

Ancient Greek Childhood and the Pursuit of *Polis* Identity:

By

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In Book Six of Homer's *Iliad*, the poet takes a break from the ever-whirling conflict of the Trojan War for a scene of curious domesticity. Hector, famed protector of Troy, holds his young son Astyanax in his arms and blesses the boy. He prays, "Zeus... Grant this boy, my son, may be like me, first in glory among the Trojans, strong and brave like me, and rule all Troy in power".¹ Such a moment of paternal affection offers an oasis of normality in the chaotic battle scenes of Homer's epic, and it also offers the reader a glimpse into a little seen part of Greek society. Though a variety of books have been written about the Homeric heroes, histories, myths, gods, and cultural norms of the Ancient Greek world, a major element of Greek life is often ignored in many of these accounts.² What about the historical role of children in Ancient Greece? As historian Mark Golden writes in *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens*, often "[c]hildren were regarded as physically weak, morally incompetent, mentally incapable" in Ancient Greek *polis* culture.³ Yet in a very real sense, children were the promoters of Classical Greek cultural identity. Children became the physical representation of a *polis*' shared culture and the community's future. The Greeks of Classical Athens and Sparta recognized the importance of children in generating *polis* vitality, raising their offspring to reflect the deeply held ideals of their respective *poleis*. Through their upbringing, they became citizens further shaping their society. By examining the typical lives of children within the *poleis* of Athens and Sparta from birth until adulthood, one can understand more fully the historical importance of children in the development and transmission of cultural *polis* identity.

For the purposes of this paper, *polis* identity will be defined as the accumulated cultural traditions and ideologies regarded by a Greek city-state as the framework for proper citizenship. The *polis* would implement a variety of methods, such as the children's educations, to enforce its particular identity. Athens' *polis* identity was oriented around developing active and able citizens capable of participating in a democratic society. Such development would emphasize the individuality of each citizen, training them toward independent thought and action in connection to the greater community. In contrast, Sparta's *polis* identity centered on maintaining societal unity and conformity via martial strength, preserving an oligarchic system of dominance over its enslaved helot population within the surrounding region. Both Sparta and Athens sought to propagate societal values within each generation. The methodologies for this perpetuation are discussed at length in the following sections.

Factors of Early Childhood

The *poleis* of Athens and Sparta viewed early childhood through two very different lenses. There were, however, certain universal practices and concepts within both *poleis*, and ancient Greek society in general, which require examination first. The abandonment and exposure to the elements of unwanted babies appeared to be a common practice throughout Ancient Greece. Garland explains, "[t]hrough the Greeks had certain reservations about terminating an unwanted pregnancy, they showed little concern for the rights... of the newborn child".⁴ In Athens, the right to abandon an infant rested in the hands of the father as *kyrios* ("head of the household"), whose individual decision determined the child's fate.⁵ In contrast, the Spartan government determined which infants would live or die within the *polis*, a differentiation aligning fully with the two *poleis'* unique traditions and societal ends.

The extent of infanticide within Greek *poleis* and its distribution between genders is debated among historians.⁶ For example, Sarah B. Pomeroy, in her ground-breaking study *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, suggests that female infants were more often abandoned than males within Athens.⁷ This gender imbalance was probably not matched within Sparta, where women were revered for their child-bearing abilities. Pomeroy suggests in her work *Spartan Women*, “it is likely that the magistrates understood that the number of Spartiates was directly related to the number of child-bearers... and therefore did not cull female infants”.⁸ From its very first trembling breaths, the differentiation between Athenian and Spartan ideology marked whether the child would live or die, based on its physical conditions or even solely on its gender.

With such cultural issues as child abandonment and high infant mortality rates so prevalent in Ancient Greek culture, some scholars have questioned whether ancient parents felt the loss of a child as deeply as modern parents do.⁹ Child mortality was indeed very high in Ancient Greece, with estimates of infant death rates up to twenty-five to thirty-five percent.¹⁰ Historian M.I. Finley believes that grief certainly existed within classical cultures, but, “in a world in which such early deaths and burials were routine... the intensity and duration of the emotional responses were unlike modern reactions”.¹¹ Golden directly disagrees with Finley and similar historical views, arguing that “members of cultures in which children are at risk often make sure that their infants are in almost constant contact with a care-giver... precisely because they know the danger that they will die if they are not attended to”.¹² He notes that demographic data, often cited by those making a case for lower emotional commitments in ancient civilizations, does not correlate to any lessening in parental grief and loss. Though parenthood existed in very different contexts within Athens and Sparta, it can be extrapolated that ancient Greek parents cared for their children and typically grieved when death struck unexpectedly.¹³

- *Early Childhood in Classical Athens*

The emphasis on individual decision-making, a clear mark of Athenian identity, existed at the birth of every child in Athens. As previously mentioned, an Athenian father, as *kyrios*, held the right to accept his newborn or abandon it. Infants were not automatically part of the nuclear family, or *oikos*. Upon the decision to keep them, they would be brought into the *oikos* via two ceremonies.¹⁴ The first was the *amphidromia*, occurring within seven days after birth. During the *amphidromia*, the child's father carried his child around the house's hearth and the family would decorate the home's doorway with an olive wreath for a boy-child and wool for a girl-child. The second ceremony, called the *dekatē*, occurred after ten days when the child was given his or her name. A sacrifice to the gods marked each of these ceremonies.

