

Comparison of men and women of athens and sparta

Literature



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When comparing power levels and women's rights, Sparta was a leader in its time. Athens and Sparta, though both Greek city-states were different in the way they operated. More specifically, Sparta was different in the way that they treated their women. Athenian women were treated quite appallingly compared to the standards of today's women. The stem of this difference seems to lie in how these two city-states were governed. Sparta, known for its' militaristic ways, was an oligarchy and Athens, known for its' philosophers and thinkers, was a democracy.

Sparta's oligarchy was ruled by a counsel of 5 men, one being a lawmaker or giver. The lawgiver's name was Lycurgus. Lycurgus was known for his warden-like ways in the training of men for war, but also for his equivalence in the rights of Spartan women. It has been speculated that women's equality to men sprung from stories "of the Amazons [, warrior women of the Bronze Age, position and bravery] in the Trojan War" (Who were the Amazons?). Athens, on the other hand, was a democracy that acted with the voice of the people through the Senate and the Roman Council.

The life of men and women in Athens and Sparta was very different if we look at equality and women rights; the conclusion in the end will be declared as Sparta having more equality and more women rights than in Athens. The Athenian women were kept at low level status like the status of women under Taliban. The reason of this difference was because of the function of the governments of both the states. Sparta was a military oligarchy while Athens was a democracy. While Sparta had a history of producing magnificent fighters, Athens was famous for producing thinkers & philosophers etc. men were supposed to run the Spartan Oligarchy.
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Athens on the other hand was a democracy, which functioned with the voice of the people through senate and the Roman Council. In Athens, family life was strong as women were utterly dependent on husbands and fathers from a legal view point. They were not entitled to own any property except that of their family. While in Sparta, the rights that women enjoyed were not enjoyed by anyone else, they formed relationships with any men they choose and were comparably stronger in every aspect as compared other women living in Athens.

They could own property as they wish. In Athens, women were exclusive to chores like weaving and cooking while in Sparta women were not entitled to any chores and were free to choose to do anything they like. The basic difference between Spartans and the Athenians was about their focus on particular walk of life as Spartan were more devoted to be soldier while Athenians were more inclined towards studying literature, art and music. That is the reason why Spartan never lost a single war between small different states of ancient Greece.

It is believed that, in Sparta, when a new baby was born he was checked for any deformities, if he's cleared then he would be destined to become a soldier and if not then he would be taken out of Sparta and left alone to die of hunger. (Welty 1965)Its hard to determine what was worse the rigorous training which was so rigorous that it might makes a person head spin or letting the new born baby die alone. While in Athens, the life was wonderful and creative, they put more emphasis on education and the male members of the society were free to choose any form of art or science.

When comparing women from both nationalities, i. e. women from Athens and Sparta, it is most likely that difference in their lifestyles would be apparent. And that is in fact the case with the women in both these ancient states, and the difference are not minimal they are on the opposite sides of the poles with Spartan women being more free as compared to the women in Athens. In Athens, women mostly belonged to houses, throughout their childhoods they were obliged to obey their fathers, and after their marriages they would be forced by their husbands to obey their will instead of their own.

Athenian women had the liberty of learning the skill of reading, but mostly they would manage the houses, take care of the children and husband. They were only allowed to leave their houses if some sort of religious festival was taking place. On the contrary to life of women in Athens, the women of Sparta had considerable freedom. They were allowed to leave their houses whenever they pleased. They were required per the state policy to have education both from physical and educational perspective.

The reason for physical education was because they could make and nourish babies that would be healthy for the children to be capable of being good warriors and if the baby was not fit as they would be judged by the elders, as mentioned before they would be left to die outside the city. A woman's place was supposed to be at home, in both Sparta and Athens, but the capacity in which they were supposed to be at home differed substantially. In Athens, it was compulsory for women to be acquiescent and compliant.

They were supposed to stay home most of the time, bearing, nourishing and taking care of the children, spinning and weaving clothes, keeping the home clean and tidy, preparing food or overseeing the preparation of food by the servants; women from Sparta were the complete opposite of the women in Athens, they were allowed to keep property with the over seeing of the male counterpart, which according to Aristotle, said that in 4th BCE, 405 Sparta was owned by women, and may have contributed to the weak societal system of the Spartan society.

