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## **ILLEGITIMATE CHILDREN IN SPARTA: ORIGIN, SOCIAL STATUS, ROLE IN SOCIETY**

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**Abstract.** The Spartan way of life – including attitudes toward wealth, marriage, and childrearing – has long been surrounded by stereotypes, subjective interpretations, and even outright fabrications. This enduring interest, shared by ancient authors and modern scholars alike, necessitates a reassessment of certain aspects of Spartan social organization. The purpose of this article is to study the socio–legal status of illegitimate children of Spartans and the mechanisms of their recognition, integration, or exclusion from the civil community, which, based on the material of the institutions of partheniai and mothakes, allows us to reconstruct the idea of Spartan society not as a closed and strictly regulated social structure, but as a dynamic and flexible social mechanism capable of responding to demographic, political, and military challenges and developing institutional ways of adapting to changes in the surrounding reality. Main methods. The research employs a combination of historical–genetic, comparative–historical, socio–legal, demographic, and systemic approaches. The historical–genetic method traces changes in the status of illegitimate children from the Archaic to the Hellenistic period. The comparative approach analyzes different interpretations of the origin of the **partheniai** in ancient sources. Socio–legal analysis examines mechanisms of legitimation, adoption, atimia (loss of civic rights), and the distribution of land allotments (kleroi) that determined civic status. Demographic and systemic perspectives consider the decline in the number of full citizens and interpret Sparta as a coherent socio–political system in which institutions related to illegitimacy performed a stabilizing function. **Main results.** The study demonstrates that illegitimate children of Spartiates did not constitute a peripheral or socially isolated stratum but played a structural role in the social and military organization of Sparta. The institutions of partheniai and mothakes functioned as adaptive mechanisms through which the Spartan polis responded to demographic, military, and political challenges. Spartan policy toward illegitimate children evolved over time: in the early period, they could be incorporated into the citizen body; from the 7th to the 4th centuries BC, social segregation predominated; from the 4th century BC onward, mechanisms of partial integration were developed. The partheniai marked the transition to a closed oligarchic model, as their conflict and subsequent emigration to Tarentum signaled the end of social mobility and

the consolidation of a rigidly corporate «community of equals.» The institution of mothakes later served as a means of partially replenishing the citizen body. Through the system of common upbringing (agoge) and formal adoption procedures, illegitimate sons could, under certain conditions, obtain full civic status. These findings suggest that Spartan society was more flexible than traditionally assumed and demonstrated structural adaptability in regulating citizenship. **Conclusions.** The article analyzes the processes of recognition, consolidation, and transformation of social status, as well as the place of illegitimate children within the broader system of social stratification. It demonstrates that their incorporation into Spartan society was one of the mechanisms for maintaining the viability of the «community of equals.» Illegitimate children of Spartiates were not a marginal group but played a significant role in the social and military structure of Sparta. The institutions of partheniai and mothakes functioned as adaptive mechanisms that enabled the polis to preserve stability while modifying traditional concepts of citizenship, thereby revealing the structural flexibility of Spartan society despite its reputation for rigidity.

**Keywords:** partheniai, mothakes, social stratification, «community of equals,» Spartan society, citizenship, social mobility.

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## **ПОЗАШЛЮБНІ ДІТИ У СПАРТІ: ПОХОДЖЕННЯ, СОЦІАЛЬНИЙ СТАТУС, РОЛЬ У СУСПІЛЬСТВІ**