Golden describes the Athenian idea of childhood as being "inextricably intertwined with play. *Pais*, 'child', shares the root of a family of words including *paizō*, 'I play'".¹⁵ Young children played with a variety of homemade toys such as dolls, play-horses built on wheels, tops, and balls.¹⁶ D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson references "[t]he first toy the infant has is his rattle... sometimes it was a little jug with pebbles in it".¹⁷ Thompson continues, "every little girl had her own toys too. She had her dolls especially". Children played a variety of games such as tug-of-war and hide-and-seek. Ball games were also popular, with children using balls made of expanded pigs' bladders. Girls also enjoyed the game of *astragaloī*, or knucklebones, where animal knuckles were thrown in the air and caught on the back of their hands.¹⁸ Children typically consecrated their toys to the gods before beginning their education, marking the end of their early childhood.¹⁹

The stages of childhood, by which children developed and moved into expanding areas of Athenian life, are rather difficult to define with scholarly consensus.²⁰ A rough estimate might be

taken from primary literary sources, however. Plato divides Athenian childhood into a series of stages in his *Laws*. Infants were swaddled until the age of two and continually carried by their nurses until the age of three. Their legs were therefore protected from distortion brought about by walking prematurely (*Laws* 7.789e).²¹ Between the ages of six and seven, boys and girls separated as their gender-centric educations began (*Laws* 7.794c). Aristotle echoes Plato in determining seven as the age when children were educated (*Politics* 7.1336b).²² He urges that children younger than seven should be sheltered from potentially harmful public fare such as “lampoons” and “pictures or representations that are indecent” until proper education reinforced appropriate ideas and behaviors.

As Athenian children of both genders matured, they assisted in chores such as cleaning the house, gathering wood for the hearth, working in the garden or fields, managing livestock, and taking charge of younger children.²³ They also began tasks imitating their future lives as adults. Athenian girls spent much of their time watching the younger children, anticipating, as Golden explains, “their future role in their husband’s household”.²⁴ Boys typically learned their father’s trade. The age at which this sort of work would begin is not clear, though children in poor or large families likely began working earlier so as to support their household.²⁵

As they grew, Athenian children held various religious duties in the community as well. They participated in the religious festival of *Diasia*, honoring Zeus Meilichius in his serpent-form, and the festival of *Anthesteria*, where they sat in swings hung from tree branches in what may have been a fertility ceremony.²⁶ Young Athenian girls were involved in their own religious ceremonies, such as baking bread for Athena or making Athena’s garments. A particularly interesting religious duty for young girls was their role as *arrehēphoroi* in what were likely rites to Aphrodite. The *arrehēphoroi* journeyed by night to what Golden refers to as the “precinct of

Aphrodite on the Acropolis”, all the while carrying images of babies, or perhaps even actual living infants. They later returned bearing only stones wrapped in linen such as infants would wear.²⁷ Such roles held religious function and also reinforced the image of womanhood these young girls would one day emulate as adults.

- *Early Childhood in Classical Sparta*

Sparta, defined and differentiated from Athens by its strict militaristic political and social system, had a radically different way of raising its young children. There are a variety of difficulties in unearthing how young children experienced their first years within the Spartan system. Very little Spartan writing still exists and many of the sources available to historians are derived from the writings of non-Spartans, such as Plato, Aristotle, Herodotus, Xenophon, and Plutarch.²⁸ Due to this scarcity of resources, one must acknowledge the mystery which surrounds much of Spartan society, even at the peak of its power. What little remains, however, paints a very different picture of early childhood than that experienced in Athens.

Like the Athenians, the eugenic practice of exposure was a norm of Spartan society after the Lycurgian reforms. In contrast to the individual decisions made by fathers in Athens, Spartan parents were required to submit their infant before a council of elders representing the state, where a judgment was made as to whether the child would live or die. If the council ruled for the infant’s death, it was to be abandoned to the elements. This abandonment occurred perhaps in a specific location called the *Apothetai*, or “Place of Exposure”.²⁹ Spartan children, like their parents, were therefore under the ultimate authority of the state.

