

Education in Ancient Greece

The first organized education

**Educating the mind
without educating the heart
is no education at all.**

– Aristotle

THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT aspects of the aristocratic education were that it aimed at producing an individual hero, who would outdo his rivals and that it worked by means of personal example.

Sparta was the first Greek city (polis) to drop these two ideals. In place of the idea of personal success, the idea of the success of the polis and community was put forward, and in place of the idea of entrusting the upbringing of a child to an individual, Sparta turned to a system of education firmly organized and controlled by it.

The Spartan educational system was designed to produce courage and loyalty to the city. The

ideal of patriotism and community spirit were of paramount importance in the education of the young Spartans. It was the community that mattered and not the individual hero, as in the Homeric or aristocratic education.

The organization of Spartan education was so careful that for every year of his life, the child was known by a different title. Thus, a **propais** was a young boy, probably aged eleven; he was one year younger than a **pratopampais** and one year older than a **mikizomenos**. These titles were not so important, however. From the age of seven onwards, the Spartan child became a member of a group in which he spent his entire day; and from

the age of twelve he left home and lived with the other members of this group.

In charge of the city's education was the **Paidonomos** (Supervisor of Education). He was assisted by a staff of young men with whips, who tried to keep the boys in order. The children were divided into groups and placed under the authority of various **eirenes** (young men of nineteen or twenty years) who were coming to the end of their education.

According to Plutarch, the Spartan girls had to wrestle, run and throw the javelin in order to become healthy and strong mothers. The idea was for the women not to be gentle or frail. Another ancient writer comments on the aims of the Spartan education "the Spartans do not approve of children learning music, writing and reading, or if they were taught some, it accommodated their necessities of living".

So, when we ask what the Spartan children learnt, we should not have in mind rows of desks, bits of information, debate and thought. The Spartans learnt a way of living, and they learnt it by living it every minute of every day.

In Athens, which was considered as the city of freedom and variety, it comes as no surprise that the education there bore hardly any resemblance with the **agoge** in Sparta. It is much more like a continuation of the Homeric education. Most upper-class children went to school, although the example and the friendship of older boys and young men was regarded as an important part of their education. It should not be imagined that "school" meant one building to which several hundred boys went. The English word "school" is derived from the Greek word *schole*; but *schole* did not come to mean anything like "school" until

late in history. Originally it meant "leisure" and it changed its meaning because discussion and argument were things that people did in their leisure time and what we call now school.

There were three kinds of **didaskalos** (teacher) in Athens. The **paidotribes** (the physical training instructor), the **kitharistes** (lyre-player/music teacher) and the **grammatistes** (elementary schoolmaster) whose name literally means "one who teaches, letters". The boy was accompanied to the schoolroom by a **paidagogos** who carried his equipment and remained with him throughout the lessons. He supervised the boy, watched over his behaviour and punished him when necessary.

Writing was done on wooden tablets, covered with wax. The pupil learnt by copying the teacher, using a stylus to scratch the wax. When he made progress, he was allowed to use ink and papyrus. Then, once he was familiar with the letters, he learnt to read, which must have been hard since the script was continuous, which means there were no divisions between the words. Moreover, the boys were taught some mathematics such as counting, addition, division and multiplication, which were taught on the abacus.

Undoubtedly, the most important part of their education was the reading, recitation and learning of Homer's great poems, *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

The Athenian education was not what we should call a practical or useful education, as it did not help anybody to get a job or to do a particular kind of work. It was concerned to develop the individual physically and mentally and to equip him to live a certain kind of life; a gentleman's life. This is no surprising as this education obviously grew out of the old aristocratic education given to the heroes.

■ SECTION A • Reading Comprehension

● EXERCISE A

Decide whether the following statements are true or false:

1. The education in Athens derived from the old aristocratic education.
True False
2. The Athenian education aimed at developing physically healthy, independent-minded, courageous citizens.
True False
3. Spartan education was not compulsory.
True False
4. The boys in Sparta were taught discussion, debate and expression of their ideas.
True False
5. Spartan education focused mainly on the individual development of the pupils.
True False
6. The epic poems of Homer constituted a major part of the education in Athens.
True False
7. The Athenian and the Spartan education were not similar.
True False
8. The word "Schole" in ancient Greece had a similar meaning with the word "school" in modern times.
True False
9. In Athens only the well-born children received education.
True False
10. In Sparta not all the boys were considered equal and their education was related to their social status.
True False

■ SECTION B • Vocabulary / Word Building

● EXERCISE A

Vocabulary list: Work out the meanings of the following words from their context and try to guess their meaning. Add to the list other unknown words you might have from the text.

Outdo	Authority	Leisure	Scratch
Rival	Wrestle	Instructor	Abacus
Ideals	Gentle	Physical	Division
Put forward	Frail	Elementary	Count
Entrust	Aim	Literally	Addition
Upbringing	Accommodate	Accompany	Multiplication
Firmly	Necessity	Equipment	Recitation
Loyalty	Row	Throughout	Grow out of
Community spirit	Have in mind	Supervise	Mental
Paramount	Debate	Watch over	Bits
In charge of	Variety	Pupil	Bear resemblance
Whip	Upper-class	Wax	Derive

● EXERCISE B

Match words and phrases from the vocabulary list to the synonyms given below:

1. Excel, surpass *outdo*
2. Diversity, array *variety*
3. Originate *derive*
4. Supreme, eminent *paramount*
5. Kind, mild, tender *gentle*
6. Supply, arrange, serve *accommodate*
7. Feeble, delicate *frail*
8. Supremacy, command, jurisdiction *authority*
9. Opponent, competitor, antagonist *rival*
10. Primary, basic, rudimentary *elementary*