

Ancient History Sourcebook:

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SPARTA

AN ancient city in Greece, the capital of Laconia and the most powerful state of the Peloponnese. The city lay at the northern end of the central Laconian plain, on the right bank of the river Eurotas, a little south of the point where it is joined by its largest tributary, the Oenus (mount Kelefinia). The site is admirably fitted by nature to guard the only routes by which an army can penetrate Laconia from the land side, the Oenus and Eurotas valleys leading from Arcadia, its northern neighbour, and the Langada Pass over Mt Taygetus connecting Laconia and Messenia. At the same time its distance from the sea-Sparta is 27 m. from its seaport, Gythium, made it invulnerable to a maritime attack.

I.-HISTORY

Prehistoric Period.-Tradition relates that Sparta was founded by Lacedaemon, son of Zeus and Taygete, who called the city after the name of his wife, the daughter of Eurotas. But Amyclae and Therapne (Therapnae) seem to have been in early times of greater importance than Sparta, the former a Minyan foundation a few miles to the south of Sparta, the latter probably the Achaean capital of Laconia and the seat of Menelaus, Agamemnon's younger brother. Eighty years after the Trojan War, according to the traditional chronology, the Dorian migration took place. A band of Dorians united with a body of Aetolians to cross the Corinthian Gulf and invade the Peloponnese from the northwest. The Aetolians settled in Elis, the Dorians pushed up to the headwaters of the Alpheus, where they divided into two forces, one of which under Cresphontes invaded and later subdued Messenia, while the other, led by Aristodemus or, according to another version, by his twin sons Eurysthenes and Procles, made its way down the Eurotas where new settlements were formed and gained Sparta, which became the Dorian capital of Laconia. In reality this Dorian immigration rather than a single great expedition as depicted by legend, was aided by the Minyan elements in the population, owing to their dislike of the Achaean yoke. The newly founded state did not at once become powerful: it was weakened by internal dissension and lacked the stability of a united and well-organised community. The turning point is marked by the legislation of Lycurgus, who effected the unification of the state and instituted that training which was its distinguishing feature and the source of its greatness. Nowhere else in the Greek world was the pleasure of the individual so thoroughly subordinated to the interest of the state. The whole education of the Spartan was designed to make him an efficient soldier. Obedience, endurance, military success - these were the aims constantly kept in view, and beside these all other ends took a secondary place. Never, perhaps, in the world's history has a state so clearly set a definite ideal before itself or striven so consistently to reach it. But it was solely in this consistency and steadfastness that the greatness of Sparta lay. Her ideal was a narrow and unworthy one, and was pursued with a calculating selfishness and a total disregard for the rights of others, which robbed it of the moral worth it might otherwise have possessed. Nevertheless, it is not probable that without the training introduced by Lycurgus the Spartans would have been successful in securing their supremacy in Laconia, much less in the Peloponnese, for they formed a small immigrant band face to face with a large and powerful Achaean and autochthonous population.

The Expansion of Sparta (we cannot trace in detail the process by which Sparta subjugated the whole of Laconia, but apparently the first step was taken in the reign of Archelaus and Charillus) was to secure the upper Eurotas valley, conquering the border territory of Aegys. Archelaus' son Teleclus is said to have taken Amyclae, Pharis and Geronthrae, thus mastering the central Laconian plain and the eastern plateau which lies between the Eurotas and mount Parnon: his son, Alcamenes, by the subjugation of Helos this time, probably, the Argives, whose territory included the whole east coast of the Peloponnese and the island of Cythera (Herod. i. 82), were driven back, and the whole of Laconia was thus incorporated in the Spartan state. It was not long before a further extension took place. Under Alcamenes and Theopompus a war broke out between the Spartans and the Messenians, their neighbours on the west, which, after a struggle lasting for twenty years, ended in

the capture of the stronghold of Ithome and the subjection of the Messenians, who were forced to pay half the produce of the soil as tribute to their Spartan overlords. An attempt to throw off the yoke resulted in a second war, conducted by the Messenian hero Aristomenes; but Spartan tenacity broke down the resistance of the insurgents, and Messenia was made Spartan territory, just as Laconia had been, its inhabitants being reduced to the status of helots, save those who, as perioeci, inhabited the towns on the seacoast and a few settlements inland.