Little else can be discerned of early Spartan childhood. Garland describes Spartan nurses preparing their charges for the difficult Spartan *agoge* system by teaching them to remain silent,

not to fear the dark, and not to be picky about their food.³⁰ From the age of six onward, Spartan boys were taken to be educated by the state within Sparta's *agoge* system, leaving childhood in any traditional sense behind.

Young Adulthood, the Division of Gender, and School Life

Both Classical Athenian and Classical Spartan culture placed far greater emphasis on the transition of males from boyhood into manhood than the development of females into womanhood. The growth of boys into men, and the process by which they were taught the ways of *polis* life, was crucial to the continued development and identity of the *polis* itself. Young women, though they played their own specific role within the community, did not have the same active education and investment as their male counterparts. Therefore, for the purposes of this particular paper, the maturing young women of Athens and Sparta must be left only briefly outlined. Some explanation, however, should still be given to the important transition from young womanhood into marriage and motherhood.³¹

In Athens, women of social standing were confined to the family home, awaiting their marriages and roles within their husbands' households. For these girls, the transition into adulthood signaled a woman's entry into her husband's *oikos* and authority. As Golden remarks, such rapid changes into new environments were at least partially softened by youthful participation in religious ceremonies and household chores.³² The entry into marriage signaled for all practical purpose the end of a girl's childhood development and their entry into their primary adult social role of wife and mother. According to Pomeroy, marriages were contracted by fathers or legal guardians "on the basis of economic and political considerations, and girls were always obliged to marry the men their male relatives selected for them".³³ The bride's age

was typically around fourteen, while the groom was usually thirty. Women of good reputation and social standing were to remain secluded within their households after their marriages, and the household was the place of their authority. They would remain within its confines for the majority of their life, teaching their daughters, caring for ill slaves, spinning cloth, and attending to various household chores.³⁴ According to historian William Stearns Davis, women were only allowed out of the house on rare occasions. He writes, “[a]n Athenian never allows his wife to visit the Agora...public opinion will likewise frown upon the man who allowed his wife to appear in public too freely”.³⁵ Athenian women were typically not educated outside of those functions required for the proper management of the household, and this lack of education contrasts sharply with the extensive education of Athenian men.³⁶ Golden, however, does hypothesize that some women may have been educated, but that it is difficult to ascertain whether these women were of good social standing or rather well-educated courtesans.³⁷

For Spartan girls, the transition into womanhood would be more eventful. For example, they continued to receive a modicum of education within the home unlike their Athenian counterparts, possibly even obtaining a basic level of literacy.³⁸ Paul Cartledge explains, “Spartan girls undoubtedly were educated in a sense other than trained to perform sedentary, and in ancient Greece exclusively feminine, tasks” such as weaving cloth.³⁹ Overseen by the state, they would be required to participate in various sports, games, and exercise programs, such as running and wrestling in parallel with Spartan boys.⁴⁰ Such parity in physical training was an anomaly in the ancient world, catching the attention of non-Spartan observers. Xenophon, for example, considers its practice, implemented under the Lycurgan reforms, with approval.⁴¹ Girls also danced naked in public parades, dances, and processions. These duties were designed to prepare young women for their important role as Spartan mothers, producers of the males crucial to the

Spartan military system. The state would specify their marriages as occurring in their twentieth year, and their mates would typically be chosen by their parents.⁴² Though growing up in Sparta was likely a difficult experience for both boys and girls, it seems clear that the role of women within Sparta was far more influential than the women of Athens. They lived relatively free of the sorts of restraints imposed on Athenian women, and they could gain economic power via property rights. Because of this particular (and peculiar for the historical context) tradition of womanly development, Spartan women were, according to Plutarch, “too bold, putting on men's airs with their husbands... they ruled their houses absolutely, and besides, on public occasions, [they took] part in debate and the freest speech on the most important subjects”.⁴³

As seen in the outline above, the unique *polis* identities of Athens and Sparta can be distinguished in the development of Greek girls into women. Athens, though it greatly emphasized the education of its future male citizens so as to prepare them for democratic life, remained negligent in the intellectual and social development of its women. Such an education was unnecessary and impractical, for Athenian women had no voice in political life. They were to be good wives and mothers, silent and veiled within their homes. Spartan women, in contrast, found some measure of equality with men in their development from childhood to adulthood. They certainly received significant physical training, preparing their bodies for the ultimate act of female Spartan citizenship: motherhood. Motherhood formed the point in which all other activities found their proper ends.⁴⁴ Such activity within the community gave Spartan women a wider range of opportunities for their “too bold” voices to be heard. With the role of young Athenian and Spartan women so defined, it is time to consider the path of boys toward *polis* manhood.

