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SOCIAL STATUS OF WOMEN IN ANCIENT SPARTA

The factors that determined the peculiarities of the social status of women in Ancient Sparta have been identified and analysed. It has been demonstrated that the establishment of community control over private life, namely: strict regulation of marriage and family relations, the compulsory nature of specific general education, which started for girls at the age of eight and lasted until marriage, determined that the national interests of women became a priority and dominated family values. It has been found that in Sparta, as in other polities of ancient Greece, childbearing was considered the most important function of women, as the offspring were to continue family traditions and take care of their elderly parents, conduct religious rites, etc. Only male children were seen as future citizens and defenders of the polis. In Lacedaemon, motherhood acquired a more accentuated meaning and was understood as service to the state. It became the basis of marriage and family relations, where polyandry was perceived as the norm. The Spartan woman was socially active. She was a direct participant in religious festivals and rituals, sports competitions. She publicly ridiculed the bachelors and cowards. If her own son turned out to be a coward, she could kill him herself. A mother did not bear any legal responsibility for the murder of a cowardly son. The economic rights of Spartans, which other women in ancient Greece did not have, have been investigated. Due to her husband's military service, a Lacedaemonian woman managed not only his oikos, but also his cleris. Polyandry allowed a woman to unite two or more "houses" under her control and thus increase her influence in society. It has been noted that a strong economic foundation allowed wealthy women to have more freedom in society and even influence those in power in making responsible political decisions. With the loss of Messenia, women lose their economic freedom. The social status of women also changes, as they become more subordinate to men. It has been argued that in Sparta, the state minimised the private life of spouses. Under such conditions, a woman was socially active, knew the inner life of the polis well, and understood the foreign policy priorities of the state. She acted as a motivator and guide of Spartan ideology for the men of her family. And in this way, the Lacedaemonian woman was significantly different from other women in ancient Greece.

Key words: *Ancient Greece, Sparta, Lycurgus, state, woman, education, marriage, family.*

Original article

INTRODUCTION. Ancient Greece was distinguished from other ancient civilisations by its polis type of statehood, which involved the formation of government with the direct participation of its citizens. Polises were state entities without any bureaucracy, where magistrates (officials of the city) were elected either by direct vote or by lot, which was considered to be a manifestation of the will of the gods. The society and the state were closely interconnected, as the citizens of the polis exercised control over their activities after electing

the authorities and, in case of dissatisfaction with the decisions of the magistrates, had the opportunity to remove dishonest officials or replace them with others. Polises were usually located in a small area and had a limited population. For the most part, the inhabitants knew each other and undoubtedly influenced the decisions of citizens who elected magistrates and strategists at public meetings. Athens, Corinth, and Sparta stood out among the ancient Greek polises for their size. They played a crucial role in the political life of

ancient Greece. Scholars usually pay more attention to Athens and Sparta. This is due not only to the availability of historical sources for the study of the largest city-states, but also to the different forms of government that they had. While the scholars studied the origins of democracy in Athens, Sparta was of interest as a classical monarchical aristocracy. Thus, the originality of the polises and their polarity in all spheres of life has attracted more than one generation of researchers. As a result, there have been many works on the history of Sparta, which dealt with the formation and development of the state, legal and social institutions of the ancient state. At the same time, among the numerous scientific studies, there is a lack of analytical works that would show the place and role of women in Spartan society, and characterise the peculiarities of their legal status.

Typically, the scholars have provided social characteristics of women in Sparta by referring to the works of ancient historians and philosophers. However, these works usually reflect the personal attitude of the ancient author (Aristotle, Plato, Plutarch, Cicero, etc.) to the subject of their study and do not contain a proper critical approach to the issue. Also, the researchers paid insufficient attention to the comparative analysis of sources, which greatly simplified the picture of the social life of a Spartan woman and eventually led to a distortion of the reality of the time. Therefore, it is logical to conduct an impartial study of the social and legal status of the Spartan woman, to identify and analyse the factors that determined the exceptionally important role of women in the life of Lacedaemon.

The topic is also relevant because studying the history of women in Sparta and their place in society will help to see the origins of modern gender issues and identify the factors that determine gender equality.

And finally, the authors devoted their first study to the legal status of women in ancient Athenian society (Lohvynenko I., Lohvynenko Ye., 2021), which was typical for most ancient Greek polises. Now it is logical to show the life of a Spartan woman, which in many ways contrasted with traditional ideas about women not only in ancient Greece but throughout the ancient world.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH. The *purpose* of the research is a comprehensive and integrated analysis of the social status of women in Ancient Sparta. In order to achieve this purpose, it is necessary to solve the following *objectives*: to identify and analyse the main factors that determined the social status of women in Sparta; to characterise marriage and

family relations in the Spartan polity; to show the influence of the state on the development of marriage and family relations; to determine the legal rights of women in Ancient Sparta; to reveal the role and place of women in Spartan society; to make appropriate generalisations and conclusions, showing the connection between the past and gender issues of the present.

METHODOLOGY. The study was based on the principle of historicism, which allowed all events and phenomena to be considered in a cause-and-effect relationship. This approach was used to identify the main factors that influenced the social status of women in Sparta and determined its peculiarities. The hermeneutic method and systematic analysis were useful in the study of ancient Greek legislation and primary sources, primarily the works of ancient philosophers, politicians and scientists: Aristotle, Plutarch, Xenophon, Plato, Thucydides, and others. The comparative legal method was used to study the legal rights and obligations of women in ancient Greek polities and to determine the specifics of the legal status of women in Sparta. The anthropological method helped to understand the formation of the worldview of a Spartan woman and her understanding of her own purpose in society. The study also used a gender approach, which, through the study of social institutions (family, household, upbringing and education system, etc.) and a comprehensive analysis of religious, political and legal norms, allowed for a more detailed description of the Spartan woman and her place in the society of the time. Finally, the authors relied on the latest findings of the scholars who have studied the history of statehood and law of Ancient Sparta.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION. The chronology of Sparta begins in the ninth century BC, when the Dorian tribes invaded the Eurotus Valley and conquered the local Achaeans. Antiquarians explain the creation of the Spartan state by establishing control over the occupied lands and the need to maintain power over the oppressed population (Kolisnichenko, 2013).