This extension of Sparta's territory was viewed with apprehension by her neighbours in the Peloponnese. Arcadia and Argos had vigorously aided the Messenians in their two struggles, and help was also sent by the Sicyonians, Pisatans and Triphylians: only the Corinthians appeared to have supported the Spartans, doubtless on account of their jealousy of their powerful neighbours, the Argives. At the close of the second Messenian War, i.e. by the war 631 at latest, no power could hope to cope with that of Sparta save Arcadia and Argos. Early in the 6th century the Spartan kings Leon and Agasicles made a vigorous attack on Tegea, the most powerful of the Arcadian cities, but it was not until the reign of Anaxandridas and Ariston, about the middle of the century, that the attack was successful and Tegea was forced to acknowledge Spartan overlordship, though retaining its independence. The final struggle for Peloponnesian supremacy was with Argos, which had at an early period been the most powerful state of the peninsula, and even now, though its territory had been curtailed, was a serious rival of Sparta. But Argos was now no longer at the height of its power: its league had begun to break up early in the century, and it could not in the impending struggle count on the assistance of its old allies, Arcadia and Messenia, since the latter had been crushed and robbed of its independence and the former had acknowledged Spartan supremacy. A victory won about 546 B.C., when the Lydian Empire fell before Cyrus of Persia, made the Spartans masters of the Cynuria, the borderland between Laconia and Argolis, for which there had been an age-long struggle. The final blow was struck by King Cleomenes I., who maintained for many years to come the Argive power and left Sparta without a rival in the Peloponnese. In fact, by the middle of the 6th century, and increasingly down to the period of the Persian Wars, Sparta had come to be acknowledged as the leading state of Hellas and the champion of Hellenism. Croesus of Lydia had formed an alliance with her. Scythian envoys sought her aid to stem the invasion of Darius; to her the Greeks of Asia Minor appealed to withstand the Persian advance and to aid the Ionian revolt; Plataea asked for her protection; Megara acknowledged her supremacy; and at the time of the Persian invasion under Xerxes no state questioned her right to lead the Greek forces on land and sea. Of such a position Sparta proved herself wholly unworthy. As an ally she was ineffective, nor could she ever rid herself of her narrowly Peloponnesian outlook sufficiently to throw herself heartily into the affairs of the greater Hellas that lay beyond the isthmus and across the sea. She was not a colonizing state, though the inhabitants of Tarentum, in southern Italy, and of Lyttus, in Crete, claimed her as their mother-city. Moreover, she had no share in the expansion of Greek commerce and Greek culture; and, though she bore the reputation of hating tyrants and putting them down where possible, there can be little doubt that this was done in the interests of oligarchy rather than of liberty. Her military greatness and that of the states under her hegemony formed her sole claim to lead the Greek race: that she should truly represent it was impossible.

Constitution

Regarding the internal development of Sparta down to this time very little is recorded. This information was attributed by most of the Greeks to the stability of the Spartan constitution, which had lasted unchanged from the days of Lycurgus. But it is, in fact, due also to the absence of an historical literature at Sparta, to the small part played by written laws, which were, according to tradition, expressly prohibited by an ordinance of Lycurgus, and to the secrecy which always characterizes an oligarchical rule. At the head of the state stood two hereditary kings, of the Agiad and Eurypontid families, equal in authority, so that one could not act against the veto of his colleague, though the Agiad king received greater honour in virtue of the seniority of his family (Herod. vi. 51). This dual kingship, a phenomenon unique in Greek history, was explained in Sparta by the tradition that on Aristodemus's death he had been succeeded by his twin sons, and that this

