

## ***Evaluate the significance of Spartan architecture as an expression of their culture***

19/20.

The Spartan civilisation was distinctive in the annals of ancient Greek city-states. Spartan society was not solely distinguished by its unique code of law, underpinned by ***eunomia***, enshrined in the ***Great Rhetra***, and crafted by Sparta's ancestral lawgiver, ***Lykourgos***, but its architecture also contrasted starkly with the rest of Greece. Although little tangible evidence has survived of the ordinary ***Spartiate*** home, there are significant archaeological remains of Sparta's religious structures. The ***Amyklaion***, ***Menelaion*** and ***Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia*** were all buildings representative of Spartan cultural life; one typified by fervent religiousness.

The religious devoutness inherent in Sparta is best reflected in the architecture of the ***Amyklaion*** temple. Standing around five kilometres south of the Spartan ***polis*** at the ***Amyklai***, the ***Amyklaion*** temple was not merely a monument to the Greek god ***Apollo***, but also the location where the legendary warrior, ***Hyakinthos***, was interred. Constructed by the ***Ionian*** architect, ***Bathykles***, the ***Amyklaion*** served as the physical manifestation of Spartan dedication to Apollo, with a wooden cult statue or ***xoanon*** of this god rising approximately fourteen metres high, lined with bronze plates and depicted with a helmet, spear and bow. Although historically the subject of considerable debate in the archaeological community, it was generally believed, especially by Nineteenth Century archaeologists like Frenchmen ***Quatremé de Quincy*** (1755 - 1849) that situated at the statue's base was the ***thronos***. The ***thronos*** was configured like a block to act as a pedestal to Apollo, where offerings venerating his dominion regularly took place and as an altar to ***Hyakinthos***, over whose entombed remains the structure stood. Enclosing the statue were four walls decorated with a continuous ***frieze***, each depicting scenes from Spartan mythology. The fragments that have been unearthed, including parts of lotus and palmette frieze and pieces of a column and ***capital***, display according to the respected historian ***Dr Brian Brennan*** in ***Source A*** '*...influence of the more oriental decorations to be found in Asia Minor*'. This source is valid in assessing the significance of religion and is primarily useful in illustrating its centrality in all levels of Spartan life, particularly their architecture. The source implies the Spartans were willing to compromise their normally all-pervasive ***xenophobia*** by importing the architectural style of a foreign people, in this case the ***Ionians***, if it were to be used as a means of expressing their faith. The apparent lack of bias, evident through the impartial tone, coupled with the author's academic credentials reinforce the source's reliability as well.

Further evidence of religious influence in Spartan architecture is evident in ***Source B***, debris collected from the remains of the ***Amyklaion***. Clearly visible are intricate, etched markings carved into a thick stone slab. This source is valid in determining the impact of religion on Spartan architecture, highlighting the importance of faith to the Spartan people, whom were willing to expend time and valuable natural resources such as stone, a commodity rare in the isolation of the ***Peloponnese***, to pay homage to their gods. As an archaeological source, the possibility of bias is reduced to the point of negligibility. Thus the considerable significance of the ***Amyklaion*** in illustrating the prominent role of religion in Sparta is aptly demonstrated.

The ***Shrine of Menelaos and Helen***, dubbed the ***Menelaion***, is a prominent illustration of Sparta's devotion to religion. Located north-east of Sparta proper, the building was a

monument and burial site to the mythical King *Menelaos* and his wife *Helen of Troy*, who was supposedly abducted during the *Trojan War*. This building was the earliest of its kind in all of *Lakonia*, being dated to the late Seventh Century by respected archaeologist, *Hector Catling*. The structure's final design included blue limestone and white marble, buttressed by a terrace which displayed large dedications. Such opulence in clear opposition to the usual frugality of Sparta demonstrates the privileged position that religion held in their society. Advanced as strong evidence for the influence of religion in Spartan architecture is **Source C**, the crumbling marble and limestone foundations of the *Menelaion* shrine. This source is useful in conveying the importance of religion in Sparta by indicating that if the Spartans were willing to construct such elaborate buildings, so clearly antithetical to prevailing minimalist ideas, then religion was certainly held in high-regard. Accordingly, this source is thus valid to the question of religion and architecture and by virtue of its status as an archaeological source, there is minimal bias present. Therefore the *Menelaion* shrine was clearly a significant architectural expression of Spartan religion.

The *Temple of Artemis Orthia* is another expression of religion through Spartan architecture. Dating to around the Eighth Century B.C.E, the first *Temple of Artemis Orthia* was a relatively small structure, about four and a half metres wide and built simply with wood, brick and stone foundations. The temple's prime function was to act as a shrine to the hybrid god, *Artemis Orthia*, a fusion of the mainstream Greek god *Artemis* with local Spartan god, *Orthia*, of whom little is known. The roof of the structure was *gabled* and covered with painted tiles whilst within the building stood a raised dais, believed to be where the *xoanon* commemorating *Artemis Orthia* stood. Ritual was the common within the temple confines, consisting of the Spartan substitute for human sacrifice, the *Dimastigoisis* and 'cheese-stealing', whereby young Spartan males would attempt to gather copious amounts of cheese whilst braving older boys with whips in an effort to acclimatise Spartan males to pain. As seen in **Source D**, an extract from the ancient Greek writer Pausanias and his *Description of Greece*, the *Temple of Artemis Orthia* was the subject of much discussion where he states '*On their market-place the Spartans have images of Apollo Pythaios, of Artemis Orthia and of Leto*'. This source, albeit indirectly, is valid in assessing the impact of religion on Spartan architecture and usefully implies that the Spartans were an extremely pious people due to the ubiquity of religious imagery and their many temples, exemplified by the *Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia*. This excerpt is also free from obvious bias despite being a written source due to the neutral and explanatory tone of the quote.

**Source E**, another extract from *Pausanias' Description of Greece* is also valid in addressing the question of how Spartan religion was expressed through architecture, highlighting the religious purpose of the building where he describes the *Dimastigoisis* stating '*Whereat an oracle was delivered to them, that they should stain the altar with human blood...*'. This source is useful in emphasising the religious significance in Spartan architecture by alluding to the surprising willingness of Spartans to deliberately embark on the construction of buildings like the *Temple of Artemis Orthia* as an avenue of professing their faith, obviously not within the realms of strict need. This therefore underscores the importance of religion in Spartan life. Hence, the *Temple of Artemis Orthia* was considerably significant as a manifestation of Spartan religiosity.

In summation it is abundantly clear that Spartan architecture, specifically that of its religious temples, the *Amyklaion*, *Menelaion* and *Temple of Artemis Orthia*, was immutably substantial in expressing the cultural identity of its makers, an identity where religion was integral.