

Athens and Sparta

Brief #2

Focus

Athens and Sparta became two of the most powerful Greek city-states.

Although Athens and Sparta were both a part of what is considered to be Ancient Greece, they were two independent city-states. These two city-states had different cultures and political systems, but they did speak the same language.



Politics in Ancient Athens

The political system in Athens in 500 B.C. was a democracy. Ancient Athens had elected officials and an assembly.

To be part of the Athenian Assembly, you simply had to be a citizen of Athens. Of course, the ancient Athenians did keep slaves. Slaves were not allowed to take part in politics. In addition to the assembly, there was also a council of five hundred members. The job of the council was to execute the decisions made by the Assembly.

The ancient Athenians believed that it was every citizen's duty to participate in politics. Citizens had to serve on juries and be informed and able to discuss the issues that were important to their city.



Life in Ancient Athens

Like most civilizations, Athenian society had a structure. **Freemen were the male citizens of Athens.** Among the freemen there were aristocrats. **Aristocrats were wealthy men who owned property.** Aristocrats could also be military men. Farmers made up the middle ranks. At the bottom were the thetes. **The thetes were craftsmen and men who did manual labor.**

In ancient Athenian society, boys, especially if they came from the aristocracy, were well educated. They studied math, music, reading, and writing. Older boys could go to a kind of college where they continued their studies in philosophy and ethics. All male citizens were required to train in the military for two years.

Life was different for girls in ancient Athens. They were not educated, even if they did come from wealthy families. Women were considered to be the property of their husbands. Athenian girls learned domestic duties like spinning and weaving.

Vocabulary

1. Athens
2. Sparta
3. freemen
4. aristocrats
5. thetes
6. oligarchy

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Vocabulary (cont.)

7. oligarchy
8. helots
9. Delian League
10. Peloponnesus League
11. Peloponnesian War
12. Thucydides



The Military in Ancient Sparta

The government of Ancient Sparta was a kind of combination of an oligarchy and a democracy. **An oligarchy is a government that is led by a few people.** (Ancient Sparta did have some elected officials.)

In ancient Sparta, the military was the most important thing in their politics and society. When boys turned seven years old, they were taken from their parents and sent away to learn how to be soldiers. They were treated badly and given very few clothes and little food. They were expected to steal what they needed in order to survive. This is how the Spartans taught survival skills. As a result, the Spartan army was the strongest and most feared military in the region.



Life in Ancient Sparta

Physical strength was highly prized in ancient Spartan society, for both men and women. Everyone was expected to exercise and be physically fit. The Spartans frowned upon luxuries and comfort. Being tough and self-reliant was important.

Unlike in ancient Athens, Spartan women were educated. They learned how to read and write. They took part in athletics. They were also allowed to own property. The Spartans believed that all of these things would help Spartan women have healthy babies.

Spartans usually married at about the age of twenty.

But even after marriage, Spartan men lived most of their lives in military camps away from their wives.

Most city-states in ancient Greece had slaves, but the slave population in ancient Sparta was enormous. **The Spartan slaves were called helots.** They were treated very badly — beaten, humiliated, and often murdered. Because the helot population was so huge, they outnumbered the Spartans. So the Spartans had a hard time keeping them under control. There were often slave rebellions, which challenged Spartan authority.

Fast Fact

Spartan infants would be put to death if they were sick or weak.