joint rule had been perpetuated. Modern scholars have advanced various theories to account for the anomaly. Some suppose that it must be explained as an attempt to avoid absolutism, and is paralleled by the analogous instance of the consuls at Rome. Others think that it points to a compromise arrived at to end the struggle between two families or communities, or that the two royal houses represent respectively the Spartan conquerors and their Achaean predecessors: those who hold this last view appeal to the words attributed by Herodotus (v. 72) to Cleomenes I.: "I am no Dorian, but an Achaean." The duties of the kings were mainly religious, judicial and military. They were the chief priests of the state, and had to perform certain sacrifices and to maintain communication with the Delphian sanctuary, which always exercised great authority in Spartan politics. Their judicial functions have at the time when Herodotus wrote (about 430 B.C.) been restricted to cases dealing with heiresses, adoptions and the public roads: civil cases were decided by the ephors, criminal jurisdiction had passed to the council of elders and the ephors. It was in the military sphere that the powers of the kings were most unrestricted. Aristotle describes the kingship at Sparta as "a kind of unlimited and perpetual generalship" (Pol. iii. 1285a), while Isocrates refers to the Spartans as "subject to an oligarchy at home, to a kingship on campaign" (iii. 24). Here also, however, the royal prerogatives were curtailed in course of time: from the period of the Persian wars the king lost the right of declaring war on whom he pleased, he was accompanied to the field by two ephors, and he was supplanted also by the ephors in the control of foreign policy. More and more, as time went on, the kings became mere figureheads, except in their capacity as generals, and the real power was transferred to the ephors and to the gerousia. The reason for this change lay partly in the fact that the ephors, chosen by popular election from the whole body of citizen, represented a democratic element in the constitution without violating those oligarchical methods which seemed necessary for its satisfactory administration; partly in the weakness of the kingship, the dual character of which inevitably gave rise to jealousy and discord between the two holders of the office, often resulting in a practical deadlock; partly in the loss of prestige suffered by the kingship, especially during the 5th century, owing to these quarrels, to the frequency with which kings ascended the throne as minors and a regency was necessary, and to the many cases in which a king was, rightly or wrongly, suspected of having accepted bribes from the enemies of the state and was condemned and banished. In the powers exercised by the assembly of the citizens or apella we cannot trace any development, owing to the scantiness of our sources. The Spartan was essentially a soldier, trained to obedience and endurance: he became a politician only if chosen as ephor for a single year or elected a life member of the council after his sixtieth year had he brought freedom from military service.

Shortly after birth the child was brought before the elders of the tribe, who decided whether it was to be reared: if defective or weakly, it was exposed in the so-called Apothetae. Thus was secured, as far as could be, the maintenance of a high standard of physical efficiency, and thus from the earliest days of the Spartan the absolute claim of the state to his life and service was indicated and enforced. Till their seventh year boys were educated at home: from that time their training was undertaken by the state and supervised by the paidonomos, an official appointed for that purpose. This training consisted for the most part in physical exercises, such as dancing, gymnastics, ballgames, etc, with music and literature occupying a subordinate position. From the twentieth year began the Spartan's liability to military service and his membership of one of the dining messes or clubs, composed of about fifteen members each, to one of which every citizen must belong. At thirty began the full citizen rights and duties. For the exercise of these three conditions were requisite: Spartiate birth, the training prescribed by law, and participation in and contribution to one of the dining-clubs. Those who fulfilled these conditions were the peers, citizens in the fullest sense of the word, while those who failed were called lesser men, and retained only the civil rights of citizenship.

