

Soviets and Spartans: Women in Nondemocratic Societies

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Separated by over two-thousand years, it would seem as if the Spartans and the Soviets had very little in common. However, both had highly-advanced rights for women and opinions about their place in society (especially in comparison with their democratic counterparts Athens, and the United States) for their respective times. Women in these cultures enjoyed benefits regarding education, childcare, military involvement, labor, politics, love, health, and control over their own fertility. In order to examine the advantages that women in Sparta and the Soviet Union had over their respective contemporary women, this paper investigates Sparta and the Soviet Union with regard to how their influence separated themselves from Athens (the birthplace of democracy), and the United States. This paper will answer how these advantages aided the women, how they made things more difficult for them, and explain how certain factors accelerated rights of women in these countries.

The historiography of the women of Ancient Sparta reveals the misogyny of Ancient Greece. Aristotle in particular wrote that they were permitted too much license, they ruled their men, were intemperate, resisted laws, and were “conspicuous in their ownership and management of real property.”¹ Plutarch continued this style of thought, writing in the 1st century CE that the Laws of Lykurgus allowed Spartan women to dominate their men.² This shows a continuous fear within the male society of women holding any sort of power, one that continued into the Soviet era. As for modern scholars, the works of Paul Cartledge, and Sarah B. Pomeroy who focused on women in the Classical Age were both essential to this paper. Mary Buckley’s work on Soviet women made her the standout author in the historiography of the Soviets which began with the rise of the Bolsheviks and peaked in the mid-to-late 1980s as the Soviet Union with the political changes of *perestroika* and *glasnost* allowing outside researchers more freedom. Through these sources, one can locate several patterns which help indicate

¹ Sarah B. Pomeroy, "Spartan Women among the Romans: Adapting Models, Forging Identities," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 7 (2008): 222-223.

² Pomeroy, "Among the Romans," 222

a woman's place in a given society. These areas will be discussed below to gain a better view of the rights of women in the Soviet Union and Ancient Sparta, beginning with access to -- and the importance of -- education.

The Athenian philosopher Plato praised the Spartan education system, saying that the men and the women both found pride in their schooling, especially in regards to philosophy. He warned against judging the Spartans solely on their athletic prowess, stating that they would strike with quick wit and leave their opponent feeling "like a helpless child."³ The Spartan *agōgē* (ἀγωγή) trained the young men to be fierce warriors, and the young women to become intelligent and athletic. Plato indicated that the Spartan girls would have studied the arts, and evidence shows that foreign teachers would have been brought in on occasion to ensure a more worldly view.⁴ Literacy and education is shown within the female population through inscriptions at female sanctuaries, letters written by Spartan women, Spartan poets such as Megalostрата and Cleitogora, Spartan female philosophers such as Chilonis (daughter of one of the Seven Sages), and followers of Pythagoreanism which highlighted the importance of astronomy, mathematics, and music. With one-third of all known Pythagoreans having been Spartan women, the importance of a strong education is visible within the culture.⁵ Spartan women were shown through votive figurines to have played wind, string, and percussion instruments. Athenaeus claimed that music was studied the most in Sparta, indicating an abundance of free-time which could be used to study the arts and music. Unlike the majority of Greek cultures, Spartan women did not marry young (discussed below.) Sarah B. Pomeroy argued that this led to a longer period of time in which they could study the arts, rather than focusing on the needs of their husband and family.⁶

³ Plato, *Protagoras*, 342D-E.

⁴ Paul Cartledge, "Literacy in the Spartan Oligarchy," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 98 (1978): 31; Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Spartan Women*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3.

⁵ Paul Cartledge, "Spartan Wives: Liberation or License?" *The Classical Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (1981): 92-93; Pomeroy, *Spartan Women*, 8-10.

⁶ Pomeroy, *Spartan Women*, 5, 12.

Athenian girls, on the other hand, were groomed from childhood to become subservient wives. Usually entering marriage around fourteen years of age, they would have received – save for the wealthy – an exclusively domestic education which taught them how to run a household. From an early age an Athenian girl would have taken care of a doll to prepare her for motherhood, and helped with the cooking, weaving, or family business.⁷

