

2. Athenian Government

Athens became a democracy around 500 B.C.E. However, unlike modern democracies, Athens only permitted free men to be citizens. All Athenian-born men over the age of 18 were considered Athenian citizens. Women and slaves were not permitted citizenship.

Every citizen could participate in the city's government. A group called the **Council of 500** met every day. Each year, the names of all citizens 30 years of age or older were collected. Then, 500 citizens were selected to serve on the council, which ran the daily business of government and suggested new laws.

Proposed laws needed approval from a much larger group, the Assembly of Athens. The Assembly met on a hill called the Pnyx every ten days. According to law, at least 6,000 citizens needed to be present for a meeting to occur. If fewer people attended a meeting, slaves armed with ropes dipped in red paint would be sent out to collect more citizens. Athenian men were said to be embarrassed to appear in red-stained clothes at these meetings.

The Assembly debated issues and voted on laws that the council proposed. Every citizen retained the right to speak at Assembly meetings. Some speakers were more skilled than others, and some spoke longer than others. Sometimes, a water clock was used to time a speaker. It worked by placing a cup filled with water above another cup. The top cup had a small hole drilled into the bottom. A speaker was permitted to talk only during the time it took for all the water in the top cup to drain into the bottom cup.

Most Athenian men enjoyed participating in the city's democratic government. They liked to gather and debate the issues and were proud of their freedom as Athenian citizens.

3. Athenian Economy

An important part of life in any community is its economy. An economy is the way in which a community or region organizes the production and exchange of money, food, products, and services to meet people's requirements.

Because the land around Athens did not provide enough food for all of the city's people, Athens's economy was based on trade. Athens was near the sea, and it had a good harbor. This location enabled Athenians to trade with other city-states and with several foreign lands to **obtain** the goods and natural resources they required. Athenians acquired wood from Italy and grain from Egypt. In return, Athenians traded honey, olive oil, silver, and beautifully painted pottery.

Athenians exchanged goods at a huge marketplace called the **agora** (A-guh-ruh), where merchants sold their goods from small stands. Athenians purchased lettuce, onions, olive oil, and other foods. Shoppers could also buy household items such as pottery, furniture, and clay oil lamps. Most Athenians made their clothes at home, but leather sandals and jewelry were popular items at the market. The agora was also the place where the Athenians bought and sold slaves.

Similar to most other city-states, Athens developed its own coins—crafted from metals such as gold, silver, and bronze—to make trade easier. Athenians decorated the flat sides of their coins. One such coin had an image of the goddess Athena, while its other side pictured Athena's favorite bird, the owl.

4. Education in Athens

Athenian democracy relied on well-prepared citizens. People in Athens believed that producing good citizens was the main purpose of education. Since only boys could become citizens, boys and girls were educated quite differently.

Athenians believed that a good citizen should have both an intelligent mind and a healthy body. Therefore, book learning and physical training were equally important. Boys were taught at home by their mothers or male slaves until the age of 6 or 7. Then, boys went to school until about the age of 14. Instructors taught reading, writing, arithmetic, and literature. Because books were rare and very expensive, students had to read subjects out loud and memorize everything. Writing tablets helped boys learn. To build boys' strength, coaches taught sports such as wrestling and gymnastics. Boys also studied music and learned to sing and to play the lyre, a stringed instrument like a harp.

At 18, Athenian men began their military training. After their army service, wealthy young men might study with private teachers who charged high fees for lessons in debating and public speaking that would help mold young men into future political leaders.

Unlike boys, most girls did not learn to read or write. Instead, girls grew up helping their mothers with household tasks like cooking, cleaning, spinning thread, and weaving cloth. Some also learned ancient secret songs and dances performed for religious festivals. Girls usually married around the age of 15. Those from wealthy families married men chosen by their fathers, while girls from poor families often had more choice.

5. Women and Slaves in Athens

Only men were considered citizens in Athens. Citizenship was not possible for women and slaves, so they had far fewer rights than free men did.

Women Athenian women could not inherit or own much property. They could not vote or attend the Assembly, and most could not even choose their own husbands.

A few women held jobs, and some sold goods in the market. A few very important women were priestesses. However, most Athenian women had their greatest influence in the home. They spent their days managing the household and raising their children. An Athenian wife had separate

rooms at home to complete her responsibilities, which included spinning, weaving, and supervising the slaves. She never went out alone. An Athenian mother taught her sons until they were about 6 or 7 and ready for school. She educated her daughters until they were 15 and ready to be married.

Slaves There were many slaves in ancient Athens. Most Athenians who weren't poor owned at least one slave. Some people were born into slavery, while others were forced into it as captives of war.

Slaves performed a wide variety of jobs in Athens, including tasks that required a great deal of skill. Some ran households and taught Athenian children. A number of slaves were trained as artisans. Others worked on farms, in factories, or for the city as clerks.

Some slaves worked in the silver mines, where they might work ten hours a day, in cramped tunnels 300 feet below the surface. They had little air to breathe and were often harshly punished if they stopped to rest.

6. Spartan Government

Sparta differed from Athens in almost every way, beginning with its government. While Athens was a democracy, Sparta was an oligarchy, in which the ruling power was in the hands of a few people.

