

Transformation of greece into a great country

[Parts of the World](#), [Europe](#)



Greek City States

The ancient Greek city states were each, individual, autonomous and unique from one another. Ancient Greeks never considered themselves as part of a larger nation or referred to themselves as Greeks but rather were loyal to their home city state. From Macedon, to Sparta, all the way to Athens, each city state was so incredibly different from one another in almost every aspect of life, due in part, to the mountains that created physical borders between the states but not to be credited entirely. There were many key factors that led to the diverse intellectual, cultural and political development among the ancient Greek city states.

The contrast of culture between these ancient cities is staggering; Athens and Sparta may have as well been two different worlds. Athens liked to present itself as more civilized than other city states such as Sparta but history shows that was not the case, at least not for women. Women in Athens were not allowed to vote or pursue an education and often were not allowed to leave the household by their husbands, whereas in Sparta, they were given many more opportunities. Spartan women were given a lot more social and political freedom, with notable Spartan Queens, such as Queen Gorgo.(Sparta. net) Spartan women had full control over the household, as men often lived at the barracks full time until they were thirty and were still expected to spend most of their time there after that, and women were also allowed to inherit land and were given the same educational opportunities that the men had. Athenian philosopher Aristotle blames the fall of Sparta on the transference of male controlled property to female controlled property.

The Spartan way of life was a culture shock to Aristotle as he had grown up in a patriarchal democracy based on slavery, but slavery was no secret, and the Spartans had the largest slave population out of any city state. The word Helot, from Spartan, meaning "Subjugated Population", were the conquered people forced into slavery by the Spartans. The Spartan economy and class structure was built on slavery, as helots often worked agricultural and other laborious jobs, while the Perioeci were foreigners or untrained Spartans that had legal protections but could not vote or own property and were often merchants or artisans. Spartan males, called Spartiates, lived upper-class lives while being constantly on draft, for life, in the event of a battle. (Sparta.net) The social structure within Athens was divided into four classes, with Freeman being the highest class that was comprised of all male citizens and was subdivided with aristocrats being the highest rank possible above the middle class and Thetes, or lower class. Below the freemen were the outsiders, who were not allowed to own land but could operate business, similar to the Perioeci in Sparta. (AncientAthens.org) Below them were the slaves and although the slavery in Athens was nowhere near the scale of Sparta's, the slaves played more of a role in daily life. It was common for families to own at least one slave. The slaves in Athens were not just reserved for hard labor but slaves were often given intellectual jobs such as tutoring an Athenian child for example. Slaves in Athens had many rights relative to other city states such as admission under torture not being counted as evidence as well as their owner could be prosecuted for mistreatment of the slave. Slaves were allowed to take part in religious and family activity and although they were not allowed to own property, their

owners would often let them save up enough money to buy their own freedom.(AncientAthens. org)

The life of a Spartan and an Athenian were vastly different but each thought that they had had it better. Spartans were groomed for warfare from birth, unhealthy children either became a helot or were left in the wilderness to die while the healthy children were sent to a military training camp as young as the age of 7. Spartan children grew up in the military training camp where they were intensely to become warriors. They were provided with less than ample rations to encourage stealing from the Agora and, more importantly, stealthiness. Young Spartan men often had an older warrior that took the role of a mentor to them and in the battlefield this encouraged, not only loyalty to the state, but also to one's comrades, making Sparta a powerful military with a low population, relative to neighboring empires such as Persia.(Donald Sommerville, Brittanica. org) " Come back with your shield or on it", a Spartan quote, meaning win in battle or die trying, accentuates Spartan values towards war and in general. Athenian male children were sent to school where they learned a variety of topics ranging from pottery, to mathematics all the way to philosophy and even wrestling. Athenian girls were limited to the home and were often taught only what their mother passed down such as cooking, embroidering, taking care of children, playing music and other domestic skills. By time a male reached 30, he was expected to take part in politics as long as he was upper class and male. Women had no role in politics in Athens.

The intellectual production of Athens and Sparta were vastly different as each had their own specializations. Athenian philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle and Socrates, and their ideas are considered to be the foundation of modern Western philosophy. Athenian philosopher, Socrates, coined the Socratic method, which is questioning everything, which led to the evolution of future philosophies. Philosophy, meaning “ Love of Wisdom” was used before the scientific method to analyze anything that isn’t religion, anything from biology to political philosophy to more human terms such as logic or rhetoric. Spartan philosophy was much different, conducted by Spartan warrior-philosophers that prided themselves on their ability to unify their body and mind and based much of their philosophy on unity. (Donald Sommerville, Britannica. org) They had a culture based on cooperation and community, and believed refraining from gossip and instead listened to each other, that the group would be more comfortable together and stronger as a whole. The Spartans have been criticized throughout history as being nothing more than a race of warrior people, with no need for intellectualism, but that is not the truth, they questioned the world and their introspection as much as any other people.