As the Bolsheviks came into power they began to turn against everything considered part of the old elite regime, this included anyone who had earned a PhD prior to November 25th, 1907 (a ten year window from the laws creation.) This left a wide gap for leadership in schools who could not only educate the youth, but indoctrinate them into following the new ideologies of the State. Women who had been teaching in higher education, but had not been able to get doctoral degrees due to the laws of the Russian Empire were automatically bestowed with these honors, and made professors. All schools were then opened up to women regardless of past-qualifications, or lack thereof. By April of 1929, women made up 23.3% of all grad students, and 26.9% by 1935.⁸ While the United States began accepting women on a limited basis into eight state universities in 1870, they tended to be given liberal arts classes only to train them to be teachers. The problem was that they gained such high qualifications, that they were unable to find jobs within these fields and were left with degrees that essentially did them no financial good. Women were also accepted into graduate schools at a much lower rate, making up still under 14% of all students by 1970 and some professors expressed a fear that too many women in certain classes would drive men away from them, and others believed they simply had no time and should be focusing on more traditional female roles. This expectation to be housewife

⁷ Elaine Fantham, Helene Peet Foley, Natalie Boymel Kampen, Sarah B. Pomeroy, and H. A. Shapiro, *Women in the Classical World*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 114

⁸ Olga Valkova, "The Conquest of Science: Women and Science in Russia, 1860-1940," *Osiris* 23, no. 1 (2008): 154, 155, 161.

and more was not problematic in Sparta, but left Soviet women's involvement in other areas such as athletics nearly nonexistent.⁹

The Augustan poet Propertius wrote a poem which glorified the athleticism of the women of Sparta. In it, he discussed young Spartan girls enjoying discus tossing, running, boxing, *pankration* (*παγκράτιον*), dog hunting, horseback riding, and wrestling. The athletic activities would have been done in the nude (Propertius compares them to the Amazons), and in the presence of -- and with -- the males in the *agōgē*.¹⁰ Ancient historians and classicists Paul Cartledge, and Matthew Dillon argued that part of this rigorous athletic activity was for the females to create stronger offspring, while Pomeroy noted that these features -- including the nudity -- were central to Spartan pride.¹¹ Their athleticism made them well known as tough competitors in an age where most women could not even view most games, let alone compete in them. While the Spartans trained, they would have been able to view the *heroon* to Cynisca (the first female to win the chariot races at Olympia), who earned hero-cult status after her death. They would have looked up to her as they trained for the foot races at the Heraean games where votive bronze offerings to Hera have been found depicting women running.¹² Since only unmarried girls and women were allowed to compete (eliminating almost all but the pre-pubescent Athenians from competition), and most city-states failed to promote athletic activities to women, this was Sparta's game to win. While the women of Sparta were lampooned for their muscles in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, their athleticism, and preference for outdoor activities, made them healthier than the average Greek, and likely even more so than the males of Athens. Pomeroy estimates that the average Spartan woman ate about 3,416 calories a day due to their athletic activity, and that these better diets could have delayed

⁹ Pamela Roby, "Women and American Higher Education," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 404 (1972): 124-127.

¹⁰ Propertius, *Elegies*, 3.14

¹¹ Matthew Dillon, "Were Spartan Women Who Died in Childbirth Honoured with Grave Inscriptions?" *Hermes* 135, no. 2 (2007): 154-155 ; Cartledge, "Spartan Wives," 102; Pomeroy, "Among the Romans," 225

¹² Pomeroy, "Among the Romans," 226.

puberty and helped lead to later marriages.¹³ While this system helped the Spartans gain athletic prestige, for the Soviets, prestige came from hard labor and child-rearing, rather than athleticism.

Forty Soviet women competed at the 1952 Summer Olympic Games (the first that the Soviet Union joined), it was still one under the amount that the United States fielded, and while it went back and forth between first and second place in total medal count throughout its history, the system of labor and housework was deemed more essential and was simply too much work for there to be enough female athletes who could dedicate enough of their life to the sport. Historian Allen Guttman wrote: "In the 1960s and 1970s, in no country of Eastern Europe did women have the same opportunities for sports participation that they enjoy in Western Europe and in North America."¹⁴ The Soviet women were simply too vital to two important parts of the Soviet machine: production and reproduction.

Marx, Engels, and Lenin all believed that women would only be free once they were economically independent. Lenin believed that socialism would end the "domestic slave", and said "petty housework crushes, strangles, stultifies and degrades her, chains her to the kitchen and to the nursery, and wastes her labor."¹⁵ In theory, all looked well; 80% of working-age women were employed outside the home in 1960, and there had been eighteen million women at home in 1959 and that number had dropped by two-thirds by 1970.¹⁶ However, despite the continued statement that the Soviet Union had solved the "women's question", much of this was simply due to necessity.¹⁷

The October Revolution which brought the Bolsheviks to power in Russia came at the heels of a violent First World War where the Russian Empire suffered the largest number of casualties out of all

¹³ Cartledge, "Spartan Wives," 93; Pomeroy, *Spartan Women*, 53-54.

¹⁴ Allen Guttman, *Women's Sports: A History*, (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1991), 179-180.