**Анотація.** Спосіб життя спартанців – зокрема їхнє ставлення до багатства, шлюбу та виховання дітей – тривалий час був оточений стереотипами, суб'єктивними інтерпретаціями й навіть відвертими вигадками. Цей стійкий інтерес, притаманний як античним авторам, так і сучасним дослідникам, зумовлює необхідність переосмислення окремих аспектів соціальної організації Спарти. **Метою статті** є комплексне дослідження соціально-правового статусу незаконнонароджених дітей спартіатів та визначення їхньої ролі в еволюції спартанського суспільства в архаїчний і класичний періоди. **Основні методи.** У роботі використано поєднання історико-генетичного, порівняльно-історичного, соціально-правового, демографічного та системного підходів. Історико-генетичний метод дав змогу простежити зміни статусу незаконнонароджених дітей від архаїчного до елліністичного періоду. Порівняльний підхід застосовано для аналізу різних версій походження парфеній в античних джерелах. Соціально-правовий аналіз охоплює механізми легітимації, усиновлення, атімії (позбавлення громадянських прав) та розподілу земельних наділів (клерів), що визначали громадянський статус. Демографічний і системний підходи враховують скорочення чисельності повноправних громадян та розглядають Спарту як цілісну соціально-політичну систему, у межах якої інститути, пов'язані з незаконнонародженістю, виконували стабілізуючу функцію. **Основні результати.** Дослідження доводить, що незаконнонароджені діти спартіатів не становили периферійний чи соціально ізольований прошарок, а відігравали структурну роль у соціальній і військовій організації Спарти. Інститути парфеніанів і мофаків функціонували як адаптивні механізми, через які спартанський поліс реагував на демографічні, військові та політичні виклики. Політика щодо незаконнонароджених змінювалася з часом: у ранній період вони могли бути включені до громадянського корпусу; у VII–IV ст. до н.е. переважала соціальна сегрегація; з IV ст. до н.е. формувалися механізми часткової інтеграції. Парфенії стали маркером переходу до закритої олігархічної моделі, оскільки їхній конфлікт та подальша еміграція до Тарента засвідчили завершення етапу соціальної мобільності й утвердження жорстко корпоративної «спільноти рівних». Інститут мофаків згодом став засобом часткового поповнення громадянського корпусу. Через систему спільного виховання (agoge) та формалізовану процедуру усиновлення незаконнонароджені сини могли за певних умов набути повноправного громадянського статусу. Отримані результати свідчать, що спартанське суспільство було більш гнучким, ніж традиційно вважається, і демонструвало структурну адаптивність у регулюванні громадянства. **Висновки.** У статті проаналізовано процеси визнання, закріплення й трансформації соціального статусу незаконнонароджених дітей, а також їхнє місце в загальній системі соціальної стратифікації. Показано, що їхня інкорпорація до спартанського суспільства була одним із механізмів підтримання життєздатності

«спільноти рівних». Незаконнонароджені діти спартиатів не були маргіальною групою, а відігравали значну роль у соціальній і військовій структурі Спарти. Інститути парфеніанів і мофаків функціонували як адаптивні механізми, що дозволяли полісу зберігати стабільність, водночас модифікуючи традиційні уявлення про громадянство, що свідчить про структурну гнучкість спартанського суспільства попри його репутацію ригідного.

**Ключові слова:** парфенії, мофаки, соціальна стратифікація, «спільнота рівних», спартанське суспільство, громадянство, соціальна мобільність.

**Problem Statement.** According to ancient tradition, the 9th-8th centuries BC may be regarded as a turning point marking the emergence of a qualitatively new phase in the development of the Spartan «community of equals,» perceived by much of the Greek world as both unusual and potentially threatening. It was then that the legendary legislator Lycurgus introduced laws that consolidated and rigidly structured the Spartiate community for nearly five centuries, in which an extreme form of statism, gave rise to an ideal for some, and a distorted for others, idea of the forms and methods of preserving the Spartan world. Lycurgus's instructions, leading to temporary greatness, and later to the inevitable collapse of Sparta, gradually caused, in particular, radical transformations of the institution of marriage and family, the legitimization of polygamy, a certain sexual segregation, same-sex relations, etc.

**Historiography of the problem.** The most famous researchers and connoisseurs of Spartan history, and therefore the specifics of marital and extramarital relations, were and remain H. Busolt<sup>1</sup>, N. D. Fustel de Coulanges<sup>2</sup>, G. Gilbert<sup>3</sup>, A. Toynbee<sup>4</sup>, V. Ehrenberg<sup>5</sup>, P. Cartledge<sup>6</sup>, S. Hodkinson<sup>7</sup>, J. L. Huxley<sup>8</sup>, V. Kravets<sup>9</sup>, L. Pechatnova<sup>10</sup>, who studied the specifics of origin, place in social stratification, the guaranteed rights of illegitimate children of Spartiates, transformation of their status and role in the spartan community.

In classical historiography (H. Busolt, N. D. Fustel de Coulanges, G. Gilbert), attention was primarily focused on Spartan political institutions, while illegitimacy was treated marginally.

In the twentieth century, A. Toynbee and V. Ehrenberg analyzed Spartan oligarchy and demographic crisis, yet without systematically examining the socio-legal status of parthenians and mothakes.