The early history of Sparta is little known. A large array of written sources that refer to the beginning of Sparta's history mostly convey mythologised stories about the first rulers of the polis and the lives of its inhabitants. They also contain philosophical and theoretical explanations by authors of the Classical and Hellenistic periods about the peculiarities of the formation of Spartan social institutions. It is worth noting that the ancient Greek thinkers and poets who left written records of life in Laconia were not direct witnesses of that time. Their works were published much

later than the events described, so the reliability of the knowledge they passed on to us requires careful analysis.

It is known from sources that the Spartans considered the legislator Lycurgus to be the founder of the political system that turned Laconia into a powerful state. Discussions among scholars about the historicity of this figure continue to this day. Some consider him to be a mythological figure, while others consider him to be a real historical character. In our opinion, the activities of the legislator Lycurgus took place in the early period of Sparta's history, shortly after the Dorian conquest. Further changes in the policy were only consecrated by his name.

Prior to the Lycurgic reforms, Sparta was a polis that was not much different from many others in terms of social structure and political administration. After the conquest of Messenia, the Spartan state not only expanded its borders but also significantly increased the number of enslaved people. Most of the conquered lands were appropriated by the nobility, which led to an aggravation of internal contradictions in the polis itself. As a result, Sparta faced a real threat of losing a significant part of the conquered territory due to internal social conflict during the Second Messenian War (7th century BC). The reforms carried out at that time were essentially a compromise between the Spartan aristocracy and ordinary citizens. They not only saved Lacedaemon from discord and decline, but also turned it into a strong and influential state in ancient Greece. R. Fleck and E. Hanssen (2009, p. 227), describing the reasons for the rise of Lacedaemon in the 7th century BC, rightly noted that it was the conquest of Messenia and the Lycurgic reforms that "laid the foundation for Sparta's unique system".

Significant changes in all spheres of the polis' life determined the social status of Spartan women. The reforms led to the formation of a new social system of Lacedaemon. The entire population was divided into three main social groups: Spartans, Periekos, and Ilots. (Bandurka et al., 2021, p. 101). Spartans were full citizens who lived exclusively in the main city. Periekos (from the ancient Greek *περίοικοι* – "those who live around", "surrounding") were residents of the surrounding lands captured by Sparta, simple community members, personally free but deprived of political rights (Gurevich, 1894, p. 30). According to the reforms of Lycurgus, the lands of Laconia were divided into plots of land – cleris – which were granted to Spartans and Periekos depending on the number of their families. Thus, 9,000 cleris were allocated to the Spartans and 30,000 to the Periekos (Plutarch, 1994a, p. 53).

Thanks to the Periekos as the main taxpayers, the state treasury was replenished. In addition, they had to supply sacrificial animals and a certain amount of agricultural products to the temples of Sparta for cult rites and rituals (Zaikov, 1988, p. 22). The Periekos were subject to military service. They had to supply the Hoplite contingents. According to Herodotus (1993, p. 397), the Lacedaemonian army consisted of 5,000 Spartan soldiers and the same number of Hoplite-Periekos.

At the lowest level of the social hierarchy of the Lacedaemonian state were the Ilots (from the Greek *εἰλώτης* – "captured", "prisoners") (Gurevich, 1894, p. 30). Scholars continue to debate the social status of the Ilots. Without going into a detailed analysis of the arguments used by researchers to justify their conclusions, we note what is generally acknowledged in the scientific world. First, the Ilots did not have any political rights. Secondly, they were not barbarians, but Greeks. Thirdly, the Ilots worked on Spartan farms, keeping part of the harvest for themselves. Fourthly, they were not the property of the Spartans, and therefore they had no right to sell them or set them free. Fifthly, the Ilots were allowed to start a family, perform religious rites and be untouchable while staying in the temple of Poseidon on Cape Tenar. In view of this, the status of the Ilots, in our opinion, can be defined as a specific type of "state" slavery, which differs significantly from the so-called "classical" slavery known to us from the history of Ancient Athens.

It is known that the Spartans valued courage and bravery above all else. In the polis, they paid homage not only to the gods but also to people. Heroes who showed courage and perseverance in battle were honoured, their images were mythologised and they became the basis of many legends. However, the Spartans were also educated on negative examples, which they found both in their polis and outside it. For example, in order to make future warriors despise the enemy and have no fear of the mighty Persia, they were shown overweight Persians and explained that it was no more difficult to fight such opponents than women. At the same time, it was emphasised that intemperance in eating leads to the inability to become a real warrior. Ilots also played an important role in the education of Spartan youth. They served as a demonstration of the negative. For example, a slave was forced to drink undiluted wine until he could barely stand. Then the intoxicated man was brought to the young Spartans, mocked, and the young men were shown the consequences of excessive wine consumption. If he was too talkative or slurred his words, he was