¹⁵ Mary Buckley, "Soviet Interpretations of the Woman Question," in *Soviet Sisterhood*, ed. Barbara Holland (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1985), 35; Mary Buckley, "Women in the Soviet Union," *Feminist Review*, no. 8 (1981): 79, 89.

¹⁶ Buckley, "Women in the Soviet Union," 80, 83.

¹⁷ Mary Buckley, "the Woman Question," 25.

the other participants (an estimated 9,150,000.)¹⁸ At Least that many soldiers and civilians died during the Russian Civil War two years into Bolshevik power, and upwards of 31,000,000 soldiers and civilians in the Second World War.¹⁹ Due to nearly constant warfare throughout its existence, the Soviet Union had 25.9 million more women than men in 1946. The ideology of the Soviets spoke of women's liberation, but it was out of pure necessity that these actions began.²⁰

While the exact ratio of male-to-female Spartans is unknown, there are similar connections of necessity which sparked the progression of female equality there. From an early age, the men and women of Sparta were raised separately. A young girl would have known all the boys through athletic activities. However, she was educated separately and raised at home by her mother while her father was likely living in the barracks, and her brothers at the *agōgē*.²¹ With the Helots forced to take care of any labor, the women of Sparta were free from the demands placed on most ancient women, and essentially without the need for employment. They would, however, have been the only full-time residents, as the men would have been campaigning during the summer months, and training during the winter. The women were essential to Sparta's continued existence; they were what kept the war machine running. It was in the best interest of Sparta to allow their women a higher level of autonomy found nowhere else in Ancient Greece. However, despite this added freedom, women from both sides still found themselves playing a lesser role than their male counterparts.²²

Stalin's 1928 "Five Year Plan" helped to increase women in the workplace by 300%, or to about 24% percent of all workers, with an additional 10 million by 1940.²³ Despite this, a sexist hierarchy still

¹⁸ PBS, "WWI Casualty and Death Tables." Accessed June 4, 2014.
http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/resources/casdeath_pop.html.

¹⁹ J. T. Dykman. The Eisenhower Institute, "WWII Soviet Experience." Accessed June 1, 2014.
http://www.eisenhowerinstitute.org/about/living_history/wwii_soviet_experience.dot.

²⁰ Buckley, "Women in the Soviet Union," 80, 84.

²¹ Cartledge, "Literacy in the Spartan Oligarchy," 31.

²² Pomeroy, *Spartan Women*, 3.

²³ Buckley, "Women in the Soviet Union," 83.

existed within the system. Women tended to fill unskilled jobs in urban areas (warehouse workers, goods examiners, letter carriers), and under mechanized work in rural towns (milking, feeding, husbandry); only 11.3% of rural women worked with machines in 1972.²⁴ A Soviet era propaganda poster pictured a woman in overalls, holding a spade, with the caption “Build your own prestige.” What this poster failed to mention was that even if a woman were to gain access to a higher position, she would still not achieve true equality with her male coworkers.



Population issues do help to explain why many of the professions were dominated by women. However, the stereotypical female jobs were nearly completely absent of men, showing that some jobs were still considered to be women’s work. These included sales and cafeteria positions which were held

²⁴ Buckley, "Women in the Soviet Union," 85.

²⁵ “Отстроим на славу!” Translation by Anna Veprinsky, from Buckley, "Women in the Soviet Union," 86.

by 91% women, telephone receptionists another 96% women, and finally typists which held an overwhelming majority of 99% women in the position. Even in jobs where the numbers were slightly less staggering, there existed a sexist hierarchy within them. 71% of teachers in the Soviet Union were female, however 69% of the school directors were men. 77% of doctors were women, but only 52% of them were head-doctors. Mary Buckley put it simply, "at a time when men comprised only 23% of the medical profession, they constituted almost half of all chief physicians." Altogether, women earned one-third that of men due to the fact that equal pay was consistent, but men were favored in higher-paid positions and women in lower ones. Even technicians (male dominated) were paid more than the doctors.²⁶

Soviet women did make progress in some areas where women in the United States did not, especially in engineering where nearly half of all engineers were women (one million total) in 1970.²⁷ When one compares female doctor statistics in the United States, in the 1970s only 9.7 percent were female, and that number has only grown to 32.4 in the year 2010. There too is a large salary gap between the sexes, with women making on average just under 75,000 dollars less than male physicians.²⁸ Therefore, while there still was job discrimination in the Soviet Union, women were still paid equally in the Soviet Union, something which still is not mandatory in the United States. The American Civil Liberties Union claims that women in the United States only make 77 cents to every dollar made by a man, this figure drops to as low as 54 cents for women of color.²⁹ Equal payment is important when one considers that the women of the Soviet Union, like the women of Sparta, were more often than not the sole caretakers of their children.