Modern scholarship, especially the works of P. Cartledge and S. Hodkinson, significantly advanced the understanding of Spartan social structure, citizenship, and property relations. Nevertheless, the institutions of partheniai and mothakes have generally been interpreted as peripheral phenomena.

In modern Western historiography, the issue of the social status and role of mothakes and partheniai has been significantly reinterpreted. One of the most recent studies is Matthew Sears' monograph *Sparta and the Cult of War*<sup>11</sup>, in which the author analyzes in detail the activities of Gilippus and Lysander, emphasizing that both military leaders were either directly

<sup>1</sup> Busolt G., Swoboda H. Griechische Staatskunde. Aufl. Hf. II. München: Beck, 1926.

<sup>2</sup> Фюстель де Куланж Н. Д. Гражданская община древнего мира. Санкт-Петербург, 1906. 459 с.

<sup>3</sup> Gilbert G. Der Staat der Lakedaemonier und der Athener. B.G. Teubner., 1893.

<sup>4</sup> Toynbee A. Some Problems of Greek History. P. III. The Rise and Decline of Sparta. Gnomon. 1969.

<sup>5</sup> Ehrenberg V. Neugrunder des Staates. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte Spartas und Athens in VI. Jahrhundert. Munchen, 1925.

<sup>6</sup> Cartledge P. Sparta and Lakonia. A Regional History 1300–362 B.C. Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1979.

<sup>7</sup> Hodkinson St. Inheritance, Marriage and Demography: Perspectives upon The Success and Decline of Classical Sparta. *Classical Sparta: Techniques behind her Success* / Ed. A. Powell. London, 1989. P. 79–121.

<sup>8</sup> Huxley G. L. Early Sparta. Faber & Faber, 1962.

<sup>9</sup> Кравець В. П. Проблеми міжстатевих та шлюбно-сімейних стосунків у Античній Греції. *Україна – Європа – Світ. Міжнародний збірник наукових праць. Серія: Історія, міжнародні відносини.* Тернопіль: ТНПУ ім. В. Гнатюка., 2013. Вип. 12. С. 78–89.

<sup>10</sup> Печатнова Л. История Спарты (период архаики и классики). Санкт-Петербург, 2001. URL: <https://litmir.org/books/starinnaya-literatura/antichnaya-literatura/page-103-251901-larisa-pechatnova-istoriya-sparty-period-arhaiki-i.html> (дата звернення: 11.02.2026).

<sup>11</sup> Sears M. Sparta and the commemoration of war. Cambridge University Press. 2024.

associated with the institution of mothakes or followed a similar social trajectory. Sears argues that their careers demonstrate social mobility, which was partially accessible within the Spartan system thanks to the institution of the mofacs, and that their military successes changed the Greeks' perception of the capabilities of people outside the circle of «homeis» (equals). Andrew Bylis's study Spartans<sup>12</sup> is also significant, offering a new interpretation of the mothakes as a social category that served as a «buffer» between Spartans and non-citizens. Bailey emphasizes that the institution of mofacs was a key mechanism for maintaining the size of the citizen army, as well as a means of partially integrating illegitimate children. In domestic historiography, the research of I. Logvinenko and E. Logvinenko<sup>13</sup> is important. The authors offer an unconventional analysis of the position of women and the issue of the origin of children in Spartan families, which may deepen the interpretation of the phenomenon of illegitimacy and explain the possibility of the emergence of large groups of children who later formed the stratum of parthenes and mothakes. Thus, despite extensive historiography on Sparta, the socio-legal status of illegitimate children of Spartiates and their structural role in the transformation of the «community of equals» remain insufficiently explored. The present study seeks to address this gap through an integrated interdisciplinary approach.

**The Purpose and the Subject of the Study.** Therefore, the purpose of this article is to study the socio-legal status of illegitimate children of Spartans and the mechanisms of their recognition, integration, or exclusion from the civil community, which, based on the material of the institutions of partheniai and mothakes, allows us to reconstruct the idea of Spartan society not as a closed and strictly regulated social structure, but as a dynamic and flexible social mechanism capable of responding to demographic, political, and military challenges and developing institutional ways of adapting to changes in the surrounding reality. Accordingly, the subject of the study is the socio-legal status of illegitimate children of Spartiates, the mechanisms of their recognition, integration, or exclusion from the citizen body, and their role in the transformation of the Spartan «community of equals» during the Archaic and Classical periods.

