

Lycurgus Reforms Sparta

4A

TIME FRAME

9th century B.C.

GEOGRAPHIC SETTING

Greece

Spartans claimed that sometime in the 9th century B.C. a great leader called Lycurgus [lī kēr'gəs] decreed a number of rules and laws that set the pattern for the constitution of Sparta down to the 4th century. Scholars today feel that no one person could have accomplished all with

which Lycurgus is credited. The Greek historian Plutarch [plū'tärk] (A.D. 46?–120?) agreed, but after examining all the ancient sources concluded that even if the Lycurgan reforms were the accomplishment of several leaders, the accomplishment was no less remarkable.



Wrapped in his cloak, and with his hair in long braids emerging from beneath his crested helmet, a Spartan warrior is depicted in this Greek bronze statue, which dates from the 6th century B.C.

The . . . boldest of Lycurgus's reforms was the redistribution of the land. Great inequalities existed, many poor and needy people had become a burden to the state, while wealth had got into a very few hands. Lycurgus abolished all the mass of pride, envy, crime, and luxury, which flowed from those old and more terrible evils of riches and poverty, by inducing all landowners to offer their estates for redistribution, and prevailing upon them to live on equal terms one with another, and with equal incomes. . . .

He desired to distribute movable property also, in order completely to do away with inequality; but, seeing that actually to take away these things would be a most unpopular measure, he managed by a different method to put an end to all ostentation in these matters. First of all, he abolished the use of gold and silver money, and made iron money alone legal; and this he made of great size and weight, and small value, so that the equivalent for ten minae [mī'nē] required a great room for its stowage, and a yoke of oxen to draw it. As soon as this was established, many sorts of crime became unknown in [Sparta]. For who would steal, or take as a bribe or deny that he possessed, or take by force a mass of iron which he could not conceal, which no one envied him for possessing, which he could not even break up and so make use of. . . .



A Spartan gravestone from the 6th century B.C. shows a dead couple, with two tiny figures, probably representing their descendants, bringing offerings to them.

[As a second reform, Lycurgus expelled all workers employed in the creation of luxury goods.] Wishing still
40 further to put down luxury and take away the desire for riches, he introduced the third and the most admirable of his reforms, that of the common dining table. At this the people were to
45 meet and dine together upon a fixed allowance of food, and not to live in their own homes, lolling on expensive couches at rich tables. . . .

Considering education to be the most
50 important and the noblest work of a lawgiver, he began at the very beginning, and regulated marriages and the birth of children. . . . He strengthened the bodies of the girls by exercise in run-
55 ning, wrestling, and hurling [the discus] or javelins, in order that their children might spring from a healthy source and so grow up strong, and that they

themselves might have strength, so as
60 easily to endure the pains of childbirth. He did away with all affectation of seclusion and retirement among the women, and ordained that the girls, no less than the boys, . . . value good
65 health, and . . . love honor and courage no less than the men. This it was that made them speak and think as we are told [that] Gorgo, the wife of Leonidas, did. Some foreign lady, it seems, said to
70 her, "You [Spartan] women are the only ones that rule men." She answered, "Yes, for we alone give birth to men." . . .

A father had not the right of bringing
75 up his offspring but had to carry it to a certain place called Lesche [les'kē], where the elders of the tribe sat in judgment upon the child. If they thought it well-built and strong, they ordered the
80 father to bring it up . . . but if it was

mean-looking or misshapen, they sent it away to the place called the Exposure [where it died]. . . .

Nor was each man allowed to bring up and educate his son as he chose, but as soon as they were seven years of age [Lycurgus] received them from their parents, and enrolled them in companies. Here they lived and [ate] in common, and were associated for play and for work. . . . They learned their letters, because they are necessary, but all the rest of their education was meant to teach them to obey with cheerfulness, to endure labors, and to win battles. As they grew older their training became more severe; [their heads] were closely shorn and [they were] taught to walk barefooted and to play naked. They wore no tunic after their twelfth year, but received one garment for all the year round. . . .

The training of the Spartan youth continued till their manhood. No one

was permitted to live according to his own pleasure, but they lived in the city as if in a camp, with a fixed diet and fixed public duties, thinking themselves to belong not to themselves but to their country.

Discussing the Reading

1. What reforms did Lycurgus institute in Sparta?
2. What were the difficulties in instituting reforms?
3. Compare the position of women in ancient Sparta to their position in the contemporary United States.

CRITICAL THINKING

Assessing Cause and Effect

How did the Spartan educational system help achieve the goals of the Lycurgan reforms?

Alexander's Vision of Empire

4B

TIME FRAME

Mid-4th century B.C.

GEOGRAPHIC SETTING

From Greece to India

By 323 B.C., when he was thirty-three years old, Alexander the Great had conquered a vast empire. Although he was clearly a skillful and gallant soldier, his ability to administer his empire was never tested because of his early death. Nevertheless, during the last few years of his life Alexander took many actions which lead some scholars to believe that he had a vision of one world united under one law where all peoples would be treated equally regardless of race or culture. Alexander's biographer Plutarch had expressed this opinion already in the first century A.D. The *Republic* of the philosopher Zeno [zē'nō] (336?–264? B.C.), mentioned by Plutarch, is a work that deals with the nature of ideal government. Like all of Zeno's writings, it is now lost.

Moreover, the much-admired *Republic* of Zeno, the founder of the Stoic sect, may be summed up in this one main principle: that all the inhabitants of this world of ours should not live differentiated by their respective rules of justice into separate cities and communities, but that we should consider all men to be of one community and one [government], and that we should have a common life and an order common to us all, even as a herd that feeds together and shares the pasturage of a common field. This Zeno wrote, giving shape to a dream or, as it were, shadowy picture of a well-ordered and