Spartiates were absolutely debarred by law from trade or manufacture, which consequently rested in the hands of the perioeci, and were forbidden to possess either gold or silver, the currency consisting of bars of iron: but there can be no doubt that this prohibition was evaded in various ways. Wealth was, in theory at least, derived entirely from landed property, and consisted in the

annual return made by the helots who cultivated the plots of ground allotted to the Spartiates. But this attempt to equalize property proved a failure: from early times there were marked differences of wealth within the state, and these became even more serious after the law of Epitadeus, passed at some time after the Peloponnesian War, removed the legal prohibition of the gift or bequest of land. Later we find the soil coming more and more into the possession of large landholders, and by the middle of the 3rd century B.C. nearly two fifths of Laconia belonged to women. Hand in hand with this process went a serious diminution in the number of full citizens, who had numbered 8000 at the beginning of the 5th century, but had sunk by Aristotle's day to less than 1000, and had further decreased to 700 at the accession of Agis IV. in 244 B.C. The Spartans did what they could to remedy this by law: certain penalties were imposed upon those who remained unmarried or who married too late in life. But the decay was too deep-rooted to be eradicated by such means, and we shall see that at a late period in Sparta's history an attempt was made without success to deal with the evil by much more drastic measures.

The 5th Century B.C.

The beginning of the 5th century saw Sparta at the height of her power, though her prestige must have suffered in the fruitless attempts made to impose upon Athens an oligarchical regime after the fall of the Peisistratid tyranny in 510. But after the Persian Wars the Spartan supremacy could no longer remain unchallenged. Sparta had despatched an army in 490 to aid Athens in repelling the armament sent against it by Darius under the command of Datis and Artaphernes: but it arrived after the battle of Marathon had been fought and the issue of the conflict decided. In the second campaign, conducted ten years later by Xerxes in person, Sparta took a more active share and assumed the command of the combined Greek forces by sea and land. Yet, in spite of the heroic defence of Thermopylae by the Spartan king Leonidas, the glory of the decisive victory at Salamis fell in great measure to the Athenians, and their patriotism, self-sacrifice and energy contrasted strongly with the hesitation of the Spartans and the selfish policy which they advocated of defending the Peloponnesians only. By the battle of Plataea (479 B.C.), won by a Spartan general, and decided chiefly by the steadfastness of Spartan troops, the state partially recovered its prestige, but only so far as land operations were concerned: the victory of Mycale, won in the same year, was achieved by the united Greek fleet, and the capture of Sestos, which followed, was due to the Athenians, the Peloponnesians having returned home before the siege was begun. Sparta felt that an effort was necessary to recover her position, and Pausanias, the victor of Plataea, was sent out as admiral of the Greek fleet. But though he won considerable successes, his overbearing and despotic behaviour and the suspicion that he was intriguing with the Persian king alienated the sympathies of those under his command: he was recalled by the ephors, and his successor, Dorcis, was a weak man who allowed the transference of the hegemony from Sparta to Athens to take place without striking a blow (see DELIAN LEAGUE). By the withdrawal of Sparta and her Peloponnesian allies from the fleet the perils and the glories of the Persian War were left to Athens, who, though at the outset merely the leading state in a confederacy of free allies, soon began to make herself the mistress of an empire. Sparta took no steps at first to prevent this. Her interests and those of Athens did not directly clash, for Athens included in her empire only the islands of the Aegean and the towns on its north and east coasts, which lay outside the Spartan political horizon: with the Peloponnesians Athens did not meddle. Moreover, Sparta's attention was at this time fully occupied by troubles nearer home—the plots of Pausanias not only with the Persian king but with the Laconian helots; the revolt of Tegea (c. 473–471), rendered all the more formidable by the participation of Argos; the earthquake which in 464 devastated Sparta; and the rising of the Messenian helots, which immediately followed. But there was a growing estrangement from Athens, which ended at length in an open breach. The insulting dismissal of a large body of Athenian troops which had come, under Cimon, to aid the Spartans in the siege of the Messenian stronghold of Ithome, the consummation of the Attic democracy under Ephialtes and Pericles, the conclusion of an alliance between Athens and Argos, which also about this time became democratic, united with other causes to bring about a rupture between the Athenians and the Peloponnesian League. In this so-called first