**Sources and research methods.** The study is based on a representative body of ancient narrative sources directly addressing the origin, status, and role of partheniai and mothakes.

A key testimony is provided by Aristotle, who regarded the partheniai as members of the «equals» exposed in a conspiracy and sent to found Tarentum, emphasizing the political dimension of the issue.

Antiochus of Syracuse, cited by Strabo, connected their origin with the refusal of certain citizens to participate in war, leading to atimia and the downgrading of their children's status. This version reflects a military and social interpretation.

Ephorus provides an alternative tradition, describing the parthenians as children born during the First Messenian War and later deprived of land allotments. His account highlights legal and economic discrimination as the cause of conflict.

For the institution of mothakes, references in Aristophanes are important for understanding the semantic evolution of the term.

An important ancient source is Polybius<sup>14</sup>, who describes the social policy of the tyrant Nabis (201–192 BC). According to Polybius, Nabis carried out radical social reforms aimed at granting equal rights to broad categories of the population alongside the Spartans, including the descendants of extramarital unions and other disenfranchised groups. Contemporary scholars (in particular Cartledge, Hodkinson, and Bayliss) emphasize that it was under Nabis that the institution of the mothakes first received de facto legal recognition, and their rights were brought as close as possible to those of full Spartan citizens.

<sup>12</sup> Bayliss A. *The Spartans*. Oxford University Press, 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Lohvynenko I. A., Lohvynenko Ye. S. Social status of women in Ancient Sparta. *Law and Safety*, 2023. № 4(91), P. 106–118. <https://doi.org/10.32631/pb.2023.4.09>

<sup>14</sup> Polybius. *The Histories* (W. R. Paton, Trans.). Harvard University Press, 1922.

Polybius' testimony is crucial for understanding the final evolution of the status of the mothakes, especially in the Hellenistic period, when Sparta attempted to compensate for a demographic crisis by expanding its citizen body.

Taken together, these sources represent diverse traditions and political perspectives, allowing for comparative analysis.

**Main Body.** The laws of Lycurgus, having largely preserved the social relations of the tribal period, significantly limited the development of a conventional patriarchal family structure, family, and kinship relations in Sparta. A spartan, to whom the state granted the right to own a land plot only nominally, did not feel like a full-fledged owner, which was also facilitated by the harsh system of state education of boys, which removed them from the family from childhood, forcing them to engage only in military craft, the only one worthy of a spartiate. Therefore, Spartan men were discouraged from developing strong notions of private ownership, both with regard to land and family relations. The only important thing was the time spent in the palaestra and at common meals (sisitia), participation in which gave the opportunity to be called a citizen. The general socialization of everything and the statism of the state made women were subordinated to the interests of the community rather than exclusively to the authority of a husband. Lycurgus not only socialized property, but also made marital relations «open». Women were largely equal to men, allowed to engage in sports and military service. This was supposed to facilitate relationships, which, in turn, would contribute to an increase in the number of marriages and birth rates. Extramarital relationships were encouraged, and it was forbidden to show possessive feelings, jealousy, etc. towards women. The state took care of the upbringing of all children without exception.

Spartan women had much greater independence in matters of reproduction than women in other Greek city-states. In Sparta, the decisive factor was not legal marriage itself but a woman's ability to bear healthy future citizens and warriors. This created conditions for the legitimization of extramarital sexual relations if they contributed to the demographic strengthening of the city-state. Spartan society did not strongly stigmatize the birth of children outside formal marriage, since the primary criterion was the benefit to the state rather than adherence to conventional family morality. It was this attitude of women and the community towards childbirth that created favorable conditions for the formation of large groups of extramarital offspring who could obtain special status—partheniai or mothakes—depending on specific political and economic conditions. The Spartan model of the family was closely linked to the model of citizenship, and therefore the phenomenon of extramarital children was not marginal, but was part of the general demographic policy of the polis. This approach is fully consistent with the emergence of a significant stratum of partheniai during the First Messenian War or mothakes in the Classical and Hellenistic periods<sup>15</sup>.