also mocked for his inability to formulate his thoughts concisely (Shama, 2015, pp. 64–65). Thus, the Spartans cultivated a humiliating, even hostile attitude towards the Ilots from their childhood. In our opinion, this can be explained by the fact that the Spartans perceived the Ilots as a threat, a real force capable of destroying not only the established way of life in Sparta, but also the foundations of its state system. The Spartans' collective fear of the Ilots can also explain the fact that the latter were forced to wear special clothing such as a hat made of dog skin, and instead of the traditional linen chiton, they were forced to wear animal skin, i.e. to have an appearance that allowed free citizens of the city to easily recognise a slave. Since the Spartans lived in constant expectation of disobedience or even revolt of the Ilots, the latter were forbidden to gather at night and carry weapons (Lur'e, 1939, pp. 102–103). According to Thucydides (1981, p. 196), "most of the Lacedaemonian measures from time immemorial were aimed, in fact, at keeping the Ilots in line". An ancient Greek historian describes one of these insidious "measures" as follows: "Intimidated by the impudence of numerous young Ilots, the Lacedaemonians... proposed to select the most capable in military affairs, promising them freedom... So, about 2000 thousand Ilots were selected, and they went around the temples with wreaths on their heads (as if they had already been granted freedom). After a while, the Lacedaemonians killed these Ilots, and no one knew where and how they died". The so-called cryptics (from the ancient Greek *κρυπτός* – "secret", "hidden"), which were held every autumn as a necessary educational measure, were also terrifying. Their essence was that armed young Spartans dispersed in small groups around Lacedaemon. They waited for the night to attack and kill a defenceless Ilote man in hiding (Plutarch, 1994a, p. 67). These state-authorized actions were aimed not only at the physical elimination of potentially dangerous Ilots, but also had a more far-reaching goal – intimidation, suppression of any resistance to the authorities and complete subjugation of the enslaved population (Figueira, 2018, p. 567).

The Spartan was instilled with a sense of superiority and hostility towards the Ilots from childhood. According to A. Powell (2015, p. 96), the "great numerical imbalance" between the Ilots and the citizens was the decisive reason that prompted Sparta to "gather its children into a single group that was carefully guarded", because only in this way "could the Spartans be taught to see themselves as the norm and the Ilots as outsiders".

With the change of the social system, starting in the eighth century, Lacedaemon acquired the

features of a large military settlement, the entire life of which was focused on the training of soldiers, the ability to solve both internal and external problems of Sparta with arms. That is why the life of a Spartan was clearly regulated from birth to death. The state system of male education included three stages, which were determined by the age of the person: children (*παιδιά*) – from 7 to 14/15 years old; juniors (*αγόρια*) – from 14/15 to 19 years old; and young men (*νέοι άνθρωποι*) – from 20 to 30 years old (Bandurka et al., 2020, p. 104). At the age of 20, every Spartan became liable for military service and had to join the *syssitia* (*συσσίτια*), a daily communal meal that was a prerequisite for obtaining citizenship. Only men participated in *syssitia*, usually no more than 15 people (Gurevich, 1894, p. 37). General meals, on the one hand, developed and strengthened the sense of collectivism that was necessary in battle, and on the other hand, served as a form of total control over the male population, which prevented any manifestations of discontent in both the polis and the army (Hodkinson, 2018, pp. 36–37).

With the introduction of the Lycurgus reforms, women's lifestyles also changed. Specific Spartan ethics had a significant impact on the system of girls' education, marriage, family, formation of life values and worldview. Comparing the system of girl's education in Sparta with the traditions of female education in ancient Greece, Xenophon (1998, p. 23) wrote: "People believe that they are raising their daughters, future mothers, well when they give them as little meat as possible and even less seasoning; wine is forbidden altogether or given diluted with water... all the Hellenes demand that their daughters stay at home and spin wool". Lycurgus believed that slaves were capable of making clothes, and that the main purpose of free women was to give birth to children. On this basis, he decreed that "women should exercise as much as men" because "strong spouses give birth to stronger offspring". In order to strengthen their bodies, Plutarch (1994a, pp. 57, 90) noted, girls had to run, wrestle, throw a javelin and discus, so that in the future "the fetus that they will bear would be healthy from the very beginning" and women could give birth safely.

According to the existing canons, girls were forbidden to stay at home and "lead a pampered and refined life". They had to attend festive processions, dance and sing without clothes in the presence of young men, and were allowed to mock officials who abused their authority (Plutarch, 1994a, p. 57).

When describing the Spartan way of life, researchers have traditionally noted the rather low educational level of women. This is explained by

the fact that in ancient Greece women did not participate in government, and therefore they had no reason to become literate, although some of them did. S. Pomeroy (2002, p. 5) was critical of this stereotypical statement, noting that the education of boys in Sparta was focused on the acquisition and development of military skills, and therefore there was little time for the humanities. The girls, “accompanied by their mothers and older women,” had much more time and “in such a female environment they learned not only to read and write, but also music, dance, and poetry.” It is known that the Dorian poet-lyricist Alcman was invited to Sparta, where he taught girls choral singing and wrote lyrics for songs that the Lacedaemonians performed at festivals. Unfortunately, Alcman’s work has survived to this day in the form of small fragments of poetry, but even these fragments clearly demonstrate the author’s high artistic skill in glorifying the Spartan way of life, in particular, restraint in food:

“There are three seasons – winter,
And summer, and autumn is the third.
And the fourth is spring, when
Flowers are plentiful,

And don’t think about plenty to eat...” (Gorbov et al., 1935, p. 40).

According to S. Pomeroy (2002, pp. 5–6), the main obstacle to finding out the cultural level of the inhabitants of Ancient Sparta is the lack of written sources that would allow us to show the structure of education in the polis more broadly and reasonably. According to the researcher, girls did not write down myths, religious canons, rules of etiquette, melodies, poems, and lyrics, but memorised them, because “they certainly could not sing and dance while holding a papyrus roll”, and therefore a “strong oral tradition” developed in Lacedaemon, which consisted of passing on from generation to generation all the “necessary information” that influenced the formation of the worldview of young residents of Lacedaemon. In view of this, S. Pomeroy (2002, p. 8) concluded that Spartan society for a long time “remained conservative and aware of its traditions”. If women were “carriers of oral traditions”, it can be assumed that their cultural level was higher than that of men.

This idea can be confirmed by the stories related to Gorgo, the daughter of Cleomenes I. According to Herodotus (1993, pp. 241–242, 357), Gorgo was only 8 or 9 years old when she warned her father against the temptation of a bribe, which the tyrant Miletus Aristagoras persistently and insidiously offered for the “favour of hearing his request”. Clement I listened to his daughter and thus avoided a major war with the Susans. Another case when Gorgo showed her wisdom and in-

genuity is related to Demartes. While in exile, he sent a secret message to Sparta, the text of which he wrote on a wooden writing board and covered it with wax. No one could understand what the message meant when they received it. Only Gorgo figured out how to remove the wax from the board and read the text.