- *Boyhood and Development within Classical Athens*

The ultimate goal of Athenian child raising practices was the production of Athenian men displaying the true character of their *polis*. Each boy would one day be an independent citizen within democratic Athens, capable of participating in Athenian politics. Future citizens, ideally responsible for the future of *polis* society, required a high level of education and training in civic virtues. Therefore, boys traditionally began the education at a very early age. Even before the age of seven, at which time young boys would leave their mothers' care and enter into the first stages of schooling, they were to be developing proper patriotism, discipline, and dignity.⁴⁵ When a boy began his schooling, it was not forced by the state, a primary difference between Athenian and Spartan education. Instead, schools were independent institutions in which the father and teacher agreed to tutoring sessions.⁴⁶ These sessions consisted of groups of students coming together under the same teacher, gathering to learn music, the alphabet, and gymnastics. Teachers were divided into their basic types according to the discipline they taught. The *kitharist* taught music, the *grammatist* taught reading and writing, and the *paedotribe* taught gymnastics.⁴⁷ The fields of study were rather broad, however, with the *grammatist* teaching levels of arithmetic and the *kitharist* often teaching the ancient poetry of Homer.

As mentioned, Athenian education existed to mold boys into proper citizens of a democratic society. Such citizenship required active participation requiring at least a basic level of literacy. Literacy was necessary for Athenians to practice their civic duties, and even the poorest of Athenians had some knowledge of their letters.⁴⁸ The pursuit of literacy was due in both to the democratic nature of Athenian politics and to the role of Athens as a trade hub in the Mediterranean world. Davis references a famous Athenian proverb, "He can neither swim nor say his letters", implying that a man who could neither survive in maritime Athens nor participate in its politics was an utter fool.⁴⁹ The repetitive transcription of the Greek alphabet

was likely a boy's first experience of school life. Boys would write their letters on wax covered tablets which could be marked and erased by a bone or metal stylus.⁵⁰ Likewise, music and poetry lessons were designed to instill proper Athenian characteristics within the listener. Historian James Bowen explains that "[t]he pursuit of music, singing and recitation was thought to lead to an inner harmony reaching into the soul".⁵¹ Gymnastic training was intended to bring about corresponding physical harmony in the student as well, preparing him for needful service within the ranks of Athenian hoplites. Schools were extremely strict. Golden explains, "[t]he stress on discipline and punishment reflects the goal of Athenian schooling, to produce citizens with the hoplite virtues of courage and self-control rather than to teach skills".⁵² In every way, Athenian academics were designed to instill a sense of *polis* identity.

In addition to their regular schooling, the boys of Athens would be taught and cared for by their individual pedagogues. The pedagogue was a personal slave purchased by a boy's father to follow the child to and from school, protecting him and guiding his actions.⁵³ As previously mentioned, children were viewed as mentally unstable and incapable of self-control, so the pedagogue provided a method by which a father could ensure the moral welfare and physical protection of his child on the streets of Athens. A.V. Yannicopoulos writes, "[i]f we take into account that children left home for school early in the morning, that they had to travel a long distance... that they were exposed to dangers from animals, weather conditions and immoral people... it is easy to realize the magnitude of a pedagogue's contribution to the child's overall safety and welfare".⁵⁴

Though school was important, it was certainly not the sole activity of an Athenian boy's life. Boys would often compete against one another in sporting events, including participation in the Panhellenic games such as the Isthmian Games, the Pythian Games, the Nemean Games, and the

famous Olympic games.⁵⁵ Athletic activities, like the gymnastic disciplines which preceded them, were meant to develop the boys of Athens into good citizens. Competition based upon personal merit connected well with the societal ideal of independent citizenship and the city's emphasis on the individual pursuit of success. Competition was also extremely useful in preparing older boys for future military service.⁵⁶

- *Boyhood and Development within Classical Sparta*

The difference between an Athenian boyhood and a Spartan boyhood were as distinctive as the differences between the two *poleis* themselves. Whereas Athenian boys had what amounted to liberal educations, with visits to the *gymnasia* to look forward to and a pedagogue to carry their school gear, the boys of Sparta were experiencing a far stricter and more strenuous life within Sparta's *agoge* system. The *agoge* was a form of public education devoted to training Spartiates from the age of seven to the age of twenty-nine.⁵⁷ Boys were divided into three educational groups by age and then likely subdivided into groups based on birth year. Compared to the independent pedagogic method of Athenian education, the *agoge* was far more analogous to a military training regime, one developed and enforced by the Spartan state.