The art produced by the different city states differed vastly depending on where you were. The Athenians produced awe-inspiring temples across the acropolis, most notably of the architectural wonders was the Parthenon, dedicated to Athens patron Goddess, Athena. Athenians have coined the term aesthetics coming from the Greek word, “ aisthetikos”, meaning “ critical reflection of art, beauty and good taste” Architecture was no secret to the Spartans, who designed their buildings for practicality rather than

aesthetic with many significant buildings such as monuments, temples and public buildings. Pottery was a popular pastime among Athenians, who inscribed scenes of the pantheon of Gods and scenes of their history. Contrary to popular belief, the Spartans produced many great works of art including magnificent bronze sculptures and beautiful poems that were written with the same level of craftsmanship. Spartan music and dance was revered across the classical world. (Historywiz. com) Spartan art was humanitarian based while Athenian art was usually government funded, large works, dedicated to the Gods, such as the Parthenon. (historywiz. com)

The Athenians and Spartans each had an interest in the natural world and did what they could to understand it. Athenian scientists took a great interest the cosmic world above them, making great strides in astronomy, including the idea that the the Earth is a sphere, rather than flat.

(AncientAthens. org) Their astronomical advances can be credited to their previous knowledge from neighboring civilizations who were dependent on the calendar such as the Babylonians and the Egyptians. The Spartans made many practical advances in military science such as bottlenecking the opponent, which they utilized in the Battle of Thermopylae, against the Persians. They also created many new weapons such as the dory, which was a one handed spear that allowed one to dual wield a shield as well. The Spartans had their own way of encrypting messages called Scytale, which involved wrapping a piece of parchment with your message on it in a four by five sequence and then twisting it, adhering to a certain diameter.(Donald Sommerville, Brittanica. org) The Athenians made their own advances in

military technology, wielding a navy uncomparable to any other civilization at the time.

Spartan and Athenian ideologies clashed when it came to the rule of their people but were more similar than either one would've believed. The Spartans had a very unique system of ruling with two kings who held equal power over the city but had their power checked by a council of twenty eight elders. They had the concept of checks and balances years before it was commonly utilized. The Athenians had a direct democracy that was open to the upper class males, who participated in politics heavily. Athenian men were expected to participate in political discussion and debate as a social event. Both city states had extensive contact with other nations and city states. Athens created an alliance among the Greek city states, called The Delian League, due to the militaristic neighbors, the Persians, who sought to expand their empire. The Delian League brought much wealth and power to Athens because they organized it and demanded that each member pay tribute for the maintenance.

The Greek city states were being endangered by the Persian empire around 500 B. C, led by Darius, the Persians had taken parts of Europe and were going for Athens and Sparta next. The Spartans, at the time a part of the Delian League, had frequently conflicts with the Persians, most notably, at the battle of Thermopylae. Three hundred Spartans held off thousands of Persian soldiers in a narrow passage, thanks to their knowledge of military strategy. (Donald Sommerville, Brittanica. org) The Persians ultimately conquered Thermopylae, but this exemplified Spartan culture and their

unwillingness to give up. The Persian people had heard of the Greek democracy and began to revolt, called the Ionian revolt, which caused Darius to want to dispel these revolts through the conquering of Athens and Eretria, another city state. The Delian League managed to push back Persian forces by assembling the largest collection of Greek soldiers in one place and captured the cities of Sestos and Byzantium. (Donald Sommerville, Britannica.org) After the capture of Byzantium, the Spartans had no interest in being in the league any longer and after a disagreement with an Athenian general, King Leonidas removed the Spartans from the Delian League and created their own, called the Peloponnesian League, rightfully named, is composed of city states along the Peloponnese peninsula. This league was comprised of a congress, in which each city state had a single vote and Sparta oversaw the entire thing. There was no tribute necessary unless in times of war, in which you would be expected to put forth one third of one's military.

After the Greco-Persian wars, tensions were high between Athens, who was still collecting tribute and expanded their empire vastly and Sparta. There was a helot revolt within Sparta that was too large and they required assistance from their allies but when Athenian hoplites arrived, they were dismissed but others were permitted to stay, due to fear that the Athenians would assist the side of the helots. (Donald Sommerville, Britannica.org) This greatly offended the Athenians, who revoked their alliance with the Spartans and quickly took advantage of Megara and Corinth, neighboring states at war that were both allies of Sparta. This was the start of the Peloponnesian war, in which Athens fought with Sparta, Corinth, Megara and many other Peloponnesian states. Sicily, an ally of Athens, was under attack by Syracuse

and requested help from Athens, who sent enormous naval fleets but left their city relatively unguarded. The Spartans took advantage of this, pillaging silver mines, disrupting the land and freeing as many as twenty thousand slaves. Meanwhile, Athens kept demanding more tribute from their allied states, which caused more revolt across the empire. While their city was being pillaged, Athens kept sending fleets over to Sicily, rather than defend herself. The fleets were destroyed and nearly all Athenian soldiers were sold into slavery, leading to the near collapse of the Athenian empire. After the defeat of the Athenians by the incredibly intelligent Spartan general, Lysander, who had destroyed essential trade routes carrying grain, ultimately starving the Athenians until they surrendered in 404 B. C. Gradually, the Delian and Peloponnesian leagues had merged into the Hellenic league. (Donald Sommerville, Britannica. org)

It is absolutely unbelievable that these tiny, single nation states along the Mediterranean would end up having such great influence over the development of the modern world. These states have a rich and diverse history that is completely unique from one another and is often, unfairly, lumped together. Out of all the Greek city states, the ones who played the largest roles were Athens and Sparta, who outlined the basic tenets of concepts that are essential to our way of life. These city states, each made revolutionary cultural, intellectual and political breakthroughs, that shaped their world, and ours.