It is clear that Gorgo, who was the daughter of a king and eventually became a queen herself, had the opportunity to learn to write and read in her high-status family. However, there is other evidence that suggests that literacy was known to the women of Lacedaemon. S. Pomeroy (2002, p. 8) drew attention to short stories about Spartan mothers who sent letters to their sons and encouraged them to be brave on the battlefield. “Given the fact,” the researcher writes, “that mothers were separated from their sons who were in military service for long periods of time, the idea that they communicated through letters is not inconceivable. In addition, the inscriptions found in the shrines dedicated to the deeds of famous women not only testify to the veneration of the memory of the dead, but also “allow us to reasonably assume that visitors could read them”.

The system of women’s education and girl’s nudity, which was commonplace at sporting events in Sparta, caused a mixed reaction among Greeks in other polities. The majority had a negative attitude to the Lacedaemonian methods of education, as they violated the traditional understanding of the essence of women, their place and role in society. A typical example is Pelaeus’ statement about the women of Sparta in the tragedy *Andromache* by the famous Greek playwright Euripides (1969, p. 312):

“And yet,
How can a Spartan be modest, when
From maidenhood, leaving home,
She shares a palette with a youth and a peplos
Her thighs exposes while running...
It’s unbearable. Or strange,
That you bring up the depraved?”

However, a part of the ancient Greek society admired the beauty of strong, athletic blond Lacedaemonians and considered them the ideal of a woman mother (Tetlow, 2005, p. 44). According to Plato (2000, p. 150), the participation of girls in festive processions, nudity, dancing and singing, wrestling and athletics competitions in the presence of young men were all explained by “not so much geometric as erotic necessity” that was supposed to lead to marriage.

The state in Sparta minimised the private life of citizens and interfered heavily in all spheres of social life, including marriage and family relations. Marriage of a man who had reached the age

of twenty was considered a duty, the failure to fulfil which entailed appropriate consequences. The unmarried (*ἀγαμος*) became outcasts of society. According to the laws of the Lycurgus, bachelors were forbidden to be spectators at the hymnopedias (from the ancient Greek *ὑμνοπαιδία*, literally “games without clothes”), where girls competed. “It is possible,” S. Pomeroy (2002, p. 34) suggests, “that bachelors preferred unproductive sexual relations with boys to reproductive sex with women, and this ban on attending the great festival was a punishment from the state. At festivals and hymnodramas, the researcher believes, the Spartans were able to “examine the bodies of potential wives,” as “women not only undressed but also displayed them to whet the appetite of unmarried men for marriage”.

As a punishment for their unwillingness to marry, bachelors were forced to walk naked around the square in winter and sing humiliating songs in which the performers ridiculed their fear of women and marriage (Lohvynenko Ye., Lohvynenko I., 2019, p. 181). Despite their previous achievements, unmarried men could lose respect among young people, who were supposed to respect their elders. For this reason, no one punished the young man who refused to give way to the famous commander Derkild, saying: “You have not yet given birth to anyone who could ever give way to me” (Plutarch, 1994a, pp. 57–58). Clearchus Solemnus argued that even women could despise and insult the unmarried: “In Lacedaemon, at one of the festivals, women chase bachelors around the altar and beat them with scourges so that they, avoiding such humiliation, revive their passion and marry in time” (Afinei, 2010, p. 249). The authenticity of this story is questionable, as there is no mention of it in other sources. At the same time, the general trend towards the mandatory timely marriage is correctly reflected. It is worth paying attention to Plutarch’s testimony that the most severe punishment for men who avoided marriage could be deprivation of civil rights (Pomeroy, 2002, p. 41).

It is not known from the sources what punishments were imposed on unmarried women. E. Tsoukalidis (2023) believes that they did not bear any legal responsibility, since due to constant wars, the male population of Sparta was small and therefore “many women could not find husbands and remained childless”.

Girls, like boys, already had good physical fitness before marriage. Unlike other polises of ancient Greece, where girls could marry after reaching puberty (at 13–14 years old), in Sparta “they were allowed to mature physically” and most of them did not marry until they reached 18 years

old. According to K. O’Pry (2015, p. 11), Lacedaemon “was not concerned with the number of children a woman could bear, but with the production of healthy male children for the Spartan army and healthy female children for reproduction”. The researcher saw the role of a woman in motherhood, and that of a man in service to the army. They were united by the fact that they “served the polis” together.

Unlike other polities, marriage in Sparta had its own peculiarities. Upon reaching the age of marriage, a girl, with the mediation of her father or elder brother, considered the proposals of suitors. After the parties came to an agreement, a marriage ritual was held, which involved the symbolic abduction of a girl. The bride was received by a so-called friend (Plutarch, 1994a, p. 58). She cut her hair short, dressed her in a man’s clothes and “put her on a straw”. The bridegroom, who was at the *syssythia* at the time, would come to the bride, “untie her belt and carry her to the bed”. After staying with her for a while, he would return to the community to “spend the night there as usual”. The young man spent his days and nights with his friends, and went to his wife “with great caution and shyness, fearing that someone would not notice”. Such visits to his wife lasted quite a long time. There were many cases when children were born in such families, and the husbands “did not see their wives even once during the day”. According to Plutarch, short visits between spouses were right, because in this way “a new and lively passion was kept alive” between husband and wife, and the fire of “mutual love and desire” was kept burning.

This format of marital relations lasted until the man turned 30. It was believed that secret meetings between husband and wife contributed to the birth of healthy offspring. At the same time, as E. Tetlow (2005, p. 44) notes, “this practice involved checking a woman’s ability to give birth before the marriage was declared”, which was important in the society of the time.

