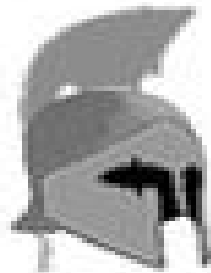


Take a Side

Brains or Brawn?

Comparing Spartan and Athenian Society

Authoritarian rule is a political system where power is concentrated in the hands of a very few people. The Greek philosopher Aristotle described Sparta this way, as "a kind of unlimited and perpetual generalship..." Within Sparta there existed three groups: 1) slaves, known as heklotai, 2) Spartan females, who were taught to be fit and powerful, and 3) Spartan males, who were trained to become warriors. None of these groups enjoyed a great deal of freedom. At the age of seven, boys were forced from home to live in barracks and receive military training from older boys. The heklotai slaves provided the necessary food and labor for Sparta. While women enjoyed some freedom relative to other Greek city-states, overall, their lives were very limited in Spartan society and control was often harsh and ruthless.



Democracy is a political system presided over by the citizens of Athens, Greece. In 508 BC the unpopular oligarch Peisistratus was overthrown, and all citizens were allowed to participate in Athenian governmental activities. All citizens were equal before the law, although slaves and women were not allowed citizenship. Athenians eventually established slavery and developed a direct democracy where citizens chose the members of the powerful Assembly. Athenian youth were encouraged to develop artistic and intellectual talents to such a degree that historians refer to this time period as Athens' "Golden Age." Citizens in Athens also had to complete military training, but Athens never exercised the same strict and brutal control over its people as Sparta.

