

## **Sparta & Athens: the Peloponnesian War**

**Athens and Sparta** were two rival city-states, but at one time they had been united to protect the Greek states from a series of invasions by Persia. There were three major battles against the Persians: the Athenians stopped the Persian king Darius's invasion of the Greek mainland at the battle of Marathon in 490 BCE. Under their new king Xerxes, the Persians regrouped and invaded Greece again, occupying more than half the country before being defeated by a coalition of 31 city-states, fighting together as Greeks to defend their homeland. Led by Athens and Sparta, the Greeks defeated the Persians at the battle of Salamis in 480 and at Plataea in 479 BCE.

The Spartans did not depend upon slaves from other territories for their labor force. Instead, they created what Sue Blundell calls a "serf class" from the native populations they had conquered. These serf-like peoples, known as helots, resented their suppression and presented a constant threat of rebellion against Sparta, which met this danger early on (in the 7th century BCE) by turning their citizens into a highly trained, efficient army. A male citizen's life was spent in learning and practicing the military arts: "All Spartan citizens were full-time professional soldiers," writes Blundell. "They were trained for this role from boyhood, and up to the age of thirty they lived continuously in barracks. After that, they could set up their own domestic establishments, but for the rest of their lives they ate every night in a common mess." As a result of a lifetime of training, the Spartans were famed for their military abilities. The Spartans and their alliance, the Peloponnesian League, were a strong military force and dominated the southern region of Greece.

Unlike the Spartans, who were to a great degree self-sufficient and did not have business dealings with others, the city-state of Athens became wealthy through trade with others, tributes from states that looked to Athens's navy for protection, and a large slave-based economy. There were about 40,000 citizens

in Attica (in the early 400s BCE) and 100,000 slaves. Athens was wealthy, many of its citizens had a relatively large amount of leisure, and they enjoyed contact with the outside world. The city produced a remarkable series of writers, thinkers, philosophers, and politicians; they invented theatre, created democracy, and produced great art, architecture, and literature.

To protect its trade routes over the water, Athens created a strong navy, one that, over time, dominated the sea. Athens and its allies, known as the Delian League, came into conflict with the Spartans and the Peloponnesian league, and in 431 BCE war broke out between the two cities—a war based on trade routes, rivalries, and tributes paid by smaller dependent states.

This conflict, the Peloponnesian War, essentially was a 28-year period of on-again off-again civil war among Greek city-states. (A city-state was the city, such as Athens, and the surrounding country under its influence and protection; Athens and its surrounding area, known as Attica, was about the size of Rhode Island). Sparta had a clear military advantage on land, but the Athenian navy far surpassed Sparta's capabilities at sea; neither side was able to seize and maintain the upper hand. Both sides experienced major victories and crushing defeats, and the war was frequently interrupted by periods of negotiated peace. The war ended in 404 BCE with the defeat of Athens and its democracy.

**Athens Population:** Approximately 140,000; Approximately 40,000 men were citizens; and slaves (about 40,000). By 432 BC, Athens had become the most populous city-state in Hellas. In Athens and Attica, there were at least 150,000 Athenians, around 50,000 aliens, and more than 100,000 slaves.

**Sparta Population:** Approximately 100,000. About 8,000 were Spartan adult male citizens.

**Athenian Food:** Athenians enjoyed luxuries and foods from all over their empire. Wealthy Athenian **homes** were quite nice with an inner courtyard.

**Spartan Food:** Spartan Broth consisted of pork, blood, salt and vinegar. Spartans were trained to dislike luxuries and fancy foods. The men lived most of their lives in **military barracks**.

**Athens Allies:** Delian League (with Athens clearly the most powerful); Athens taxed and protected other city-states.

**Sparta Allies:** Peloponnesian League (with Sparta clearly the most powerful).

**Athens Military:** Strong navy.

**Sparta Military:** Strong army, best and most feared fighters on land.

## Athenian Government

Usually classified as a "limited democracy". Athens claims to be the "birthplace of democracy".

**Elected officials** including 10 **generals** (strategos), **magistrates** (archons), and others.

**Council of 500** was charged with administering decisions made by the Assembly.

**The Assembly** open to all citizens (all citizens were eligible to attend such meetings and speak up). They passed laws and made policy decisions. The Assembly met on the Hill of the Pnyx at the foot of the Acropolis.

During time of Pericles citizens were paid for **jury service** so not only the wealthy could participate.

Women did not participate in the political life of Athens.

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## Spartan Government:

Usually classified as an "oligarchy" (rule by a few), but it had elements of monarchy (rule by kings), democracy (through the election of council/senators), and aristocracy (rule by the upper class or land owning class).

**Two kings** who were generals in command of the armies and with some religious duties.

**Five overseers** (ephors) elected annually ran the day-to-day operations of Sparta. They could veto rulings made by the council or assembly.