M. Joshua’s (2021) explanation of the marriage ritual is of interest. He believes that the bride’s hair was cut short and dressed in a man’s clothes so that the groom, who “knew only the company of other men before marriage, would feel more comfortable in sexual relations with a woman”. In our opinion, the girl’s short hairstyle was not meant to “provide comfort” to the man in an intimate relationship, but to be an indication that the woman was married. This explanation is more reasonable, since the scholar himself notes that “women kept their hair short throughout their marriage”. S. Pomeroy (2002, pp. 42–43) also believes that a short hairstyle was a sign of a

married woman: “In childhood, a virgin wore her hair long and uncovered; as a wife, she wore it short and covered it”. At the same time, the researcher suggested that the bride’s male attire was meant to “facilitate the man’s transition to procreative sex from the homosexual sexual intercourse to which he was accustomed”.

In the marriage and family relations of the Lacedaemonians, with the exception of royal families, marital fidelity was not considered a binding norm. Xenophon (1998, p. 23) in *The State System of the Athenians and Lacedaemonians* draws the reader’s attention to the fact that some of the laws introduced by Lycurgus did not correspond to the general ideas about the family that had developed in ancient Greek society. In particular, he reports that in Sparta, a man was allowed to share his wife with another man. If the man was elderly and the wife was young, “the old man would invite a person whose physical and moral qualities he admired to the house to have children”. Or, “if someone did not want to live with his wife, but wanted to have children of whom he could be proud”, then such a person could have children with his wife with the husband’s consent.

Xenophon believes that the state’s interference in the private life of its citizens is right, because it created conditions for the birth of healthy children, which was in the interests of the whole community. Even kings were not immune from interference in their private lives. According to Plutarch (1994b, p. 36), in the middle of the fifth century BC, the ephorate, who had de facto power in Sparta, “imposed a fine” on Archidamus II for marrying a short woman. The Ephorates feared that such a marriage could produce weak “kings” rather than strong and powerful kings.

Spartan legislation on family relations was focused on creating conditions under which the most important thing in marriage was the birth of healthy offspring – future warriors and citizens of Lacedaemon. In the case of a childless wife, a Spartan, unlike men in other polities, had more opportunities to have children: first, he had the right to divorce and marry another woman; second, he could remarry and have two wives; third, he was allowed to adopt an illegitimate son or officially adopt a child from an impoverished family. The authorities supported all methods of acquiring an heir. In addition, they put pressure on childless men who were able to have offspring to create a full-fledged family. For example, the ephorate forced King Anaxandrides II (mid-6th century BC), who was married to his niece and had no children, to take a second wife “to procreate the line of Eurysthenes”. However, after the king

remarried, his first wife became pregnant three times and gave birth to healthy sons. Anaxander II also had one son from his second wife (Herodotus, 1993, pp. 238–239; Cartledge, 2002, p. 264).

“Lycurgus believed”, writes Plutarch (1994a, p. 58), “that children belong to society, not to their parents. For this reason, he wanted citizens to be “descended from the best” and “not from accidental” people. The Spartans were convinced that Lycurgus’ wise rulings made adultery impossible in the state. As an example, Plutarch cites the story of the Lacedaemonian Herod, who, when asked by a foreigner: “What is the punishment for adultery in Sparta?”, assured him that there was no one to punish in the polis, since there were no adulterers. When the guest asked him again, “But if there is one?”, Herod explained that the guilty person should be punished by giving away an ox that, if it stretched its neck from the top of Tahit, could drink water from the Eurotus. To the stranger’s surprise: “How can I find an ox of this size?”, Herod replied in unison, smiling: “How do you find an adulterer in Sparta?”.

Studying the history of the Spartan woman, S. Pomeroy (2002, p. 74) noted that to this day there is no known punishment for adultery in Lacedaemon. Studying women’s rights in the ancient world, E. Tatlow (2005, p. 45) concluded that adultery was not considered a crime in ancient Sparta, “unless the woman’s husband refused permission to have sex with her. For example, a man committed adultery with the queen of Sparta, who conceived a child. The only known punishment was that the king removed the child from the line of succession.” In our opinion, adultery could not exist in a society that did not attach great importance to monogamy and family relationships.

One of the peculiarities of marriage and family relations in Sparta was polyandry. In the polis it was common for women to marry three or four or more men if they were brothers. Polybius (1895, p. 362) states that the Lacedaemonians had a custom “whereby three or four men, or even more if they were brothers, had one wife and their children were common; it was also considered a praiseworthy and common thing if a citizen made a sufficient number of children with his wife and gave her to any of his friends”.

In the scientific literature, there is no single view on the causes and nature of the existence of this form of polygamy in Lacedaemon. It is seen as a relic of group marriage. Most scholars explain Spartan polyandry by the desire of the state to avoid the division of family property between numerous heirs that a wife could give birth to her husband. According to O. Zolotnikova (2009,

pp. 57–58), “ancient Greek polyandry should be approached more broadly”, since it is part of “a specific phenomenon caused by circumstances that inevitably arise in the process of development of kinship and marriage institutions”. The researcher considers polyandry in three ways. First, as a form of marriage where a wife has two or more husbands at the same time. Secondly, as a socially approved sexual behaviour when a woman can legally have more than one partner both before and during marriage. Thirdly, as repeated multiple marriages of women, which are supported by the state and recognised by society. As a result of the comparative analysis, the researcher concluded that in ancient times, cases of “sharing wives, sometimes mixed with fraternal polyandry, were found among the Northern European tribes (Britons, Caledonians, Liburnians), Etruscans, Scythians, Indians, Libyans and some other Arabian peoples”. However, unlike women of other nations, Spartans were distinguished by “relatively free sexual behaviour” and “relative independence in society”, which was due to their “extraordinary economic rights” and “constant presence in a warlike state where men as professional warriors were absent for a long time”. As a result, the researcher concludes, the “exceptional role” of Spartan women “does not fully correspond to the nature of classical patriarchal slavery”. In view of the above, the reports of ancient historians that only the husband decided whether to give his wife to others or not are questionable (Xenophon, 1998, p. 23; Polybius, 1895, p. 362). In our opinion, the Spartan woman’s consent to her husband’s choice of partner was mandatory. It is known that children born of such unions were recognised by both the wife’s husband and their blood father.