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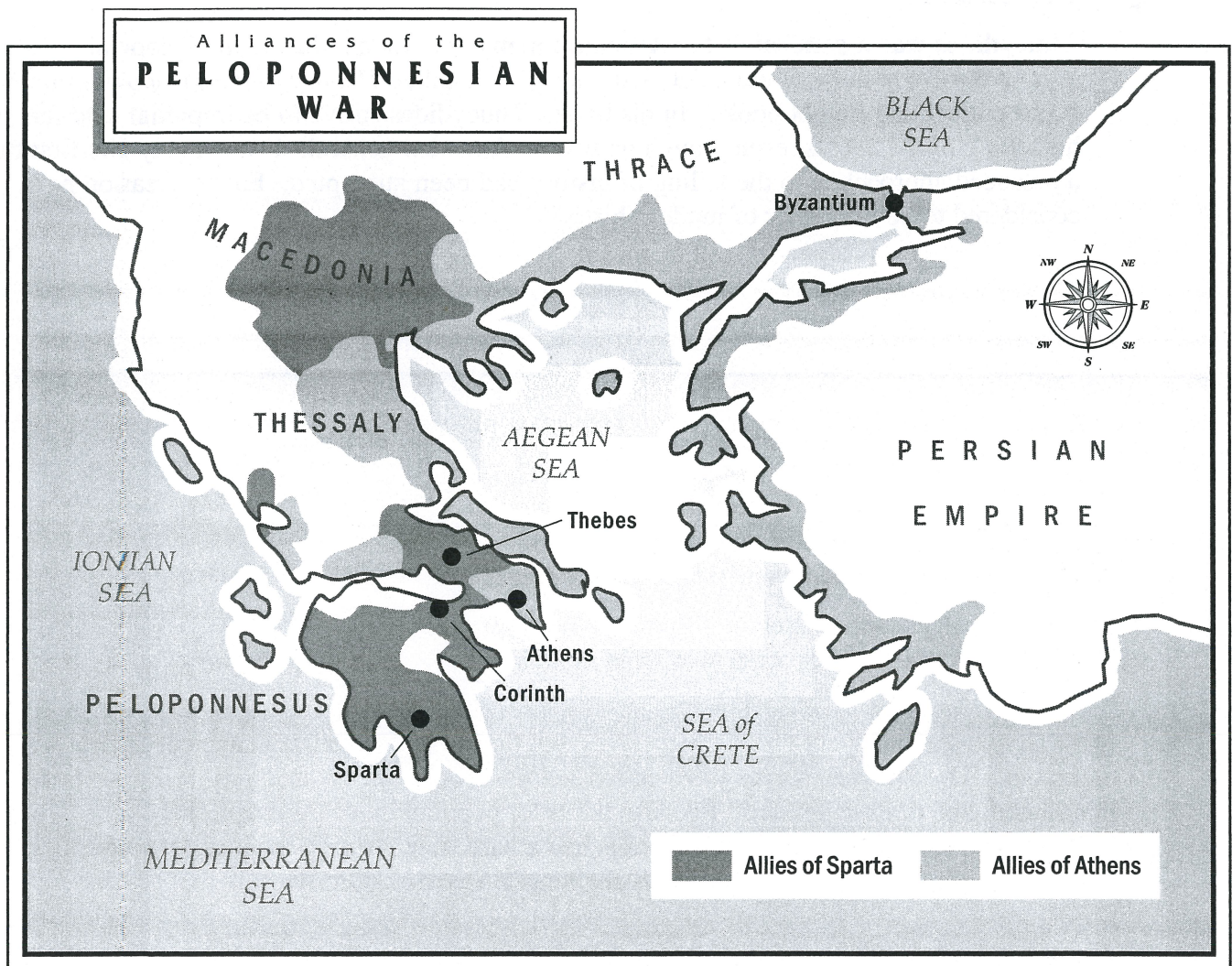
Brief #2 (cont.)



The Peloponnesian War

The Greek city-states of Athens and Sparta both had power and influence in the region. They each also had alliances with various city-states. Athens formed the Delian League. **The Delian League was a group of many Greek city-states, including Thessaly and Thrace. The Delian League was originally formed to fight the Persian Army when they invaded Athens in 490 B.C.**

Sparta had allies in the region, too. **The Greek city-states who allied with Sparta were called the Peloponnesus League. They included Corinth and Macedonia.**



War broke out between Athens and Sparta and their rivals in 431 B.C. This twenty-seven-year conflict between Athens and Sparta is known as the Peloponnesian War.

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The Peloponnesian War (cont.)

The Peloponnesian War consumed the entire region. Sometimes Athens would seem to be winning, and at other times Sparta would be victorious. Athens had a strong navy, and there were many battles at sea fought during this conflict. But Sparta had a powerful land army. The army attacked villages and towns, and destroyed farms.

The constant fighting weakened both sides in the conflict, but it was Athens that surrendered in 404 B.C. Although Sparta was the victor, the war had taken its toll on them, too. They were never again the superpower they once were.



Thucydides

Thucydides was a general in the Athenian army. He fought during the Peloponnesian War. After the war, he wrote a detailed history of it called *History of the Peloponnesian War*. It is a collection of eight books. In his books, Thucydides strove to be impartial and fair in his telling of the events, even though he was an Athenian general. It was really the first time a balanced approach to the telling of history had been attempted. For this reason he is considered to be the father of modern history.