Ultimately the *agoge* was meant to train and develop boys into ideal soldier-citizens, perfect fighting machines prepared to defend and protect their homeland. Sparta's obsession with security and *polis* unity, maintained via martial strength, originated in the overriding need to defend Sparta against the enslaved helots of Laconia. Anton Powell explains that Spartan society was organized according to "[t]he mechanisms whereby the unity and discipline of the Spartans were maintained".⁵⁸ From birth, the boys of Sparta were destined for the training and lifestyle of career soldiers protecting the Spartan way of life. The Spartan *polis* identity, focused intently on

unity, security, and strength, required the development of a homogenized citizenship. Such homogenization is reflected in the term representative of Spartan citizenship, *homoioi*, translated by Powell as “equals” or, more specifically, as “those who are similar”.⁵⁹

Like Athenian boys, Spartans began their schooling at around the age of seven, tutored not by a privately contracted teacher but by older Spartan warriors, enforcing the will of the state.⁶⁰ The state had close control of every formative moment in a Spartan boy’s childhood, directly supervising them for the purposes of empowering the Spartan military oligarchy.⁶¹ Spartan boys were sent away from their homes to group barracks, where they lived together as class regiments until they were deemed adults at the age of eighteen. Each regiment was led by a *paidonomos*, a sort of camp commander.⁶² The boys dined in specific dining groups (*syssitia*) with older Spartan men, so that the mature soldiers’ wisdom and advice could be transmitted to the rising generation.⁶³ Such dining arrangements created another element of unity via conformity, with all men of fighting age eating the same basic fare together. The dining groups also removed men from their family tables, enforcing *polis* loyalty before even the family unit.⁶⁴

The *agoge* curriculum continued to enforce Spartan values of austerity, conformity, as well as both mental and physical endurance. Unlike Athens, literacy was not particularly valued in Sparta. Boys would be taught only a little reading and writing as well as such poetry as exemplified the Spartan way of life.⁶⁵ Rather than developing the life of the mind, so important to the growing intellectual culture of Athens, Spartan boys spent the vast majority of their early years in military training, preparing mentally and physically for war within the framework of Spartan virtues. Individualism, fueled by the written word, was replaced with conformity via martial drills. Their training focused entirely on cultivating them into what Bowen refers to as the archetype of the “patriot-warrior”, the pride of Sparta.⁶⁶ Militarily, Spartan hoplites-in-

training spent hours learning the necessary physical skills to participate in Spartan combat. Such brute physical training was couched in Spartan ideology emphasizing prudence, self-control, obedience, strength, and endurance.⁶⁷ The sheer intensity of the Spartan physical training and *agoge* methodology made a lasting impression on non-Spartan observers. Aristotle for one critiqued the brutal methods by which Spartan boys trained. He wrote, “Spartans... make their boys animal in nature by their laborious exercises, in the belief that this is most contributory to manly courage” (8.1338b). In contrast, Xenophon typically praised the Spartan *agoge* system, claiming that the trials faced by Spartan boys developed obedience.⁶⁸ Such obedience was indeed vital to the proper maintenance of military order, and ultimately, the strength of the *polis*.

Spartan martial virtues were further developed in a variety of ways. After the age of twelve, Spartan cadets would be given only a simple red cloak to wear year-round, further reinforcing the radical forms of endurance and conformity required of Spartan warriors. The red coloring of the cloaks was possibly intended to harden the boys against the sight of blood or perhaps to disguise wounds during battle.⁶⁹ Drunkenness was considered a weakness, and sobriety was taught to growing youths via a group of helots being forced to drink and act foolishly in front of the young men.⁷⁰ Plato makes reference to the Spartans’ aversion to drunkenness, explaining that the traditional Greek *symposium*, where men leisurely consumed copious amounts of wine, was banned in Sparta (*Laws* 637a-b).

Athletic training and athletic competitions were possibly more important in Sparta than they were in Athens, though different emphases were placed on athleticism in the different *poleis*. In Sparta, competitions were viewed as further means toward solidifying the martial prowess and virtues of the Spartan state rather than meritorious opportunities for individual Spartiates. Often closely tied to religious and civic ceremonies, Spartan contests were used to reinforce the

Spartan way of life once again on its citizens. Those who were victorious in such contests exhibited the appropriate physical and mental traits desired within the *polis*: physical strength, endurance, courage, and self-control. Competitions were primarily physical, emphasizing the martial virtue so prevalent in Spartan society. One such game involved two teams of boys fighting one another on a raised platform surrounded by a moat, with the winning team pushing the losers one-by-one into the water.⁷¹ Other contests were not strictly physical, with the *mōa* being a singing or recitation contest.⁷²

The Transitions to Adulthood and the Completion of *Polis* Identities

Athenian boys transitioned into adulthood at the age of eighteen upon taking the Ephebic Oath.⁷³ They would then go on to train and serve for two years in the Athenian military. At the end of the ephebic period, they achieved full Athenian citizenship.⁷⁴ By the fifth century B.C., Athenian men could continue their pursuit of an education in order to achieve greater fame and more importance in Athenian politics. They could, for example, hire a *sophist*, a wandering tutor of oratory, to teach them further rhetorical skills. Young Athenian men could also join one of Athen's famous philosophical schools, such as Aristotle's Lyceum or Zeno's Stoa.⁷⁵ Education, already a dominant method for active citizenship, only expanded in Athens.

