

Socio-economic and political conditions in sparta and athens after 800 b.c.e.

Countries



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Ancient Greece was in a pretty bad shape during the period from 1200 to 800 B. C. E, which is referred as the Dark Age of the Greece. Eventually, after 800 B. C. E, Greeks started expanding their empire from the Mediterranean towards east as far as the Black Sea, and towards west as far as the Atlantic Ocean. At this time, two prominent city- states named Athens and Sparta stood as two pillars in the Greek history. Although these two city -states are geographically close to each other in Greece, they were rivals and shared many differences.

However, some of the social conditions were similar in these two city -states. During the Archaic age (800- 500 B. C. E.), these two city- states progressed tremendously both politically and economically. Even though the Greeks came out of the Dark Age and were expanding with prosperity, they faced new problems with growing population, hunger, and land shortage. Moreover, their lands were not fertile to feed the needs of the growing population, and there was turmoil everywhere because of the tyranny of the aristocrats.

To improve their economical, social, and political conditions, the Athenians and the Spartans created new political systems, introduced important reforms and stood as the role models in the Greek political development. The Spartans responded to the economic crisis by conquering Messene, their rich neighbor, in 715 B. C. E so that they can add the rich region's resources. Sparta is a city -state in the southern part of Greece which was under the control of aristocracy. In fact, Sparta's asset was its powerful military, and it is the protector of Greece.

Spartans oppressed the Messenian slaves after their revolt against the Spartans. In order to appease the non-nobles, who demanded equal rights, as they assisted the Spartans in the war, the aristocrats later reformed the state system to “Lycurgan regimen.” According to this reform, all Spartans were given equal rights, and the state was ruled by two kings with the assistance from the nobles. Taking into consideration the economic situations in Sparta, the Messenian slaves called “Helots” did all the physical work while the men of Sparta devoted their lives for the military.

Boys in their young age were forced into military training. Although family life was important to Spartans, their social life was compromised as men spent much of their lives in the military. So they established close relationships with other men in the military. The main aim of the Spartan men was to be trained as the best infantrymen and sacrifice their lives in the battle. Spartan women were good wives who devoted their lives in bearing children and had rights to own property.

In the same way, Athenians implemented law of codes, reforms, and adopted democracy with the help of prominent and thoughtful aristocrats and ascended from the economic and political distress and oppression of the aristocrats. In the late sixth century B. C. E, Draco, an aristocrat, published the first law of code which asserts that law belonged to all citizens, Later, Solon, an aristocrat who became “archon,” a chief magistrate of Polis, reformed the prevailing social conditions by freeing the slaves, recalling exiles, and made enslavement for debt illegal.

He thus introduced democratic ideals into their political system in response to the tyranny of the aristocrats and nobles on small farmers and <https://assignbuster.com/socio-economic-and-political-conditions-in-sparta-and-athens-after-800-bce-research-paper-samples/>

landowners. Although Athens was under the aristocratic rule in the beginning, it later adopted the democratic form of government under the leadership of a prominent aristocrat named Cleisthenes. Undoubtedly, Athenians were the first to introduce democratic sovereign and legislation with a council (“Boule”) and an assembly of citizens (“Ecclesia”). They also developed their infrastructure, and “Acropolis” clearly reveals their love for architecture.

Young boys were not forced into military and were given opportunity to excel in education, arts, and other talents. The Athenians enjoyed better social life than the Spartans, and family life was important. Like Spartan men, Athenian men maintained close relationships with other men. Women were confined to giving birth and raising children along with other household chores, and they were considered inferior to men. Unlike the Spartan women, they had less freedom. Even though Athenians adopted democracy, women and slaves have limited rights and were not granted citizenship.

Ancient Greeks rose from their dark age in 800 B. C. E. and started expanding their empire in the neighboring regions. With their progress several economic and social tensions appeared such as population growth, hunger, and food shortage. In response to this economic and social distress, the two city-states, Athens and Sparta, with their own distinctive social structure, developed into two significant political systems. Athenians emphasized not only on firm political development, education, and culture but also on individual freedom and justice. Democracy and legislation with two presiding bodies were introduced into their political system and even the poor were allowed to vote in the election.

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On the contrary, Spartans focused on training their youth as soldiers and thus strengthened their military. With the military power they conquered their resourceful neighboring region, Messene, and later reformed their state system with two ruling kings and five noble overseers. Their reform system also presented equal rights to all Spartans. The above discussed political and social reforms were necessary for both the city-states at that time of chaos in order to survive. Even though they underwent many deadly conflicts, Athens and Sparta established themselves as prominent city-states in the political development of ancient Greek history.