**Council or Senate** (apella) of 28 councilmen (men over 60 and elected for life by the citizens) and the 2 kings. They acted as judges and proposed laws to the citizens' assembly.

The **Assembly** of all Spartan males aged 30 or over could support or veto the council's recommendations by shouting out their votes.

Women did not participate in the political life of Sparta.

### Social Structure of Athens:

**Freemen** were all male citizens: divided into numerous classes: **at the top** were **aristocrats** who had large estates and made up the cavalry or captained triremes; **middle** ranks were **small farmers**; **lowest** class was the **thetes** (urban craftsmen and trireme rowers).

**Metics** - those who came from outside the city; they were not allowed to own land, but could run industries and businesses.

**Slaves** were lowest class, but less harshly treated than in most other Greek cities. Slaves had no rights, and an owner could kill a slave. Slaves varied in status: some were given important roles in Athens, like policemen.

Women were rarely seen outside the home and had no rights in the Athenian democracy.

### Social Structure of Sparta:

Three classes: **Spartiates** (military professionals who lived mostly in barracks and whose land was farmed by serfs; they served in the army and could vote).

**Perioeci** or "neighbors/outsideers" who were freemen; they included artisans, craftsmen, merchants; they could not vote or serve in the army; foreigners could be in this class.

**Helots** (serfs descended from those peoples who had resisted subjugation by Sparta and who were constantly rebelling. They were treated like slaves and gave 1/2 of their produce to the Spartiate citizens who owned the land.

Women had few rights, but were more independent in Sparta than elsewhere in Greece.

### **Athenian Culture:**

Democratic values for citizens. They believed in participation in government as a civic responsibility.

Athenians believed in their cultural superiority and in their role in an empire and benefiting from trade. (See [Pericles' Funeral Oration](#) showing these values.) "Further, we provide many ways to refresh the mind from the burdens of business. We hold contests and offer sacrifices all the year round, and the elegance of our private establishments forms a daily source of pleasure and helps to drive away sorrow. The magnitude of our city draws the produce of the world into our harbor, so that to the Athenian the fruits of other countries are as familiar a luxury as those of his own."

### **Spartan culture:**

Militaristic values. Children of citizens were raised to be "Spartan", taught to get along with almost nothing. Spartiate citizens were not permitted to own gold or silver or luxuries. Spartan children were taught to respect elderly, women, and warriors. [The strict separation of classes and militaristic system was put into place by [Lycurgus](#) in the 8th (?) century BC.]

Spartan mothers would say to their sons, "Either come back with your shield or on it" (meaning return victorious or die fighting).

This lifestyle was praised by [Xenophon](#), an ancient historian c. 375 BCE.

## Education

**Athenian [Boys](#):** Schools taught reading, writing and mathematics, music, poetry, sport and gymnastics. Based upon their birth and the wealth of their parents, the length of education was from the age of 5 to 14, for the wealthier 5 - 18 and sometimes into a student's mid-twenties in an academy where they would also study philosophy, ethics, and rhetoric (the skill of persuasive public speaking). Finally, the citizen boys entered a military training camp for two years, until the age of twenty. Foreign metics and slaves were not expected to attain anything but a basic education in Greece, but were not excluded from it either.

**Athenian [Girls](#):** Girls received little formal education (except perhaps in the aristocrats' homes through tutors); they were generally kept at home and had no political power in Athens. The education of a girl involved spinning, weaving, and other domestic art.

**Spartan [Boys](#):** Boys were taken from parents at age seven and trained in the art of warfare. They were only given a cloak - no shoes or other clothes, and not enough food so they had to steal (to learn survival skills). [At age 20](#) they were placed into higher ranks of the military. To age 30 they were dedicated to the state; then they could marry but still lived in barracks with other soldiers.

They were educated in choral dance, reading and writing, but athletics and military training were emphasized.

**Spartan [Girls](#):** Girls were educated at age 7 in reading and writing, gymnastics, athletics and survival skills. Could participate in sports; treated more as equals.

## **Role of women**

### [Athenian women:](#)

Athenian women and girls were kept at home with no participation in sports or politics. Wives were considered property of their husbands. They were responsible for spinning, weaving and other domestic arts.

Some women held high posts in the ritual events and religious life of Athens (where the goddess Athena was the patron).

Prostitutes and courtesans were not confined to the house. Some became influential (such as Aspasia). See Greek Multimedia Project: BP 44 "Hetaira and Courtesans"

### [Spartan women](#) and the [role of Spartan women:](#)

Girls were educated in reading and writing and could participate in sports; they were treated more as equals to men. The goal was to produce women who would produce strong healthy babies. At age 18 she would be assigned a husband and return home. Citizen women were free to move around and enjoyed a great deal of freedom. Domestic arts (weaving, spinning, etc.) were usually left to the other classes. Spartan women could own and control their own property. In times of war the wife was expected to oversee her husband's property and to guard it against invaders and revolts until her husband returned.