Xenophon and Plutarch, explaining the non-traditional marriage and family relations for ancient Greece, pointed out that a married woman in Sparta willingly gave birth to another man because of the desire to manage two houses at the same time. E. Tatlow (2005, p. 44), describing the peculiarities of marriage and family relations in Lacedaemon, outlined the “advantages” of polyandry: “The advantage for a father who already had children was to give his sons brothers who could not claim inheritance. The advantage for a woman was that she had power in more than one household”. In other words, polyandry allowed women to increase their economic resources.

As already noted, each Spartan family received a cleris – a plot of land along with ilots, i.e. labour. Men devoted most of their time to military training or were at war, and therefore did not have the physical capacity to carry out managerial

functions on the land granted. Gradually, these functions were taken over by women (Fleck, Hanssen, 2009, p. 224).

It is important to pay attention to the legal status of these lands. “Until the 1980s”, writes S. Hodkinson (2018, p. 30), “it was traditionally believed that Spartan land tenure was of a public nature: the polis controlled a set of identical plots that were allocated to Spartan citizens as a life-time lease and returned to the polis after their death. Today, most scholars have come to the conclusion that Sparta “essentially developed a Greek system of private land ownership. Spartan citizens owned private estates of variable size, which they usually passed on to their heirs through separate inheritance, and they also legally alienated them to other citizens through donations or wills” (Hodkinson, 2002, p. 2).

In the absence of a son, a Lacedaemonian either adopted a future heir from another house or, by his decision, his daughter received the inheritance. According to S. Hodkinson (2004, p. 104), a Spartan daughter had inheritance rights similar to those enshrined in the code of ancient Greek laws of Hortina in Crete (fifth century BC), namely, half of the share allocated to the son was her inheritance. The scholar identified three ways for a Spartan woman to inherit: first, she inherited as the sole heir; second, she received half a share in a division with her brother(s); third, she inherited on equal terms with her sister(s).

The researcher’s conclusions are interesting, logically sound, but ambiguous. For example, regarding the division of inherited land plots. Usually, the works of ancient authors indicate a constant number – 9 thousand cleris, which were granted to Spartan families. This suggests that Lacedaemonian law did not allow for their division among heirs. Obviously, the land was inherited only by the eldest son, whose duty was to support his younger brothers after the death of his father. Therefore, polyandry in the Spartan way could be the alternate cohabitation of brothers with the wife of the eldest brother. Children born in such a union were considered joint, as it was difficult to establish paternity in each case. In such a marriage, the cleris remained indivisible. Younger brothers had the opportunity to receive land allotments through their adoption by families with no son heirs. The main condition for such adoption was marriage to the daughter of the cleris owner. Studying polyandry in the Spartan state, E. Tatlow (2005, p. 44) rightly noted that the “practice of wife-sharing” allowed for “better children and maximised the fertility of strong women”. The Spartans believed that women capable of having healthy offspring should give

birth not only for their own family, but also for other families. Polygamy, according to the researcher, made it possible to “limit the number of heirs in the family, which helped to keep the family estate intact, while the wife gave birth to more children to other families”.

The key issue, in our opinion, is the question of women’s ownership of land. R. Fleck and E. Hanssen (2009, p. 232) believe that “Spartan men granted women property rights, but not political rights”. Essentially repeating S. Hodgkinson’s argument about the order of daughters’ inheritance of their fathers’ property, they identified the so-called “collective benefit” of men in granting women land ownership. Land ownership, according to scholars, was in the collective interests of men, as it gave them the opportunity to devote themselves to military service. At the same time, women’s property rights “were ‘fragile’ in the sense that they could disappear as soon as they no longer met the collective interests of men”. It is difficult to agree with this thesis, since the legal status of women in general and property rights in particular were determined not by the “collective interests” or “collective benefit” of men, but primarily by military, political and socio-economic factors: The presence of a significant amount of land, the labour force (“Ilots”) assigned to it, the Spartans’ establishment of total control over the captured lands, the economic exploitation of the Periekos, the physical inability of men to exercise administrative functions on the lands granted to them, the rather high socialisation of Lacedaemon’s women, etc. Thus, women’s right to land was determined by the objective conditions prevailing in the Spartan state.

Men often did not have the opportunity to personally manage the oikos, so this function was gradually taken over by women. The state’s assignment of labour (Ilots) to the cleris and clear regulation of the distribution of the product produced on them did not require any special managerial efforts from women. Comparing the economic rights of Spartans and other women in ancient Greek polises, R. Fleck and E. Hanssen (2009, p. 228) noted that in ancient Greece only men were engaged in agriculture and disposed of the land that was their property. Women, of course, were engaged in domestic work. “Among the Spartans,” the researchers write, “both women and men were equally well suited to agricultural production. The main agricultural task of Spartan citizens was not to plough, plant and harvest (as was the case with citizens of other Greek city-states), but rather to manage the estates that the Ilots cultivated... Such work put intelligence, not strength, first, and therefore an educated

Spartan woman was an ideal replacement for an educated Spartan man”.

Thus, in a typical ancient Greek polis, a woman was under the care of her father (or brother) and then her husband for her entire life. She did not own land, did not inherit property, and could not pass it on. The only thing that was a woman’s property was meilia (consolation), a part of the bride’s dowry that was returned in case of divorce (Vinnichuk, 1988, p. 145). Compared to others, a Spartan woman had the right to manage the cleris, which made her economic status close to that of a man (Fleck and Hanssen, 2009, p. 231).

The social status of the ancient Greek woman is characterised by her restrictions in the family, the state, and lack of access to the most valuable economic resources. She was actually deprived of the right to own land and other real estate because she could marry a resident of another polis. A Spartan woman did not have this opportunity, and therefore there was no risk of losing land due to the marriage of her daughter for the family. This led to the state’s tolerant attitude to the economic rights of Lacedaemonians.