²⁶ Buckley, "Women in the Soviet Union," 87-88.

²⁷ Buckley, "Women in the Soviet Union," 88.

²⁸ Annie-Rose Strasser. Think Progress, "Despite Growing Number Of Female Doctors And Lawyers, Women's Pay Still Lags Behind." Last modified December 5, 2012. Accessed June 2, 2014. <http://thinkprogress.org/economy/2012/12/05/1284131/women-pay-gap-persists/>.

²⁹ American Civil Liberties Union, "Equal Pay for Equal Work: Pass the Paycheck Fairness Act." Accessed June 2, 2014. <https://www.aclu.org/womens-rights/equal-pay-equal-work-pass-paycheck-fairness-act>.



As discussed above, Spartan women raised the children within their homes while the men lived within the barracks until they reached thirty years of age, though many opted to remain there even after that point. This meant that the woman had her own domain to live freely without much male interference, but also left her to raise the young boys until they were old enough to enter the *agōgē*, and the females until they were officially married themselves.³⁰ While only one woman out of seven found themselves single in the household in the Soviet Union, most women were still responsible for the majority of the child-rearing. A

political cartoon published in *Izvestiia* on the 8th of March 1980 (International Women’s Day) shows a woman with food on the stove, vacuuming and dusting, while her husband rests in his pajamas with their child on his back, saying “Masha, give our son something to do, he’s disturbing me.”³¹ This portrays the common attitude found within Soviet homes where the men were free to rest while the women (after a long day of work) were expected to then take care of the housework.

It was reported that men in urban houses spent an estimated 15 to 20 hours per week on housework, while women spent 30 to 35 hours (and upwards of 50 in rural homes). 50.3% of men interviewed in Moscow reported having taken no part in caring for their child, 67.7% did not cook, 65.8% reported not housekeeping, and 83.9% had no part in washing clothes.³² In a bid for equality, the

³⁰ Cartledge, "Spartan Wives," 102; Pomeroy, *Spartan Women*, 44.

³¹ Buckley, "Women in the Soviet Union," 91; "Маша займи сына он мне мешает" Picture from source, translation provide by Buckley.

³² Jo Peers, "Workers by Hand and Womb – Soviet Women and the Demographic Crisis," in *Soviet Sisterhood*, ed. Barbara Holland (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1985), 123-124.

Bolshevik's believed they could get women out of the home by socializing domestic labor.³³ Leon Trotsky wrote that the domestic life could only be reformed by conscious actions of the entire labor force, and revolutionary Alexandra Kollontai dreamed of a system where women could drop off their children to be raised by trained nurses, and only see them when they chose to. However, the truth was that women were expected to work physically extensive jobs all day, only to come home and raise their children, and tidy their homes while their husbands relaxed. In order for the Soviet Union to meet both their goals, of having women who produced, and women who reproduced, they had to create new policies to make child-rearing less of a burden on women.³⁴

Childcare facilities did exist, but they had extensive waiting lists (25,000 people were waiting in Alma Ata in 1974.) They were unsanitary, non-existent in some rural areas, and reminded some mothers of the horrific post-revolutionary children's centers.³⁵ When the Soviet Union's economy dropped, this caused them to build daycare and kindergarten centers for 2.5-2.8 million children in order to better support and encourage female workers.³⁶ The Soviet Union had long supported working mothers when it came to maternity leave, giving them 56 days before birth, and 56 days after birth with full pay (and up to 70 days for twins or a difficult birth). This could be extended to a year under certain conditions, and a mother was allowed to take off two years (with the second year unpaid) and still be guaranteed her job upon return. Pregnant women could not be fired, or given a smaller wage, and employers were required to allow their employees to take regular breaks in order to breastfeed.³⁷ These steps helped to protect women's rights within the workplace and ensure that she could take the necessary time to care for an infant without having to worry about money, or losing her job. In the United States, this is still a

³³ Barbara Alpern Engel, and Anastasia Posadskaya-Vanderbeck, *A Revolution of their Own: Voices of Women in Soviet History*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 4.

³⁴ Buckley, "the Woman Question," 35-36.

³⁵ Engel, and Posadskaya-Vanderbeck. "A Revolution of their Own," 10; Buckley, "Women in the Soviet Union," 91.

³⁶ Buckley, "Women in the Soviet Union," 94.

³⁷ Teresa McKeivitt, "Maternity Care in the Soviet Union," in *Soviet Sisterhood*, ed. Barbara Holland (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1985), 162.

right that women are fighting for, receiving no mandatory paid leave, and only three months of job-protected leave.³⁸ Still, the difficulties associated with work, home life, and personal goals have made the decision to raise a child a difficult one to make, therefore giving women the option to terminate a pregnancy has been seen as a vital step in women's rights.