At the age of nineteen, Spartan boys likewise stood on the edge of manhood and entry into the full Spartan society.⁷⁶ The transition to manhood for these Spartan cadets came through a ritual of endurance upon the altar of Artemis Orthia. Precluding this event was the *phouaxir* or "fox time", when the older boys of Sparta would put their years of training to the test by living off of the land.⁷⁷ At the end of the "fox time", the boys joined together at the altar of Athena and be whipped until the blood ran down their backs, staining the altar stones. Historian Nigel

Kennell explains that the boys would have approached the altar in “groups of fourteen or fifteen” with up to seventy being whipped in a day.⁷⁸ Throughout the ordeal, the Spartan boys were to remain completely silent, not crying out even once as they were flogged. Such rituals served as evidence of the *agoge*’s proper development of Spartan identity among its young men. The rights of passage, the *phouaxir* and the ritual at the altar of Athena, were each symbolic rituals initiating the boys of Sparta into manhood. The event would then end with a great banquet, where Kennell describes the newly initiated men of Sparta entering “resplendent in barbarian robes”.⁷⁹ These young men of Sparta would go on to endure ten years of active duty in the Spartan military, retiring at the age of thirty to take a wife and become a full citizen of the Spartan state.⁸⁰ Once again, the state would intervene even in the deeply private matter of marriage as with every other of a citizen’s life. Marriage functioned as the method by which future Spartan hoplites would be produced, and it was therefore vital that all citizens do their part for the *polis*. Bachelorhood was a crime punishable through public humiliation. In addition, there is evidence of what Pomeroy calls “nonexclusive monogamy”.⁸¹ Within nonexclusive monogamy, wives of impotent men could swap partners for the purposes of reproduction, while husbands with wives considered physically weak or unfit to produce strong children could likewise choose women already known for birthing strong offspring. The system was nuanced, and women appeared to actively participate within it. Through nonexclusive monogamy, men and women were capable of continually producing children who would one day be trained in the patriotic love of their *polis*.

In their transitions from boyhood to manhood, one can observe the full *polis* identity being instilled within the males of Athens and Sparta. Taught from an early age the skills and ideals within their respective cities, they then took the final step into active practice of

citizenship and continued transmission of *polis* values. Athenian men could expect the sort of open educational dialogue which had existed in their boyhood to continue as they pursued careers within the public political forum of Athens. Ideally, they would live as literate and independent citizens of a thriving democratic city. Spartan men could expect the same rigorous, disciplined, and austere lifestyle they encountered from their birth onward to continue throughout their twenties, living among their fellow hoplites. Highly trained, they would form a homogenous collective charged with protecting and serving the city that raised them. They achieved full citizenship at the age of thirty, going on to marry and produce offspring to further glorify Sparta.

The training of children in the *polis* identity had important repercussions on the history of Ancient Greece and, subsequently, the early Western world. The attributes of active intellectual development and the instilling of civic virtues found within the Athenian system would be among the elements which catapulted the Athenian democracy into an Athenian Empire during the late 400s B.C. Similarly, Sparta's militaristic cultural heritage, forwarded on the backs of highly disciplined and obedient hoplites, would develop the *polis* into the fighting force that would eventually defeat Athens at Aegospotami during the Peloponnesian War.⁸² Two very different societies, each developing generation by generation, would go on to have an impact on each other and on the world around them. Their impact continues to echo, threaded into the fabric of Western civilization.