Peloponnesian War Sparta herself took but a small share beyond helping to inflict a defeat on the Athenians at Tanagra in 457 B.C. After this battle they concluded a truce, which gave the Athenians an opportunity of taking their revenge on the Boeotians at the battle of Oenophyta, of annexing to their empire Boeotia, Phocis and Locris, and of subjugating Aegina. In 449 the war was ended by a five years' truce, but after Athens had lost her mainland empire by the battle of Coronea and the revolt of Megara a thirty years' peace was concluded, probably in the winter 446-445 B.C. By this Athens was obliged to surrender Troezen, Achaea and the two Megarian ports, Nisaea and Pegae, but otherwise the status quo was maintained. A fresh struggle, the great Peloponnesian War, broke out in 431 B.C. This may be to a certain extent regarded as a contest between Ionian and Dorian; it may with greater truth be called a struggle between the democratic and oligarchic principles of government; but at bottom its cause was neither racial nor constitutional, but economic. The maritime supremacy of Athens was used for commercial purposes, and important members of the Peloponnesian confederacy, whose wealth depended largely on their commerce, notably Corinth, Megara, Sicyon and Epidaurus, were being slowly but relentlessly crushed. Materially Sparta must have remained almost unaffected, but she was forced to take action by the pressure of her allies and by the necessities imposed by her position as head of the league. She did not, however, prosecute the war with any marked vigour: her operations were almost confined to an annual inroad into Attica, and when in 425 a body of Spartiates was captured by the Athenians at Pylos she was ready, and even anxious, to terminate the war on any reasonable conditions. That the terms of the Peace of Nicias, which in 421 concluded the first phase of the war, were rather in favour of Sparta than of Athens was due almost entirely to the energy and insight of an individual Spartan, Brasidas, and the disastrous attempt of Athens to regain its lost land-empire. The final success of Sparta and the capture of Athens in 405 were brought about partly by the treachery of Alcibiades, who induced the state to send Gylippus to conduct the defence of Syracuse, to fortify Decelea in northern Attica, and to adopt a vigorous policy of aiding Athenian allies to revolt. The lack of funds which would have proved fatal to Spartan naval warfare was remedied by the intervention of Persia, which supplied large subsidies, and Spartan good fortune culminated in the possession at this time of an admiral of boundless vigour and considerable military ability, Lysander, to whom much of Sparta's success is attributable.

The 4th Century B.C.

The fall of Athens left Sparta once again supreme in the Greek world and demonstrated clearly her total unfitness for rule. Everywhere democracy was replaced by a philo-Laconian oligarchy, usually consisting of ten men under a harmost or governor pledged to Spartan interests, and even in Laconia itself the narrow and selfish character of the Spartan rule led to a serious conspiracy. For a short time, indeed, under the energetic rule of Agesilaus, it seemed as if Sparta would pursue a Hellenic policy and carry on the war against Persia. But troubles soon broke out in Greece, Agesilaus was recalled from Asia Minor, and his schemes and successes were rendered fruitless. Further, the naval activity displayed by Sparta during the closing years of the Peloponnesian War subsidies were withdrawn, and the ambitious projects of Lysander led to his disgrace, which was followed by his death at Haliartus in 395. In the following year the Spartan navy under Peisander, Agesilaus' brother-in-law, was defeated off Cnidus by the Persian fleet under Conon and Pharnabazus, and for the future Sparta ceased to be a maritime power. In Greece itself meanwhile the opposition to Sparta was growing increasingly powerful, and, though at Coronea Agesilaus had slightly the better of the Boeotians and at Corinth the Spartans maintained their position, yet they felt it necessary to rid themselves of Persian hostility and if possible use the Persian power to strengthen their own position at home: they therefore concluded with Artaxerxes II, the humiliating Peace of Antalcidas (387 B.C.), by which they surrendered to the Great King the Greek cities of the Asia Minor coast and of Cyprus, and stipulated for the independence of all other Greek cities. This last clause led to a long and desultory war with Thebes, which refused to acknowledge the independence of the Baeotiaiae towns under its hegemony: the Cadmeia, the citadel of Thebes, was treacherously seized