The Hippocratic Oath, originating from 5th Century Cos in Ancient Greece, forbade abortion; however, it was not something that was legislated in Sparta or Athens.³⁹ With the mother living on her own, likely for the majority of her child-bearing years, she could likely abort a child by use of an herbal pessary without the father's knowledge. If a child was born, it was up to the tribal elders to decide if it was reared.⁴⁰ The Spartans would check for disfigurement, then bathe the child in wine to see if it convulsed. While boys were at risk of being exposed for failing these tests, girls were always reared even if disfigured.⁴¹ Athenians had a preference for exposure of girls. A 20th century study by Johannes Kirchnes determined that out of 346 families in Ancient Attica, he found a 5-to-1 boy-to-girl ratio, indicating a heavy preference for male children.⁴² Pomeroy argued that Spartan women were the only group in Ancient Greece that actively practiced control over their own fertility. She discussed how that due to their age at marriage, they were far more mature than the average teenage bride found in Athens and therefore more willing to speak up for herself. With women living on their own, involved in scholastic and athletic programs with other women, social groups would have been formed where women could share knowledge of birth control. In addition, Spartan men on occasion had children with

³⁸ Gretchen Livingston. Pew Research Center, "Among 38 nations, U.S. is the outlier when it comes to paid parental leave." Last modified December 12, 2013. Accessed June 14, 2014. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/12/12/among-38-nations-u-s-is-the-outlier-when-it-comes-to-offering-paid-parental-leave/>.

³⁹ Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1995), 69.

⁴⁰ Bonnie MacLachlen, *Women in Ancient Greece: A Sourcebook*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), 152.

⁴¹ Pomeroy, *Spartan Women*, 36, 136.

⁴² Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 70.

the Helots; these semi-citizens were known as Mothakes, and relieved the Spartan woman of any pregnancy out of necessity.⁴³

The women of the Russian Empire were under the threat of execution for abortion starting with the decree by 17th century Czar Alexis Romanov. Peter the Great would later lessen the punishment in Articles 1462 and 1463 to hard labor, and exile. The Bolsheviks abolished these laws upon their rise, and in 1920 abortion became legal. The Soviets did not condone this behavior, believing that the State should be able to care for the mother and her child, but they understood the socio-economic factors surrounding the decisions a woman makes and decided that the option should be left up to her.⁴⁴ In comparison, in 1969 groups such as the Citywide Welfare Alliance were fighting for abortion rights in Washington D.C. nearly fifty years after Soviet Women were granted the right. Women – especially the poor and minorities – were unable to get the services they needed. Alice Wolfson (a leading revolutionary in women’s reproductive rights in the United States) argued that women’s liberation needed unrestricted access to birth control and safe abortions. Yet between 100,000 and 150,000 women were involuntarily sterilized (half of which were African-American, and a large portion Native American) when undergoing the procedure, while others were allowed to have abortions but only if they agreed to the sterilization. Private hospitals were authorizing an estimated 170 abortions a month, but the public hospitals – which the poor relied on – performed about eight abortions per year, despite giving aid to around an annual 500 patients who came in due to complications from illegal abortions.⁴⁵

Originally there were no stipulations or regulations in the Soviet Union regarding who had access to abortions, or what limits – if any -- existed other than that the procedure must take place at a medical establishment. However, a lack of early facilities still led to the continuation of illegal abortions.

⁴³ Pomeroy, *Spartan Women*, 64.

⁴⁴ Alexandre Adveev, Alain Blum, and Irina Troitskaya, "The History of Abortion Statistics in Russia and the USSR from 1900 TO 1991," *Population: An English Selection*, 7 (1995): 40-41.

⁴⁵ Anne M. Valk, *Radical Sisters: Second-Wave Feminism and Black Liberation in Washington, D.C.* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 86, 88, 92.

On the third of November, 1924, a new law established abortion priority, placing single, unemployed women ahead of single working women, and wives with many children. Still, under this law, everyone was eligible for a free abortion if requested. By February of 1926 abortion was banned after the third month (unless absolutely necessary due to medical emergency.) The Soviet Union originally began collecting information on women who terminated their pregnancies in order to best understand the reasoning behind it, hoping to research how social status affected a woman's decision. However, their results began to show that women who were well-off economically were getting the most abortions, and by 1936 all attempts at studying the sociological trends disappeared.⁴⁶

Due to population concerns, abortion was banned completely (without a prescription) in 1936. This became troublesome as abortion was the principal method of birth control in the Soviet Union, due to low access to contraceptives and the traditional male ego.⁴⁷ While women were rarely punished for illegal abortions, any physician who assisted a woman in terminating a pregnancy faced a two to three year prison sentence, while non-physicians only could be fined.⁴⁸ This led women towards black market abortionists who were not qualified to perform the procedure, leading to medical complications and even death. With Stalin's death the law reverted to its pre-1936 status.⁴⁹ Women were finally able to gain the rights to abortion again in the Soviet Union, bringing them ahead of women in the United States in the fight for the right to decide. Those women who wished to start and raise a family also found themselves with more options than the average female.