For some time, some researchers seriously considered the hypothesis of the so-called «polyandry» among the spartans, although in reality it most likely manifested itself in the free cohabitation of a woman with several men at once<sup>16</sup>. And the ancient historians themselves denied such an «unnatural» type of marriage, emphasizing rather as a general principle, the right of other men to a married woman. From an economic point of view, polyandry would also be disadvantageous, because the income received from one allotment would hardly be enough to guarantee the entire company of male brothers, and even more so their joint children, contributions to the sisitia, and, therefore, one of them would have to lose his civil rights. Therefore, children born out of wedlock were probably regarded by spartan citizens as a completely satisfactory justification for adultery, even if their parents refused or for some reason could not recognize them as their legitimate offspring. Some of them may have been recognized as heirs, next in line for the inheritance after legitimate children and adopted by their supposed parents, others joined the ranks of illegitimate children, usually remaining under the care of their parents. In conditions of an almost constant shortage of

<sup>15</sup> Lohvynenko I. A., Lohvynenko Ye. S. Social status of women in Ancient Sparta. *Law and Safety*, 2023. № 4(91). P. 106–118. <https://doi.org/10.32631/pb.2023.4.09>

<sup>16</sup> Hodkinson St. *Inheritance, Marriage and Demography* ... P. 90.

male population, this method of reproduction was quite acceptable and not condemned by the community.

The formation of civil society in Sparta was a long and difficult process. In different periods of their history, the spartans also solved the problem of citizenship in different ways: either they excluded all «undesirable elements» from citizenship or, on the contrary, they incorporated new members from among non-citizens or semi-citizens into the civil community.

The implementation of each of these options depended on the time and circumstances of the existence of the spartan community. At the beginning of the formation of the territorial and socio-cultural borders of the polis, the first option prevailed, during the period of the IV–III centuries. BC, when after the Greco–Persian confrontation and the Peloponnesian wars, oligarchy became especially noticeable, the second option is used.

In both scenarios, the illegitimate children of the spartans took a direct part: in the first case, they were partheniai, in the second – mothakes.

One of the early cases of conspiracy or civil disobedience, of which there were only a few in the entire history of ancient Sparta, is associated precisely with the spartan parthenians – a category of illegitimate children, which to this day causes constant controversy among researchers.

These events were associated with the First Messenian War, which coincided chronologically with the beginning of the era of Great Greek colonization. For Sparta, the war became an analogue of the colonization movement, an attempt to solve the problem of overpopulation not at the expense of distant, but at the expense of nearby lands.

One of the consequences of the First Messenian War (40–20 8th century BC) was the emergence of the only spartan overseas colony in southern Italy in Tarentum (706 BC). It was founded on the eastern coast of the Apennine Peninsula, almost 370 km from Sicily, by several categories of the population, who had to be urgently resettled from the metropolis in order to avoid social stasis.

Aristotle believed that they came from «equals», were exposed in a conspiracy and sent to found Tarentum. Antiochus of Syracuse, whom Strabo mentions in his «Geography», speaks of the transformation into helots of those who did not participate in the campaign, and calls their children partheniai (born of unmarried women), who were deprived of the right to Messenian lands due to the refusal of their parents to fight, and therefore their parents were helots and spartan women. Apparently, it was from Antioch that the version of the helot origin of the partheniai came, which was repeated by later authors. Antiochus does not say why the parents of the partheniai refused to participate in the war against the Messenians. One of the main reasons for imposing atimia (deprivation of citizenship) during the war was the accusation of cowardice<sup>17</sup>.

According to Ephorus (another ancient Greek author, also mentioned by Strabo), partheniai are illegitimate children who appeared in large numbers in Sparta during the First Messenian War, which lasted 19 years. The Lacedaemonians took an oath not to return home until they won. And in the 10th year of the confrontation, spartan women pointed out to them the need to continue the family. Then they sent home young and strong warriors who, due to their age, did not take this oath. Children born to girls were nicknamed partheniai (born of virgins). When the war ended, the spartans divided the territory of Messenia among themselves. But these children, born out of wedlock, by the decision of the appellate court, did not receive land, and in an effort to change this situation they resorted to conspiracy with the helots and epeunactes, that is, «concubines»<sup>18</sup>. Thus, according to the Ephorus, their origin was in its own way impeccable, because their fathers and mothers were spartan

<sup>17</sup> Aristotle. *Politics*. Translated by C. D. C. Reeve. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1998. Book V. P. 1306b-1307a.

<sup>18</sup> Strabo. *The Geography of Strabo*. Translated by H. L. Jones. 8 vols. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919. Vol. VI. Book. 3. P. 278–279. .

citizens. However, the economic status of the partheniai was reduced – they were not allowed to participate in the distribution of the newly acquired lands in Messenia.