Sparta's government—as well as Spartan society—was dedicated to military strength. Founded in the 800s B.C.E., Sparta was the leading military power in the Mediterranean area until about 370 B.C.E.

Like Athens, Sparta had an Assembly. However, the important decisions were actually made by a much smaller group called the **Council of Elders**.

The Council of Elders consisted of two kings and 28 other men. The two kings inherited their position and shared equal powers, but the other 28 members of the council were elected by members of the Assembly.

To be elected to the Council of Elders, men had to be at least 60 years old and from a noble family. Some scholars believe that members of the Assembly voted for candidates by shouting. Those men who received the loudest support were elected. Once elected, they served for life.

The Council of Elders held the real power in Sparta. It prepared laws for the Assembly to vote on and had the power to stop any laws passed by the Assembly that council members opposed.

The Assembly in Sparta was comprised of only male citizens. Because the Assembly was large, it met in a spacious outdoor area away from the center of the city. Unlike the Assembly in Athens, it did not debate issues. Members of the Assembly had limited powers and could only vote yes or no on laws suggested by the Council of Elders.

7. Spartan Economy

While Athens's economy depended on trade, Sparta's economy relied on farming and on conquests of other people. Although Sparta had fertile soil, there was not enough land to provide food for everyone. When necessary, Spartans took the lands they needed from their neighbors, who were then forced to work for Sparta. Because Spartan men were expected to serve in the army until the age of 60, Sparta had to rely on slaves and noncitizens to produce the goods it lacked.

Conquered villagers became slaves, called helots. The helots were permitted to live in their own villages, but they had to give much of the food they grew to Sparta.

The Spartans also utilized a second group of people—noncitizens who were free. Noncitizens might serve in the army when needed, but they could not participate in Sparta's government. They were responsible for making such necessary items as shoes, red cloaks for the soldiers, iron tools like knives and spears, and pottery. They also conducted some trade with other city-states for goods that Sparta could not provide for itself.

Generally, though, Sparta discouraged trade because the Spartans feared that contact with other city-states would lead to new ideas that might weaken the government. Trading with Sparta was already difficult because of its system of money. Rather than using coins, Spartans used heavy iron bars as currency. According to legend, an ancient Spartan leader decided to use this form of money to discourage stealing. Because an iron bar had little value, a thief would have needed to steal a wagonload of bars to make the theft worthwhile. As you might assume, other city-states were not anxious to receive iron as payment for goods.

8. Education in Sparta

In Sparta, the purpose of education was to produce **capable** men and women who could fight to protect the city-state. Spartans were likely to **abandon** sickly infants who might not grow up to be strong soldiers.

Spartans highly valued discipline and strength. From the age of 7, all Spartan children trained for battle. Even girls received some military training, which included wrestling, boxing, footracing, and gymnastics. Spartan boys lived and trained in buildings called barracks. Although boys learned to read and write, those skills were not considered as essential as military skills.

The most important Spartan goal was to be a brave soldier. Spartan boys were taught to suffer any amount of physical pain without complaining. For example, they marched without shoes. They were also not well fed; in fact, they were encouraged to steal food, as long as they did not get caught. One Spartan legend tells of a boy who was so hungry, he stole a fox to eat. But seeing his teacher coming, the boy quickly hid the fox under his cloak. The boy chose to let the fox bite him in the stomach rather than be caught stealing by his teacher.

At about the age of 20, Spartan men were given a difficult test of fitness, military ability, and leadership skills. If they passed, they became Spartan soldiers and full citizens. Even then, they continued to live in soldiers' barracks, where they ate, slept, and trained with their classmates. A man could not live at home with his wife and family until he reached 30 years old. At the age of 60, Spartan men could retire from the army.

9. Women and Slaves in Sparta

In Sparta, women had more rights than other Greek women. Although Spartan slaves had little freedom, they had some rights that Athenian slaves did not.

Women Spartan women lived the same simple life as Spartan men. They wore plain clothing with little decoration and did not wear jewelry or use cosmetics or perfume. Like Spartan men, women were expected to remain strong and healthy—and ready to fight when needed. A wife was expected to protect her husband's property in times of war. She also had to guard it against invaders and revolts by slaves.

Spartan women had many rights that other Greek women did not have. For example, they were free to speak with their husbands' friends. Women could also own and control their own property. They could even marry again, should their first husband be away at war for too long a time.

Slaves Spartan slaves, the helots, were people the Spartans had conquered. There were many more helots than citizens in Sparta. The Spartans treated the helots harshly, fearful that the helots would revolt.

Occasionally, the Spartan government declared war on the helots so that any slaves it thought might rebel could be legally killed. In fact, the Spartan government once asked the helots to choose their best fighters, saying that these slaves would be set free as thanks for fighting for Sparta. The helots selected 2,000 men. Immediately, the Spartans killed every one of them to **eliminate** the possibility of any future helot leaders.

Despite this harsh treatment, helots did retain some rights. They could marry whomever and whenever they wanted. They could pass their names on to their children. They could sell any leftover crops after giving their owner his share. Helots who saved enough money could even purchase their freedom.