The marriage customs of the women of Sparta were extraordinarily unique. Spartan girls wore their hair long and displayed it as a sign of their availability. In order to transition from this stage to a married woman, a bridesmaid would cut off the bride's hair, dress her in a male's cloak (wearing nothing

⁴⁶ Adveev, Blum, and Troitskaya, " Abortion Statistics in Russia," 42-44

⁴⁷ Adveev, Blum, and Troitskaya, " Abortion Statistics in Russia," 39, 42-44.

⁴⁸ Engel, and Posadskaya-Vanderbeck. "A Revolution of their Own," 10.

⁴⁹ Adveev, Blum, and Troitskaya, " Abortion Statistics in Russia," 45.

else but sandals), and leave her in a dark room where her husband-to-be would “abduct” her and consummate the marriage. The Spartan woman would not have to acknowledge the marriage until she was pregnant with his child, giving them the opportunity to split if they were unable to do so. The legendary Spartan laws of Lykurgus forbade marrying too young, and marrying too old. Although no ages were specified, the bride likely would have been in her late teens, early twenties, and her husband in his early to mid-twenties.⁵⁰ Athenian girls would have married shortly after puberty to much older men. Athenian wives would have been kept fairly secluded in order to stop them from having chances to be seduced, or raped, by other men. Seduction was considered a far worse crime, permitting the male to murder the offender, while rape was only punishable by a fine and it was required that the man divorce his wife. She would also become a social outcast, unlikely to be able to marry, and forbidden from public ceremonies, and jewelry display.⁵¹ Rape and adultery was practically unrecorded in Sparta. This was partially due to the fact that women lived mostly alone, and could have had a second male partner unbeknownst to her husband, but also due to the acceptance of polyandry within the Spartan culture. While Aristotle compared polygamous couples to the barbarous Cyclopes of mythology, the Spartans embraced the system for a variety of reasons.⁵² While it appears that men would offer their wives to more prestigious Spartan males to impregnate if they were unable to, it is difficult to tell how much say the woman had in this.⁵³ Pomeroy argues that women would have practiced polyandry with their own intentions as well, particularly in order to dominate two oikoi (οἴκοι) -- or households -- and therefore increase the economic standing of her children. The Spartans had little understanding about the time between consummation and delivering the child, making it easy for a woman to claim that any of the

⁵⁰ Cartledge, "Spartan Wives," 94-101.

⁵¹ Fantham, Foley, Kampen, Pomeroy, and Shapiro, *Women in the Classical World*, 114; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 114.

⁵² Dana Jalbert Stauffer, "Aristotle's Account of the Subjection of Women," *The Journal of Politics*, 70, no. 4 (2008): 929-941.

⁵³ Cartledge, "Spartan Wives," 102.

men she was seeing could possibly be the father, allowing it to be considered part of both *oikoi*.⁵⁴ This also gave women more opportunity to decide who they wanted to see, and who they wanted to be with --even if it was another woman.⁵⁵ Athenian women would have been trapped in a marriage with little access for other relationships, be them homo-or-heterosexual. Males only had to cast them from the house to divorce them, but if a woman wished to end the marriage she needed the male head of her family to speak with an *archon* who would then issue a ruling. There is only evidence of this having occurred three times. On one of these occasions, when the wife of the Athenian *strategos* Alcibiades attempted to divorce him, he marched down to the courthouse and carried her from the tribunal. If a divorce was granted, the husband gained full custody of the children.⁵⁶

Soviet Women's right to divorce was initially strict under Lenin's reign, but the reforms of 1965, followed by the "Basic Principles of Family Law" in 1968 led to a much more streamlined procedure which only required a three month waiting period. Divorce was incredibly common, one-in-three marriages ended in divorce by 1976. Due to the tendency of first marriage failure, women were encourage to marry young so that they could still find another partner if her first one failed.⁵⁷ Still, women had to be at least eighteen to marry, with the average age of marriage being an estimated twenty-one.⁵⁸ Women could not be divorced if they had a child under one, or were currently pregnant, protecting them from fathers looking to avoid responsibility. These laws appealed to women the most, culminating in women bringing divorce cases to court more often than men.⁵⁹ Despite the laws which

⁵⁴ Pomeroy, *Spartan Women*, 39, 66.