In the scientific literature, it has also been repeatedly suggested that the partheniai are generally either the pre-Dorian population of Laconia<sup>19</sup>, or the pre-Greek population of Tarentum<sup>20</sup>.

In any case, the partheniai constituted a group whose status was lowered due to some inferiority of their origin.

It should be emphasized that, according to the same Ephorus, even the leaders of the conspiracy were not punished, which indicates the civil status of the partheniai. In the early archaic period, the state did not yet have an appropriate tool for suppressing internal civil unrest. It is likely that the partheniai conspiracy could have to some extent pushed Sparta to create such a system.

It is hardly possible to definitively answer who the partheniai were. Most likely, they were the illegitimate children of spartan citizens. Poverty due to the prohibition of giving them the lands of Messenia pushed them to a rebellion, which was joined by the helots and, possibly, the epeunactes (helots granted civil rights for military service). There is a point of view that the conspiracy was led by the Aegeids family from Amycles, who were annexed to Sparta as the fifth settlement around 750 BC, and therefore this could have been one of the episodes of the struggle for power among the spartan elite<sup>21</sup>.

This conspiracy can also be regarded as a certain boundary between eras. The initial mobility of spartan society from the beginning of the 7th century BC is replaced by a clear stratification and closure to outside replenishment, which later led to the notorious oligarchy. Spartan oligarchy, which by the time of the reforming kings Agis and Cleomenes had led Sparta to demographic and social collapse, dates back to the 8th century. The birth of the concept of citizenship and the final formation of the polis were a phenomenon of the decades around the year 700<sup>22</sup>. And the partheniai were the first in a long line of those whom Sparta would squeeze out of its civic collective from age to age, seeking to preserve the corporate unity of «equals» with the help of a similar social apartheid. Here Sparta was moving in the same direction as the rest of Greece, but with its own specifics, since Lycurgus' reforms had already been carried out here.

The threat of civic stasis was thus extinguished in the usual way for archaic Greece – emigration across the sea. Such a delicate and difficult political compromise was aimed at preventing civil war. At that time, the means proved effective, and the spartans managed to get rid of a large group of their fellow citizens with one blow, who claimed equal economic and political privileges with them. Emigration to Tarentum is the second act after the laws of Lycurgus, which forcibly leads to the creation of a strictly corporate unity – a «community of equals», homei<sup>23</sup>.

Overtime, at the turn of the 5th and 4th centuries BC, bastards were incorporated into a new social group of multi-level spartan citizenship of the classical era. In addition to members of the «community of equals», as well as hypomaeons (impoverished spartiates) and neodamods (former helots who received partial citizenship for their military service), in the classical period there was another group of partial citizens, some of whom, under favorable circumstances, could be attached to full citizens of Sparta. This is the institution of the mothakes – a special category of persons who received a spartan upbringing together

<sup>19</sup> Gilbert G. *Der Staat der Lakedaimonier und der Athener*. B. G. Teubner, 1893. P. 180.

<sup>20</sup> Toynbee A. *Some Problems of Greek History*. P. III. *The Rise and Decline of Sparta*. Gnomon, 1969. P. 217.

<sup>21</sup> Busolt G., Swoboda H. *Griechische Staatskunde*. Aufl. Hf. II. München: Beck, 1926. P. 283.

<sup>22</sup> Cartledge P. *Sparta and Lakonia. A Regional History 1300–362 BC*. Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1979. P. 123.

<sup>23</sup> Печатнова Л. *История Спарты (период архаики и классики)*. Санкт-Петербург, 2001. URL: <https://litmir.org/books/starinnaya-literatura/antichnaya-literatura/page-103-251901-larisa-pechatnova-istoriya-sparty-period-arhaiki-i.html> (дата звернения: 11.02.2026). С. 61–63.

with the sons of Spartiates. The origin of the term «mothakes», or «mofon», is not clear. Thus, in Aristophanes – it is an insolent, impudent person, an upstart and a commoner<sup>24</sup>.

Since mothakes as a technical term is first recorded only in the 3rd century BC, this term itself arose no earlier than the middle of the 4th century.