With men going to training, women would take on the principal role of the house, as long as men were away in wars or in their training and once they returned they enjoyed no authority over the house. An associate lecturer of classical Studies, Sue Blundell, at open university in UK, said about Spartan women's dominant role of house as "accepted and possibly even officially encouraged" (Blundell 1995)

Even at adolescence, the women of Sparta were taught to protect themselves, and also encouraged to read and write, whereas Athenian women were encouraged to learn household duties and such. Education was given preference in Sparta for both boys and the girls, and history records that women had to go through same physical tests as the men. Women participating in anything physical in Athens were frowned upon to a great extent. The level of its impropriety reached the level at which they were not even allowed to witness athletic events that involved males.

Spartan women took pride in the way their body was developed while the women in Athens took pride in the way they dressed. Athleticism was high in

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Spartan women sports such as wrestling and running involved a lot of participation from their part, and according to legend their participation was nude. Inheritance played a great role in Athenian male's gaining properties, it was an "unwritten rule" that property was to be passed on to a legitimate, related, heir.

That is one of the reasons why women in Athens were not taken out to common events that usually such as entertaining of male guests, this entire job was left for the men to do, and the women dining quarter were away from the dining room. The biggest difference between the two states was the men and women got married, while in modern western society, anyone can choose their counterpart as he or she fit, Women in Athens and Sparta had very different methods of choosing husbands. Women of the both states had no say in whoever they were going to be married to and there was no courting period.

In Athens, girls were married at an unusually early age, usually 13 or 14, their spouses were to be selected by their fathers who would give the two families the chance to come together, and it was quite encouraged in the Athenian society as well as being prominent and the marriage course of action was also long. While on the other hand, the course of action of the marriage of Spartan women was quite different, it was an almost non-ceremonial event, the female would be abducted in the middle of the night by her future spouse, finally, she would then meet her husband for the sole purpose of child conception.

Any Spartan man could choose a wife like that and these lead too many wives of a single person or many husbands of a single person, which illustrates that Sparta was a very polygamous society. The main reason of the marriage in both the societies was procreation which was encouraged in the society. Spartan women would have usually appointed a nurse to take care of the child while Athenian women would take care of the child herself. View on sex was on the opposite sides of the poles in both societies.

In Sparta, as mentioned before, men and women were polygamous and they could have as many lovers as they see fit, while on the other in Athens the situation was quite different, The medical theorist of Athens considered women to be psychologically shameless and uncontrollable object, and it was the husbands fundamental duties to curb the wife's sexual need. So much so, Aristotle showed concern for women found masturbating. The basic training period of the Spartan boys started from the age of 7 and they will be forced to enter the Agoge system.

The reason for Agoge was to push for discipline and physical toughness and to emphasize the importance of Spartan State. Boys were intentionally underfed, so that they can master the art of skilfully stealing food and were forced to live in common messes. Besides the training for fighting so that they can defend themselves, music, dancing, writing and reading was also studied. And there were punishments if the boys failed to answer any question properly. At the age of 12, the Agoge obliged the young man to take an old mentor. The old mentor would act as a substitute for father the kid and a paradigm for the young children.

Spartan boys at the age of 18 become the reserve members of the Spartan army. After leaving the Agoge they divided into groups, after which they would be sent into countryside to survive with a knife only to protect them and to use their scheming, skills and intelligence to survive. This was known as Krypteia. And the basic aim of this practice was to frighten the helot population by giving the Spartan the task of killing any helot they see fit. (Powell and Hodkinson 2002) The lives of both men and women, as illustrated above were very different in both the places.

The life of women would be preferable as compared to life of women in Athens, as with the freedom and education that she would acquire as well as the freedom to own a property would really make the life worth living. While on the other hand, for men, life would be preferable at Athens, as the freedom to marry one they want, being the master of the house, the education of literature, science and art was exclusive to them, and they had many opportunities ahead as whether they want to choose the desired field or they want to become a soldier.