⁵⁵ Eva Cantarella, *Pandora's Daughters: The Role and Status of Women in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 87.

⁵⁶ Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 65.

⁵⁷ Buckley, "Women in the Soviet Union," 95, 97.

⁵⁸ Leonid Darsky, and Sergei Scherbov, "Martial Status Behaviour of Women in the Former Soviet Republics," *European Journal of Population*, 11, no. 1 (1995), 49.

⁵⁹ Peers, "Workers by Hand and Womb," 133.

avored women, and the overwhelming population of women in the Soviet Union, men still made up the majority of the lawmakers.

Buckley argued that Soviet women simply did not have the time to work full time, take care of the home, and run for office. This was especially true for the higher levels of the government hierarchy, as their participation decreased the higher up the level the positions went. Women held the position of deputy in 49% of the rural, town, district, and regional political systems, but only fourteen of the 426 members of the 1976 congress were women.⁶⁰ The Politburo itself only had two women: Yekaterina Alexeyevna Furtseva, and Galina Semyonova. While Buckley certainly explains part of the reason that women were mostly absent from the political scene, her answer is too simple. There is a deeper issue here regarding how women were viewed in the traditional sense. Communism could inspire great changes in women's civil rights, but it could not change sexist attitudes. The men would have also been working full time, and though -- as discussed earlier -- they statistically did less work in the house, the population difference between men and women (an estimated eighteen-million more women than men in 1976) removes any justification of the argument that women were simply too busy to lead a political life, there are more traditional sexist attitudes at work.⁶¹ In the United States women's involvement in politics was equally as low at this time. In 1976 only 18 of the 435 House seats were held by women. While that number has steadily grown, as of 2012 there are still only 78 women in the House.⁶² The women of Ancient Greece would have not been able to run for any political office, but it is clear that the opinion of the women of Sparta was highly sought after and highly valued when it came to war.

The most infamous Spartan of them all was Helen of Sparta, who was so beautiful that legend has it that her betrayal of Menelaus was said by Homer to have been the reason for the Trojan War..

⁶⁰ Buckley, "Women in the Soviet Union," 99.

⁶¹ Buckley, "Women in the Soviet Union," 80, 98-99.

⁶² Center for American Women and Politics, "Women Winners for U.S. House Seats: 1976-2012." Last modified 2012. Accessed June 11, 2014.
http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/elections/documents/congwin_byseat.pdf.

Upon her return to Sparta, she was treated not as a traitor, but as a guest to be honored and a cult to her gave Spartans pride and warriors reason to fight.⁶³ Herodotus wrote of Gorgo, the daughter of King Cleomenes I, suggesting that Aristagoras of Miletus be sent away and untrusted as he attempted to convince her father that the Spartans should join the Ionians in the revolt against Persia. Cleomenes took his daughters wisdom and gave his response to the leader of Miletus by getting up and leaving the conversation.⁶⁴ Aristagoras' reaction to even the presence of Gorgo indicates that it was not acceptable for a woman, even the daughter of a king, to even attend such a discussion, let alone speak her mind. Cleomenes reaction shows that his daughter's words are to be trusted and that he respects what she has to say. Most importantly, is the fact that Gorgo felt like she had the right to speak her mind, and did so without any indication of fear of consequence. Gorgo and Hellen were women in a man's world of war, but their importance was nonetheless realized, and they became memorialized as figures and voices for all warriors. And as Spartan women they knew the importance, and glory, of war within their culture. When Ptolemy Euergetes offered aid to the Spartan King Cleomenes III, he did so on the condition that Cleomenes III send his wife Cratesicleia to Egypt as a hostage. Upon telling his wife of this offer, Cratesicleia responded: "Send me where you think my body will be of most use to Sparta."⁶⁵ Women would send their sons letters telling them to "be brave or die,"⁶⁶ while Plutarch tells of a story of a Spartan mother of five who was informed of their deaths in battle, to which she replied angrily that she only wanted to know whether the Spartans had won. There were even mentions of a Spartan mothers killing their own sons when it is discovered that they had retreated from the battlefield. In

⁶³ Homer, *Iliad*, 3.150-159.

⁶⁴ Herodotus 5.51.

⁶⁵ Claude Mosse. "Women in the Spartan Revolutions of the Third Century B.C.," In *Women's History and Ancient History*, edited by Sarah B. Pomeroy, 146. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1991.

