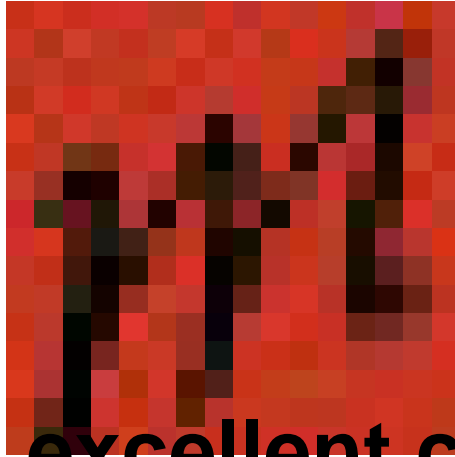


<http://montesquieu.ens-lyon.fr/spip.php?article2674>



VII.16 An excellent custom of the Samnites

- The Spirit of Law - Book VII. Consequences of the different principles of the three governments with respect to sumptuary laws, to luxury, and to the condition of women -

Date de mise en ligne : vendredi 24 août 2018

Copyright © Montesquieu - Tous droits réservés

VII.16 An excellent custom of the Samnites

The Samnites had a custom which, in a small republic, and especially given the situation of theirs, was to produce admirable effects. All the youths were assembled, and they were judged. The one declared best of all took to wife whichever girl he wanted ; the one with the next most votes again chose, and so forth. [1] It was an admirable thing to consider, among the young men's assets, only their fine qualities and the services they had rendered to the homeland. The richest in such assets chose a girl from among the whole nation. Love, beauty, chastity, virtue, birth, even wealth : these were all, so to speak, the dowry of virtue. It would be difficult to imagine a reward nobler, greater, and less onerous to a small state, better able to act upon both sexes.

The Samnites descended from the Lacedæmonians ; and Plato, whose institutions are but the perfection of the laws of Lycurgus, created almost the same law. [2]

[1] Fragments of Nicolas of Damascus, taken from Stobæus in the collection of Constantine Porphyrogenitus [p. 515].

[2] He even allowed them to see each other more often.