Despite a rather large amount of literature on the history of Sparta, its economy, in particular the land tenure system, remains poorly studied. We can agree with S. Pomeroy (2002, p. 78), who noted that the laws known to us at that time cannot fully “reflect the real historical situation”, show the dynamics and nature of changes over a long period. Therefore, in our opinion, there is an urgent need to identify the main trends in the development of the land tenure system in Sparta, as this will help to more clearly define women’s economic rights and the degree of their freedom in the society of that time.

Lacedaemon had two land tenure systems: private and state. Most of the land belonged to the state. As mentioned earlier, it was divided into equal plots of land, called cleris, which were assigned at birth to both Spartans and Periekos. These lands could only be used for the duration of a person’s life. Such a system was unstable, as the population, particularly the male population, fluctuated. Therefore, men who were assigned cleris were replaced by women in government. After the Spartan victory in the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC), the licurial system of public property effectively ceased to exist. After the war, Sparta received a lot of gold and silver, which undermined the foundations of economic equality laid down by Lycurgus. There was a rapid differentiation of society: the minority concentrated wealth and formed an elite; the majority became impoverished and, in the absence of proper state control, had no way to retain the cleris. Thus, the

ground was created for the development and dominance of the private land tenure system. The state, which had previously concealed the actual economic inequality of its citizens under the guise of a declaration of equality and restrained the process of stratification of the population by material wealth, was no longer an obstacle to the enrichment of individual families and the concentration of large material resources in their hands (Pomeroy, 2002, p. 79).

Aristotle (1983, pp. 429–430), who lived in the fourth century BC, described the economic situation as follows: “The women of Lacedaemon lead a life of liberty and luxury in the fullest sense of the word”. They “own nearly two-fifths of the land, as they have a considerable number of heir daughters and pay a large dowry for their daughters”. In Sparta, as in the rest of ancient Greece, women did not have political rights and were not represented in government. Yet, according to the philosopher, there is no difference in “whether women rule or, as was the case in Sparta, they are ruled by officials”. The consequences in both cases are negative. In Lacedaemon, this became one of the main reasons for the decline of the state. Of course, this conclusion of the philosopher is not correct. The reasons for the decline of Lacedaemon were different such as the loss of Messenia, oligarchy, which became critical in 425 BC, and so on (Plutarch, 1994b, p. 547). However, it is difficult to disagree with Aristotle’s statement about the wealth of women and their influence on politicians.

The history of the confrontation between the Spartan kings Agidas and Leonidas shows the significant influence of noble women on the political life of Lacedaemon at that time. Agidas, according to Plutarch (1994b, p. 267), “surpassed not only Leonidas in his intelligence and fortitude” but also all the former rulers who reigned after Agesilaus the Great. Agesilaus was crowned king at the age of 18. Despite his young age, he proved to be an energetic ruler and tried to restore the power of Sparta to its former glory in the time of Lycurgus. The young king’s mother, Agesistratus, and his grandmother, Archidamia, actively supported Agidas and played a key role in the implementation of the proclaimed reforms. Plutarch (1994b, p. 267) notes that Agesistratus was a very influential person who “through his many friends, supporters and debtors” decided “many public affairs”. Archidamia was no less influential. Women used all their connections to support their royal relative. It is important that women who “owned a lot of wealth” in Sparta and did not want to give it up opposed the reforms. They supported Leonidas, who eventually won. Agidas was defeated

and executed. Agesistrata and Archidamia were also punished by death (Plutarch, 1994b, p. 275). Leonidas acted so cruelly because he feared that over time, these authoritative women of the royal family could become a real threat to his power. Thus, this episode of Lacedaemon’s story clearly shows that Spartan women had incomparably greater freedom and influence on the internal political life of their state than their contemporaries from other polises.

A characteristic manifestation of a woman’s authority in Sparta was the reverence for her as a mother. “Motherhood”, writes M. Joshua (2021), was highly valued and... Spartan women were particularly proud that their independent status allowed them to raise strong and independent children like themselves. It is worth noting that in Lacedaemon, childbearing was considered the greatest service a woman could render to the state. Commemorative grave inscriptions were allowed in only two cases: men who died on the battlefield and women who died in childbirth (Myszkowska-Kaszuba, 2014, p. 80; Fleck, Hansen, 2009, p. 241).

In ancient Greece, only Spartan women had the right to kill their children if they proved to be cowards on the battlefield. According to Plutarch (1990, p. 337), the mother killed Damatrius as soon as she found out that he was a coward and “unworthy of her”. An epigram dedicated to this tragedy is of interest:

“The mother killed Damatrius, the law of Sparta he broke,

He was a Lacedaemon, she was a Lacedaemon”.

Distichus makes us understand that the punishment was considered legitimate and the mother did the right thing. Another Spartan woman asked her son, who had just returned from battle: “What about our men?” He replied: “They are all dead”. Then the mother exclaimed: “Did they send you to tell us about it?” and killed her son with a piece of tile. Another woman disowned her son and then killed him for leaving his post and running away from the army. Thus, cowardice was considered the most serious crime in Lacedaemon (Lohvynenko, 2017, p. 33) and could be punished by both the state and the mother, who was not legally responsible for the murder of her child.

Why did the mother treat her cowardly son so harshly? Firstly, because for both men and women, serving the interests of the state was an absolute priority, and family issues and relationships were relegated to the background. Secondly, negative consequences occurred not only for the cowardly soldier, but also for his family members. Thus, a coward was publicly deprived of citizenship and

property (Fleck, Hanssen, 2009, pp. 232–233). In fact, he became an outcast of society. In his elegy, the famous Spartan poet Tirthus (Kallistov, 1964, p. 136) conveyed the general attitude of the community towards those who made a mistake on the battlefield:

“...He has disgraced his family, disgraced his blossoming youth:

Shame and dishonour follow him inexorably.