 Endnotes

1. Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. by Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin, Books, 1990), p. 211.
2. The timeline predominately represented within this paper as ‘Ancient Greece’ spans the extent of what is typically labeled the Greek Classical Period (480 B.C.-323 B.C.). For this reason, ‘Ancient’ and ‘Classical’, though not perfectly synonymous, are used to describe this period throughout the paper. The sources consulted generally consider the social history of Ancient Greece within this period, though those sources documenting Ancient Sparta must at times necessarily infer from earlier portions of the *polis*’ timeline due to the scarcity of written material.
3. Mark Golden, *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 7
4. Garland, p. 92.
5. Golden, p. 23.
6. The fuller scope of the debate over infanticide and gender inequality within Ancient Greece is worth examining. See (among many): Sarah B. Pomeroy’s *Spartan Women*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Mark Golden’s “Demography and The Exposure of Girls at Athens,” *Phoenix* 35, no. 4 (1981): 316-331; Donald Engels’ “The Problem of Female Infanticide in the Greco-Roman World,” *Classical Philology* 75, no. 2 (1980): 112-120.
7. Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), p. 69. See also: Golden, p. 87.
8. Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Spartan Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 35.
9. Golden references a variety of scholars holding the view that preindustrial societies generally were less emotionally connected to their children, a topic only briefly covered in the main body of this work. For further and expanded research in this area beyond the scope of Greek antiquity, see: M.I. Finley “The Elderly in Classical Antiquity,” *Greece and Rome* 28, no. 2 (1981): 156-171; Ivy Pinchbeck and Margaret Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 1969); Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (London: Littlehampton Book Services Ltd., 1977).
10. Golden, p. 83.
11. M.I. Finley, “The Elderly in Classical Antiquity,” *Greece and Rome* 28, no. 2 (1981): 156-171, p. 159. Finley’s argument is a cautious one, and he admits that he has no way “to measure or even to identify” a differentiation between ancient and modern emotional responses to death.

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12. Ibid., p. 84.
 13. Ibid., p. 89.
 14. All subsequent information on post-birth ceremonies taken from Golden, p. 23-24.
 15. Golden, p. 53.
 16. Garland, p. 95.
 17. D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, "Games and Playthings," *Greece and Rome* 2, no. 5 (1933): 71-79, p.73.
 18. Garland, p. 95.
 19. See: Thompson, p. 74 and Garland, p. 96.
 20. For a discussion of some of the difficulties found in defining the stages of Athenian childhood, see Golden, p. 20-22. Golden was also instrumental in determining which primary sources were appropriate for consultation in defining the structure of Athenian childhood.
 21. All references to Plato's *Laws* are taken from *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, vols. 10 and 11, trans. R.G. Bury (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967) as accessed via <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>. The Stephanus pagination numbers are given in text for easier referencing.
 22. All references to Aristotle's *Politics* are taken from *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, vol. 21, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1944) as accessed via <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>. The Bekker numbers are given in text for easier referencing.
 23. Golden, p. 33.
 24. Ibid., p. 33.
 25. Ibid., p. 34.
 26. Ibid., p. 41-43.
 27. Ibid., p. 48.
 28. For a detailed account of the difficulties and methods of extracting historical meaning on Sparta from ancient sources, see: Michael Whitby's introduction to *Sparta*, ed. Michael Whitby (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 1-6.
 29. Garland, p. 120.

30. Ibid., p. 120.

31. The following brief outline sadly cannot fully encompass the extent of women's roles within Athens and Sparta. For further and more extensive examinations of this important aspect of ancient Greek history see (among others): Pomeroy's aforementioned *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves* and *Spartan Women*; Paul Cartledge's "Spartan Wives: Liberation or Licence," *Sparta*, ed. Michael Whitby (New York: Routledge, 2002): 131-160; James Davidson's *Courtesans and Fishcakes: The Consuming Passions of Classical Athens* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997).

32. Golden, p. 49.

33. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, p. 64. Interestingly, the young age of Athenian bride likely stemmed from common belief that young women were extremely lustful, and their virginity needed to be intact for their wedding days.

34. William Stearns Davis, *A Day in Old Athens: A Picture of Athenian Life* (New York: Biblio and Tannen, 1965), p. 41.

35. Ibid., p. 39.

36. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, p. 74. See also: Durant, p. 306.

37. Golden, p. 75.

38. Ralph L. Pounds, *The Development of Education in Western Culture*, New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1968), p. 45.
See also: Paul Cartledge, "Spartan Wives: Liberation or Licence?," *Sparta*, ed. Michael Whitby (New York: Routledge, 2002): 131-160, p. 143.

39. Paul Cartledge, "Spartan Wives: Liberation or Licence," *Sparta*, ed. Michael Whitby (New York: Routledge, 2002): 131-160, p. 141.

40. Pomeroy references there being "more evidence, both textual and archaeological, for athletics than for any other aspect of Spartan women's lives" (*Spartan Women*, p. 12). See also: Durant, p. 83.

41. Xenophon, *Constitution of the Lacedaimonians*, Bk. I.4. All references to Xenophon's *Constitution of the Lacedaimonians* taken from *Xenophon in Seven Volumes*, vol. 7, trans. E. C. Marchant, G. W. Bowersock (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925) as accessed via <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>.

42. Durant, p. 84.

43. Plutarch, *Comparison of Lycurgus and Numa*, Section 3.5. All references to Plutarch come from *Plutarch's Lives*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914) as accessed via <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>.

