the number of Spartan soldiers had been reduced considerably. There were other changes as well. Earlier most land had been inalienable, but in the fourth century a Spartan could pass on land owned by him to another person as a bequest or as a gift. Now citizens also had permission to own gold and silver. Estates grew larger, and quite a few of them came to be owned by women. The women were free to marry whom they liked, they could inherit wealth, and they were free from restrictions on property. As land came to be owned by fewer people, some Spartans were forced from their farms and fell into debt. Those who could not afford to pay their share to the common messes were downgraded socially; others, unable to support a wife, refused to marry, thus contributing to the decline in population.

Spartan Empire. Despite these problems Sparta succeeded Athens as the dominant imperial power in Greece after the Second Peloponnesian War, governing an empire that extended well beyond her traditional vassal states in the Peloponnese. However, her empire, like that of Athens, did not endure. The shortage of soldiers weakened Sparta's military power; she lost the battle of Leuctra in 371 B.C.E. to the Thebans, and with it her empire, including her prize possession, Messenia. Yet Sparta did not experience any social revolutions in the fourth century; there was only one conspiracy, and that was detected early and suppressed in time. After Leuctra the Thebans liberated those helots who had become their prisoners of war, but the system of helotry as a whole endured into the Hellenistic period. Despite the loss of the fertile Messenian plain, Sparta continued to be self-sufficient in food and most other commodities vital for daily subsistence.

Sources:

TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES AND INNOVATIONS

Coinage. The introduction of coinage represented a great advance of the Archaic Period (700–480 B.C.E.). Coins began to be minted in Lydia at the end of the sev-