by Phoebidas and held by the Spartans until 379. Still more momentous was the Spartan action in crushing the Olynthiac Confederation (see OLYNTHUS), which might have been able to stay the growth of Macedonian power. In 371 a fresh peace congress was summoned at Sparta to ratify the Peace of Callias. Again the Thebans refused to renounce their Boeotian hegemony, and the Spartan attempt at coercion ended in the defeat of the Spartan army at the battle of Leuctra and the death of its leader, King Cleombrotus. The result of the battle was to transfer the Greek supremacy from Sparta to Thebes.

In the course of three expeditions to the Peloponnese conducted by Epaminondas, the greatest soldier and statesman Thebes ever produced, Sparta was weakened by the loss of Messenia, which was restored to an independent position with the newly built Messene as its capital, and by the foundation of Megalopolis as the capital of Arcadia. The invading army even made its way into Laconia and devastated the whole of its southern portion; but the courage and coolness of Agesilaus saved Sparta itself from attack. On Epaminondas' fourth expedition Sparta was again within an ace of capture, but once more the danger was averted just in time; and though at Mantinea (362 B.C.) the Thebans, together with the Arcadians, Messenians and Argives, gained a victory over the combined Mantinean, Athenian and Spartan forces, yet the death of Epaminondas in the battle more than counterbalanced the Theban victory and led to the speedy breakup of their supremacy. But Sparta had neither the men nor the money to recover her lost position, and the continued existence on her borders of an independent Messenia and Arcadia kept her in constant fear for her own safety. She did, indeed, join with Athens and Achaea in 353 to prevent Philip of Macedon passing Thermopylae and entering Phocis, but beyond this she took no part in the struggle of Greece with the new power which had sprung up on her northern borders. No Spartiate fought on the field of Chaeronea. After the battle, however, she refused to submit voluntarily to Philip, and was forced to do so by the devastation of Laconia and the transference of certain border districts to the neighbouring states of Argos, Arcadia and Messenia. During the absence of Alexander the Great in the East, Agis III revolted, but the rising was crushed by Antipater, and a similar attempt to throw off the Macedonian yoke made by Archidamus IV in the troubling period which succeeded Alexander's death was frustrated by Demetrius Poliorcetes in 294 B.C. Twenty-two years later the city was attacked by an immense force under Pyrrhus, but Spartan bravery had not died out and the formidable enemy was repulsed, even the women taking part in the defence of the city. About 244 an Aetolian army overran Laconia, working irreparable harm and carrying off, it is said, 50,000 captives.

But the social evils within the state were even harder to combat than the foes without. Avarice, luxury, and the glaring inequality in the distribution of wealth, threatened to bring about the speedy fall of the state if no cure could be found. Agis IV and Cleomenes III made an heroic and entirely disinterested attempt in the latter part of the 3rd century to improve the conditions by a redistribution of land, a widening of the citizen body, and a restoration of the old severe training and simple life. But the evil was too deep-seated to be remedied by these artificial means; Agis was assassinated, and the reforms of Cleomenes seem to have had no permanent result. The reign of Cleomenes is marked also by a determined effort to cope with the rising power of the Achaean League and to recover for Sparta her long-lost supremacy in the Peloponnese, and even throughout Greece. The battle of Sellasia (222 B.C.), in which Cleomenes was defeated by the Achaeans and Antigonos Doseon of Macedonia, and the death of the king, which occurred shortly afterwards in Egypt, put an end to these hopes. The same reign saw also an important constitutional change, the substitution of a board of patronomi for the ephors, whose power had become almost despotic, and the curtailment of the functions exercised by the gerousia; these measures were, however, cancelled by Antigonos. It was not long afterwards that the dual kingship ceased and Sparta fell under the sway of a series of cruel and rapacious tyrants: Lysurgus, Machanidas, who was killed by Philopoemen, and Nabis, who, if we may trust the accounts given by Polybius and Livy, was little better than a bandit chieftain, holding Sparta by means of extreme cruelty and oppression, and using mercenary troops to a large extent in his wars.