44. Xenophon emphasizes the Spartan obsession with creating good mothers, writing that Lycurgus considered motherhood “to be the most important function of freeborn woman” (*Constitution of the Lacedaimonians*, Bk. I.4).

45. Davis, p. 63. It should be noted that scholars are not in full agreement as to the age a boy’s schooling would start in Athens. For instance, Golden references that families with wealth would send their child off to school younger than poor families (63).

46. See: Golden, p. 62.

47. Pounds, p. 46.

48. James Bowen, *A History of Western Education Volume I- The Ancient World: Orient and Mediterranean, 200 B.C.- A.D. 1054* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1972), p. 80.

49. Davis, p. 63.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 65. If too many mistakes were made, the whole tablet might be heated gently to re-melt the wax covering.

51. Bowen, p. 82.

52. Golden, p. 64. Though this paper will not examine it in any great detail, the philosophical conception of higher education was also being developed within the intellectual atmosphere of Athens. The concept of *paideia*, education and its role in the development of the ideal citizen, is attributed as belonging first to the Athenians by Bowen (85). The subsequent development of the roaming philosophers, such as the *sophistai* and their philosophical opponents Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, stem from this very Athenian analysis of how education should impact the minds of young boys within the *polis*.

53. Davis, p. 64.

54. A.V. Yannicopoulos, “The Pedagogue in Antiquity,” *The British Journal of Educational Studies* 33, no. 2 (1985), p. 175. The “immoral people” Yannicopoulos references are likely Athenian pederasts, older male lovers of young boys. Due to the many historical complexities and variety of historiographical perspectives on Ancient Greek pederastic practices, pederasty will not be covered in the scope of this paper. Pederasty certainly existed in a cultural and even legal framework within both Athenian and Spartan society, though its extent and impact as a practice are contested. Golden suggests it being part of the transition toward maturity for Athenian boys (59). Anton Powell likewise mentions Spartan pederastic practices, instituted by *polis* political authority, as being part of strengthening warrior bonds on the battlefield. See:

Anton Powell, "Dining Groups, Marriage, Homosexuality," *Sparta*, ed. Michael Whitby (New York: Routledge, 2002): 90-102. For further historiographical perspectives on this issue, see: James Davidson, "Dover, Foucault and Greek Homosexuality: Penetration and the Truth of Sex," *Past & Present* 170 (2001): 3-51 as well as William A. Percy, *Pederasty and Pedagogy in Archaic Greece* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1996).

55. Golden, p. 69. The exact age at which boys could compete in the *paidēs* or 'boys' category is unclear, but they were forced to leave it for the *andres* or 'men' at the age of eighteen.

56. William A. Percy, *Pederasty and Pedagogy in Archaic Greece* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1996), p. 98.

57. All subsequent references to the *agoge*'s structure taken from *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd ed., s.v. "Agoge."

58. Anton Powell, "Dining Groups, Marriage, Homosexuality," *Sparta*, ed. Michael Whitby (New York: Routledge, 2002): 90-103, p. 90.

59. Powell, p. 91.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

61. Pounds, p. 44.

62. Bowen, p. 53.

63. Powell, p. 91.

64. Powell, p. 92.

65. Durant, p. 82.

66. Bowen, p. 52.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

68. Xenophon, *Constitution of the Lacedaimonians* Bk. II.2.

69. James Davidson's *Courtesans and Fishcakes: The Consuming Passions of Classical Athens* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), p. 62 and Percy, p. 81.

70. Durant, p. 82-83.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 56. Spartan athletes typically competed in the nude, and Percy raises the interesting hypothesis that nudity proliferated throughout Grecian sports because of the Spartans' consistent victories in the Panhellenic games (84).

72. Nigel Kennell, *The Gymnasium of Virtue* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 51.

73. Pounds, p. 47.

74. Bowen, p. 85.

75. Pounds, p. 48.

76. It should be noted that the transition into Spartan manhood is not altogether clear. Kennell places the age of Spartan boys experiencing the *phouaxir* and ritual at Athena's altar at nineteen, basing it off of a variety of linguistic clues. Pounds likewise references military service as starting around twenty (45), supporting Kennell's supposition that the transition from boyhood to manhood would have occurred between the ages of eighteen and nineteen.

77. Kennell, p. 71.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

80. Pounds, p. 45 and Durant, p. 83. Sparta was known for a variety of marriage customs. Durant tells of one interesting ritual. If Spartan men could not choose a wife quickly enough, they would be pushed into a darkened room with a number of women and left to choose at random.

81. Pomeroy, *Spartan Women*, p. 40.

82. See: Sarah B. Pomeroy, *A Brief History of Ancient Greece: Politics, Society and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 250-251.