Indeed, there is no mercy for the man who has fled,

No compassion, no honour, no love.

We must fight hard for our children and our native land...

Oh, young people, do not abandon the old in battle!”

The family was considered to be disgraced and usually impoverished due to the confiscation of property. According to S. Pomeroy (2002, p. 37), cowards were mostly young men who first encountered “real conflict”, not “hardened veterans”. Therefore, in order to prevent cowards from “not reproducing”, they were forbidden to have children. For the same reason, their sisters were “socially ostracised” because they could not find spouses. However, the mother had a chance to save her family – to disown her son and punish him herself. Thus, a woman mother performed an important “cumulative” function in Lacedaemon. She was the main link between private and public life.

In general, in Sparta, the state had a decisive influence on the nature of family relations, as the private life of spouses was minimised by the authorities. Under such conditions, a woman was socially active, well aware of the inner life of the polis, and understood the foreign policy priorities of the state. She acted as a motivator and guide of Spartan ideology for her husband and son. And this is what made the Lacedaemonian woman stand out among other women in ancient Greece.

CONCLUSIONS. Thus, a Spartan woman, compared to other women in ancient Greek polities, played an exceptionally important role in public life. The community’s control over private life, namely the strict regulation of marriage and family relations, the compulsory nature of specific general education, which for girls began at the age of eight and lasted until marriage, determined that national interests and values for women became a priority and dominated the values of family and family. In Sparta, as in other polities of Ancient Greece, childbearing was considered the most important function of women, as the off-

spring were supposed to continue family traditions and take care of their elderly parents, perform religious rites, etc. Only male children were seen as future citizens and defenders of the polis, so only men were recognised as having the right to public life. In Lacedaemon, motherhood acquired a more accentuated meaning and was understood as service to the state. It became the basis of marriage and family relations, where polyandry was perceived as the norm. The Spartan woman was socially active. She was a direct participant in religious ceremonies and rituals, sports competitions, and publicly ridiculed bachelors and cowards. If her own son proved to be a coward, she could kill him herself. A mother did not bear any legal responsibility for the murder of a cowardly son. Moreover, the state approved of such an act and considered it a “just manifestation of motherhood”.

The economic rights of the Spartans, which other women in ancient Greece did not have, are noteworthy. Due to her husband’s military service, a Lacedaemonian woman managed not only his oikos but also his cleris. Polyandry allowed a woman to unite two or more “houses” under her control and thus increase her influence in society.

From the fifth century onwards, the private land tenure system replaced the state one. The practice of dividing and inheriting land became widespread, with daughters receiving their share. The great retrospective of Epitadaius allowed to donate or bequeath all movable and immovable property to another person at his own discretion. This accelerated the process of differentiation of Spartan society and the enrichment of individual families. 2/5 of all land was concentrated in the hands of women. A strong economic foundation allowed wealthy women to have more freedom in society and even influence those in power in making responsible political decisions. With the loss of Messenia, women lost their economic freedom. The social status of women also changed, and they became more subordinate to men.

The history of the Spartan woman shows that her relative freedom and influence in society were determined not primarily by legislation, but by economic, military-political, cultural factors, the education system and the morality of the time. This is important to take into account today when addressing gender issues, as real, not declarative, gender equality in all spheres of society should be ensured not only by adopting laws, but also by creating appropriate conditions for their implementation.

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СОЦІАЛЬНИЙ СТАТУС ЖІНКИ У СТАРОДАВНІЙ СПАРТІ

Визначено та проаналізовано фактори, які визначали особливості соціального статусу жінки у Стародавній Спарті. Показано, що встановлення контролю общини над приватним життям, а саме: жорстка регламентація шлюбно-сімейних відносин, обов'язковість специфічного загального виховання, що для дівчат розпочиналося з восьми років і тривало фактично до заміжжя, визначало те, що загальнодержавні інтереси для жінки ставали пріоритетними і домінували над сімейними цінностями. З'ясовано, що у Спарті, як і в інших полісах Стародавньої Греції, дітонародження вважалося найголовнішою функцією жінки, оскільки потомство мало продовжувати родові традиції та піклуватися про старих батьків, проводити релігійні обряди тощо. Тільки дітей чоловічої статі розглядали як майбутніх громадян і захисників поліса. У Лакедемоні материнство набуло більш акцентованого значення і розумілося як служіння державі. Воно стало основою шлюбно-сімейних відносин, де поліандрія сприймалась як норма. Спартанська жінка була суспільно активною. Вона була безпосередньою учасницею релігійних свят та ритуалів, спортивних змагань. Публічно висміювала холостяків та боягузів. Якщо ж власний син виявився легкодухом, то могла власноруч його вбити. Мати за вбивство сина-боягуза ніякої юридичної відповідальності не несла. Досліджено економічні права спартанок, яких не мали інші жінки Стародавньої Греції. Через зайнятість чоловіка на військовій службі лакедемонянка управляла не лише його ойкосом, а і клером. Поліандрія давала можливість жінці об'єднувати під своїм управлінням два «доми» або більше і таким чином посилювати свій вплив у суспільстві. Зауважено, що міцне економічне підґрунтя дозволяло заможним жінкам мати більшу свободу в суспільстві і навіть впливати на нововладців у прийнятті відповідальних політичних рішень. З втратою Мессенії жінка позбувається економічної свободи. Змінюється й соціальний статус жінки, яка стає більш підвладною чоловікові. Зауважено, що у Спарті держава мінімізувала приватне життя подружжя. За таких умов жінка була соціально активною, добре знала внутрішнє життя полісу, розумілася на зовнішньополітичних пріоритетах держави. Вона виступала для чоловіків своєї родини мотиватором і провідником спартанської ідеології. І цим лакедемонянка суттєво відрізнялася від інших жінок Стародавньої Греції.

Ключові слова: *Стародавня Греція, Спарта, Лікурґ, держава, жінка, виховання, шлюб, сім'я.*

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