In the 3rd century BC, wealthy spartans widely used, the mothakes recruiting them as an entourage for their own sons. Thus, the mothakes for Sparta were the reserve with which it could, at least to a small extent, fill the sharp decline of its citizenship in the 4th-3rd centuries BC. This social group obviously included heterogeneous elements, the composition of which could change during the 4th-3rd centuries BC. Among them could be both the sons of foreigners and the sons of helots. Another group of mothakes could be bastards – the illegitimate sons of spartiate fathers and helot mothers. If there was any possibility of granting children of non-citizen origin full rights, then, of course, this possibility was used in the sphere of illegitimate sons. Perhaps the illegitimate sons of spartiates were the most privileged part of the mothakes, who had a real chance of becoming full citizens after graduation.

However, upbringing alone did not make a mothakes a citizen. Only the possession of a kleros (land allotment) opened the path to full citizenship, and therefore, most of them could count on the status of hypomeion at most. Therefore, the pupils of the spartan agels, as children of citizens, and the mothakes having become adults, maintained relations between themselves that were characteristic of patrons and clients.

The mofakas who had a real chance of becoming full citizens included those born illegitimate. This opportunity could be realized only when bastards were legitimized by their own parents through the adoption procedure and received blessing from them. Supervision of this procedure was within the competence of the state. Adoption was carried out publicly in the presence of the kings, who were to monitor the legality of this legal act. Perhaps it gained active distribution after the adoption at the beginning of the 4th century BC of the law of Epitadeus, which de facto allowed the purchase and sale of a kleros<sup>25</sup>.

These conclusions are consistent with the latest research. For example, A. Bayliss argues that the mothakes were not just a group of pupils or clients of the Spartans, but an important social stratum that ensured the flexibility of the entire Spartan citizenship system. Their status was potentially mobile: some of them could claim full citizenship, while others remained military and economic assistants to the Spartans. Thus, the institution of the mothakes is evidence that Sparta was not a completely closed «community of equals» but had mechanisms of internal adaptation. The culmination of these evolutionary processes was the period of Nabis' tyranny, who, according to Polybius, carried out the most radical reforms in Spartan history. Nabis effectively raised the mothakes and other disenfranchised groups to the level of Spartans, compensating for the population deficit and attempting to recreate a «community of equals» in a new format<sup>26</sup> This was the first time that the Spartan state officially legitimized the practice of equal rights for illegitimate children and the pupils of hegemons, completing the long process through which the institution of the mothakes evolved from a marginal social category into one capable of attaining full civic status. Contemporary research pays particular attention to the biographies of the most famous mofacs – Gilippus and Lysander. Gilippus's mofac origins did not hinder his military career; on the contrary, they contributed to the formation of a unique type of military leader capable of acting outside Spartan traditions. His social «peripherality» gave him greater freedom of tactical decision-making during the Sicilian expedition. As for Lysander, one of Sparta's most famous commanders, his illegitimate birth and connection with the institution of the mothakes significantly influenced his political ambitions and desire to centralize power<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> Aristophanes. *Wasps*. Edited and translated by Jeffrey Henderson. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.

<sup>25</sup> Ehrenberg V. *Neugrunder des Staates. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte Spartas und Athens in VI. Jahrhundert*. Munchen, 1925.

<sup>26</sup> Polybius. *The Histories* ... P. 1–3.

<sup>27</sup> Sears M. *Sparta and the commemoration* ... P. 144–153.

Lysander is proof that the Spartan system allowed for partial social mobility, which could lead to the formation of new elites<sup>28</sup>.

With the help of the institution of the mothakes, Sparta achieved two goals: first, although to a small extent, it nourished its declining citizenship, and second, by placing a kind of «middle» estate between itself and the rest of the people, it thereby complicated internal social hierarchies within the polis and strengthened spartan statehood, without changing the immanent essence of its society.

### Conclusions.

Thus, the social status and role of illegitimate children of spartiates serves as a marker of the principal socio-political, economic, and socio-cultural transformations of the «community of equals», which, depending on historical circumstances, varied its policy towards the underprivileged members of its community: until the 7th century BC, incorporating them into the civil community, from the 7th to the 4th century BC, implementing strict social segregation, from the 4th century BC, developing additional mechanisms for involving this category of the population in participating in the life of the polis.

**Інформація про використання генеративного штучного інтелекту.** Під час підготовки цього рукопису автор використовував інструменти на основі штучного інтелекту для корекції граматики та стилістичного вдосконалення.

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<sup>28</sup> Sears M. Sparta and the commemoration ... P. 153–163.