

## ANCIENT HISTORY: *SPARTA*

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Apollo was important to the Spartans because he affected all aspects of their lives, ranging from music, plague and prophecy. Even though each characteristic varies greatly, they are all important to Spartan life because they involve all classes from the Kings to the helots. These in turn reflect the importance of Apollo, and in particular, the Pythian Apollo, because he had the ability to change the ways in which Spartan society functioned.

The Pythian Apollo was able to oversee the Spartans growth and development as an entire State. An example of this, written by J. Stobart, was that 'the oracle deliberately claim[ed] the authorship of some of the most celebrated legal and constitutional systems of the day. Sparta became not only the chief Dorian state...but the possessor of the most elaborate and successful political system in the whole country.' As a result of Lycurgus' consultancy of the Pythia, the Delphic oracle, Sparta was able to rise in power and influence, thus gaining the ability to become the most dominant military State within the entire Peloponnese.

Not only was the Pythian Apollo a consultant for matters of State, he was also a consultant for 'personal matters' which required 'a fairly hefty cost in obligatory sacrifices.' S. Pomeroy goes on to list some examples, which include 'marriage, careers [and] voyages.' This demonstrates that this God was important in all aspects of Spartan life, as indicated by the problems he could be consulted about, and the price needed to pay in order to receive this divine assistance. Therefore, the wide variety of aspects that the Pythian Apollo was consulted about demonstrates that he was a well-rounded God for all worshipping purposes, thus was the most important one to Spartan life.

As stated by A. Atsma, 'In classical sculpture Apollon was portrayed as a handsome youth, or adolescent boy, with long unshorn locks of hair, often tied back above his head. His usual attributes were an arrow, lyre, lizard or snake.'

The myth linking Apollo to the bow and arrow indicates that this statue, dating from c.450bc and crafted of bronze may've been tied to the Delphic oracle, and therefore Sparta. The first connection with Sparta is apparent due to the craftsmanship of the work. Since it isn't highly detailed as pieces dating from the early 6th century BC, there is a possibility to link it to Spartan design as Sparta was still a producer of bronze-works during the estimated period the statue was created. The second connection with Sparta is due to how the Pythia was highly respected and esteemed within the State, thus making the deity and depictions of him reflecting the Temple to be of important worship. Since the myth involved regards glory and conquest in slaying the formidable and evil Pythos, this would've tied into Spartan culture which valued those attributes in their soldiers. This then demonstrates that as Apollo was attributed with the 'arrow', it infers that he was integral to war and glory, and thus the Spartan State's values.

The statue of Apollo Kitharoidos depicts one of the primary cultural roles of Apollo which confirms this aspect in his list of functions. This is important because the statue is clear archaeological evidence confirming the link between him and Ancient Greek cultural practices. This is evident due to how Apollo is holding a lyre in his hands, which was a common musical instrument of the time, and most likely used in festivals. This demonstrates the God's involvement in festivities across Greece and could tie into the Karneia and Hyakinthia of Sparta.

This image depicts a scene from the mythological battle between Apollo and the Pythos. This is important because it provides archaeological evidence that the Ancient Greeks believed this story as the origins to how the temple of Apollo at Delphi came into being. The source dated from the 6th Century BC depicts Apollo as being seated on a tripod, which could represent the one given to the priestess when the battle between him and the Pythos had ended. Pantheon.org writes that 'He dedicated a bronze tripod to the sanctuary and bestowed divine powers on one of the priestesses, and she became known as the "Pythia". She... inhaled the hallucinating vapors from the fissure in

the temple floor, while she sat on a tripod chewing laurel leaves.’ These ‘hallucinating vapors’ gave the Pythia the ability to channel Apollo and give prophecies to those seeking advice. This demonstrates that the role of the Pythian Apollo was to assist all members of Spartan society, by providing prophecies in order to improve all aspects of life, ranging from ‘marriage’ to war.

The evidence from both modern and ancient sources reveal, according to A. Pearson, that ‘religion played a large part in the lives of ordinary’ Spartans. This is evident in the Spartans refusal to go to war during the Karneia, as seen in Herodotus’ ‘The Histories’ wherein he writes “The Carneia... was that festival which prevented the Spartans from taking the field in the ordinary way.’ This demonstrates the already powerful influence of one variant of Apollo, Apollo Karneios, in Spartan society. This has been also evident due to how, as P. Cartledge wrote, “they applied to their attitude to the gods their outlook on life in general – one of order, hierarchy and unquestioning obedience.” This is apparent through the Pythian Apollo’s influence over important matters such as war, as seen when A. Powell wrote that ‘divination also influenced decisions on strategy.’ This influence over their highest esteemed aspect, and how the Pythia was able to assist the Polemarchs and King, demonstrates the Spartans firm belief that the divine will and wisdom of the Pythian Apollo was sacred above all else.

Spartan society functioned rigidly as a result of how “the gods stood... at the apex of a tall pyramid of authoritative command.” This hierarchy influenced further decision-making processes of the highest levels in Spartan society; the two ruling Kings. Both Kings would have had to consult the wisdom of the oracle on a number of occasions for various matters. These issues included ‘colonizing, religion, and laws’, as listed by S. Pomeroy. This shows that there was a constant need to be in favour of the Gods, requiring monthly sacrifices of ‘a full-grown animal... in the temple of Apollo’, as indicated by Herodotus. This demonstrates that the Spartans constantly needed the Pythian Apollo in order to ensure that their society remains cohesive, strong and dominant. This demonstrates that their religious beliefs were tied strongly into their society, and that the Pythian Apollo could shape the ways in which they functioned and thrived.

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