

Athens a city-state of ancient Greece that was first to have a democracy; also known as the birthplace of Western civilization; the capital of present-day Greece

Sparta a city-state of ancient Greece, known for its military oligarchy

Peloponnesus a peninsula forming the southern part of the mainland of Greece

27.2 Comparing Two City-States

Both Athens and Sparta were Greek cities, only about 150 miles apart. Yet they were as different as they could be. Why?

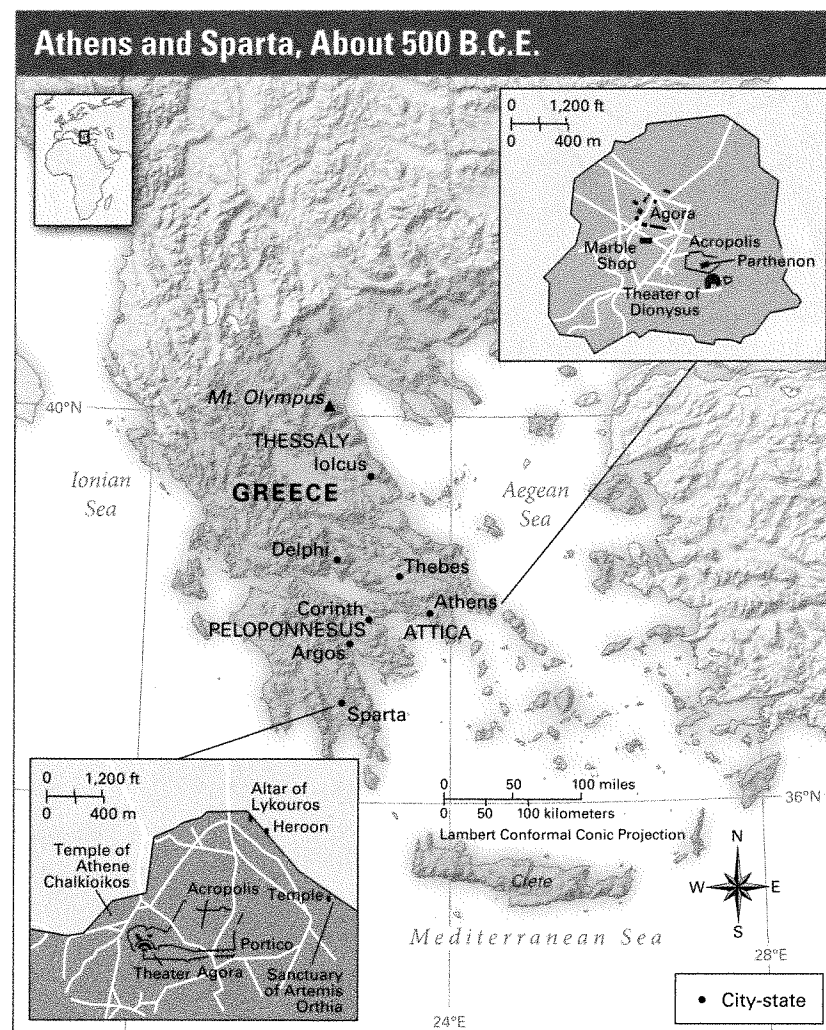
Part of the answer is geography. **Athens** is in central Greece, only four miles from the Aegean Sea. Its location encouraged Athenians to look outward toward the world beyond the city. Athenians liked to travel. They were eager to spread their own ideas and to learn from others. They encouraged artists from other parts of Greece to come and share their knowledge of art and architecture. Athens developed strong relationships with other city-states, and it grew large and powerful through trade. A great fleet made it the leading naval power in Greece.

In contrast, **Sparta** was more isolated. It was located on a narrow plain on a peninsula in southern Greece known as the **Peloponnesus** (pel-uh-puh-NEE-suhs). Sparta was surrounded on three sides by mountains, and its harbor was about

25 miles away. Spartans were suspicious of outsiders and their ideas. They could already grow much of what they needed in the fertile soil around Sparta. What they could not grow, Sparta's powerful armies would often take by force from their neighbors. While Athenians boasted of their art and culture, Spartans valued simplicity and strength. They taught their sons and daughters to fight, and they were proud to produce soldiers rather than artists and thinkers.