The Intervention of Rome.

We must admit, however, that a vigorous struggle was maintained with the Achaean League and with Macedon until the Romans, after the conclusion of their war with Philip V, sent an army into Laconia under T. Quinctius Flaminius. Nabis was forced to capitulate, evacuating all his possessions outside Laconia, surrendering the Laconian seaports and his navy, and paying an indemnity of 500 talents (Livy xxxiv. 33-43). On the departure of the Romans he succeeded in recovering Gythium, in spite of an attempt to relieve it made by the Achaeans under Philopoemen, but in an encounter he suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of that general, who for thirty days ravaged Laconia unopposed. Nabis was assassinated in 192, and Sparta was forced by Philopoemen to enrol itself as a member of the Achaean League under a philo-Achaean aristocracy. But this gave rise to chronic disorders and disputes, which led to armed intervention on the part of the Achaeans, who compelled the Spartans to submit to the overthrow of their city walls, the dismissal of their mercenary troops, the recall of all exiles, the abandonment of the old Lycurgan constitution and the adoption of the Achaean laws and institutions (188 B.C.). Again and again the relations between the Spartans and the Achaean League formed the occasion of discussions in the Roman senate or of the despatch of Roman embassies to Greece, but no decisive intervention took place until a fresh dispute about the position of Sparta in the league led to a decision of the Romans that Sparta, Corinth, Argos, Arcadian Orchomenus and Heraclea on Oeta should be severed from it. This resulted in an open breach between the league and Rome, and eventually, in 146 B.C., after the sack of Corinth, in the dissolution of the league and the annexation of Greece to the Roman province of Macedonia. For Sparta the long era of war and intestine struggle had ceased and one of peace and a revived prosperity took its place, as is witnessed by the numerous extant inscriptions belonging to this period. As an allied city it was exempt from direct taxation, though compelled on occasions to make "voluntary" presents to Roman generals. Political ambition was restricted to the tenure of the municipal magistracies, culminating in the offices of nomophylax, ephor and patronomus. Augustus showed marked favour to the city, Hadrian twice visited it during his journeys in the East and accepted the title of eponymous patronomus. The old warlike spirit found an outlet chiefly in the vigorous but peaceful contests held in the gymnasium, the ballplace, and the arena before the temple of Artemis Orthia: sometimes too it found a vent in actual campaigning, as when Spartans were enrolled for service against the Parthians by the emperors Lucius Verus, Septimius Severus and Caracalla. Laconia was subsequently overrun, like so much of the Roman Empire, by barbarian hordes.

Medieval Sparta.

In A.D. 396 Alaric destroyed the city and at a later period Laconia was invaded and settled by Slavonic tribes, especially the Melings and Ezerits, who in turn had to give way before the advance of the Byzantine power, though preserving a partial independence in the mountainous regions. The Franks on their arrival in the Morea found a fortified city named Lacedaemonia occupying part of the site of ancient Sparta, and this continued to exist, though greatly depopulated, even after Guillaume de Villehardouin had in 1248-1249 founded the fortress and city of Misithra, or Mistra, on a spur of Taygetus some 3 m. northwest of Sparta. This passed shortly afterwards into the hands of the Byzantines, who retained it until the Turks under Mahommed II captured it in 1460. In 1687 it came into the possession of the Venetians, from whom it was wrested in 1715 by the Turks. Thus for nearly six centuries it was Mistra and not Sparta which formed the centre and focus of Laconian history.

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