⁶⁶ Pasi Loman, "No Woman No War: Women's Participation in Ancient Greek Warfare," *Greece and Rome*, 51, no. 1 (2004): 39.

times of actual battle, Spartan women were known to distribute food and water, nurse the injured, bury the dead, deliver weapons, and dig trenches in defense of Sparta.⁶⁷

The women of the Soviet Union had a much greater role in warfare. In World War II, there were 520,000 active female soldiers in the Red Army, as well as an estimated 300,000 in anti-aircraft defenses and by 1945, 70% of the Young Communist Soldiers were women. Women like Zoia Medvedeva commanded male, female, and mixed units in months long standoffs against the invading German Army, while women such as Marina Raskova helped promote and build all-women combat air regiments. This certainly had a lot to do with the dwindling male population, but one must consider that all of these women had volunteered and many were granted commanding positions. Despite all of this, propaganda continued to show women in the Soviet Union as helping to build weapons, rather than wielding them on the front lines; worst of all they still were not considered soldiers, but rather “volunteers.” At this point, women in the United States (after much debate) were finally granted jobs within the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps were they held only clerical and communications positions.⁶⁸ Unfortunately, sexual harassment was far too common in the Red Army, and women who fought alongside the men were stereotyped as sexually promiscuous, leading to former soldier Vera Ivanovna Malakhova to claim that she was afraid to display her medals in public out of fear of the negative attention she would receive.⁶⁹

As for the recognition of services of Spartan women, the argument that Spartan women who died in childbirth were given gravestone markers and treated just as the men who had died in battle was often repeated throughout many works by the likes of Paul Cartledge on Spartan culture.⁷⁰ Matthew Dillon looked into these claims and found that there was no evidence of them having received special honors and that it would have been women who had died holding a religious office that would have had

⁶⁷ Loman, “No Woman No War,” 36, 39, 41.

⁶⁸ Anna Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat: A History of Violence on the Eastern Front*, (New York: Cambridge, 2010), 3, 5, 8-15, 116.

⁶⁹ Engel, and Posadskaya-Vanderbeck. “A Revolution of their Own,” 178-179.

⁷⁰ Cartledge, “Spartan Wives,” 95.

their names inscribed on the tombs. He argued that the pious Spartans would have wanted to honor anyone that had served their life honoring the gods, and discovered that even male priests who died in battle were honored separately from the remaining men. Dillon believed the myth originated due to a corrupted translation, and that the grave inscriptions actually contained the word *ιερω̃ν*, which refers to someone being holy or revered, rather than pregnant.⁷¹

The Soviets and Spartans both experienced equality for women which was considered advanced during the time which they reigned. These rights helped to progress the status and position of women within both empires and create better lives for them while helping to bring some sort of equality for the sexes. However, most of these changes were due entirely to necessity rather than doctrine or political belief. Despite being ahead of their respective democratic partners of the United States and Athens, their nondemocratic status was not the reasoning for their behavior.⁷² The Spartans certainly had more respect for women built into their culture, but their system of military and male living arrangements that came with it had more to do with why women were allotted certain rights than the fact that they had an oligarchical dual-monarchy. With the women of the Soviet Union, while Marx, Engels, and Lenin all promoted the beliefs of equality and used these as their war cry to gain support from the lower classes, it was more to do with the drastic losses in male population that led to women's rights. Even with these overwhelming majority, women there were never quite on equal terms, and traditional views on sexuality and status remained as evident by the stereotypical work and lack of female representatives in government.⁷³

While the democratic societies were slow to adapt – if ever – more liberal policies leading towards women's rights, it is not shown that Sparta and the Soviet Union adapted these policies simply

⁷¹ Matthew Dillon, "Were Spartan Women Who Died in Childbirth Honoured with Grave Inscriptions?," *Hermes* 135, no. 2 (2007): 151, 154, 157-158.

⁷² Buckley, "Women in the Soviet Union," 84.

⁷³ Buckley, "Women in the Soviet Union," 84.

due to their nondemocratic structure, rather these steps were taken due to separate circumstances, often out of necessity or culture shaped entirely outside their political beliefs. However, the progress that was made in each of these civilizations helped to advance the position of women. By giving women a more equal role in education, labor, the military, marriage, divorce, and providing them more freedom in regards to wages, maternity care, and fertility control, they were able to live with less male dominance in their lives in comparison to their democratic counterparts. While neither of these civilizations ever achieved anything close to complete equality (having failed to truly allow them into politics, and still forcing traditional gender roles on them), the steps forward that they did were monumental in comparison to other contemporary countries. Due to population concerns in the Soviet Union, and the militaristic lifestyle of the males in Sparta, the Soviets and the Spartans both realized the importance of women in their societies, ensuring that they gained more freedoms and rights to ensure that the countries were able to thrive.

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