For most of their histories, these two city-states were bitter rivals. As you will see, the major differences between Athens and Sparta were reflected in almost every part of life.

The locations of the ancient city-states of Athens and Sparta help to explain their many differences.



27.3 Athenian Government

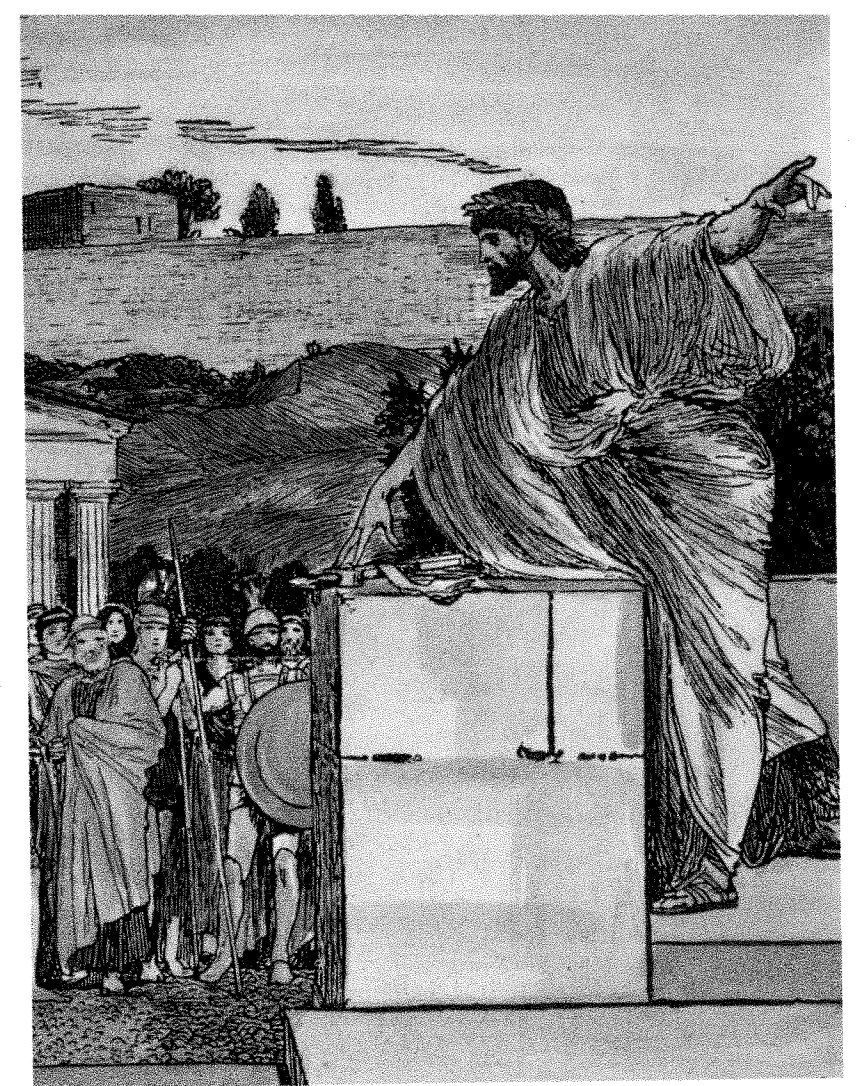
Athens became a democracy around 500 B.C.E. But unlike modern democracies, Athens allowed only free men to be citizens. All Athenian-born men over the age of 18 were considered Athenian citizens. Women and slaves were not permitted citizenship.

Every citizen could take part 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 be on the council. The council ran the daily business of government and suggested new laws.

Proposed laws had to be approved by a much larger group, the Assembly of Athens. The Assembly met on a hill every ten days. According to law, at least 6,000 citizens had to be present for a meeting to take place. If fewer people attended a meeting, slaves armed with ropes dipped in red paint would be sent out to round up 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 proposed by the council. Every citizen had the right to speak at Assembly meetings. Some speakers were more skilled than others. Some spoke longer than others. A water clock was sometimes 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 taking part in the city's democratic government. They liked to gather and debate the issues. They were proud of their freedom as Athenian citizens.



The Granger Collection, New York

Desmosthenes, an Athenian leader, speaks to the Assembly.

Council of 500 in Athens, a group of 500 citizens chosen to form a council responsible for running the day-to-day business of government