

27.10 Women and Slaves in Sparta

Spartan women lived the same simple life as Spartan men. They wore plain clothing with little decoration. They did not wear jewelry or use cosmetics or perfume. Like Spartan men, women were expected to be strong and healthy—and ready to fight when needed. A wife was expected to look after 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. They were free to speak with their husbands' friends. Women could own and control their own property. They could even marry again, should their first husband be away at war for too long a time.

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.

Sometimes, 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. The Spartans said that these slaves would be set free as thanks for fighting for Sparta. The helots chose two thousand men. Immediately, the Spartans killed every one of them to **eliminate** the possibility of any future helot leaders.

Despite this harsh treatment, helots did have 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 buy their freedom.

Like Spartan men, Spartan women were expected to be strong, healthy, and ready to fight. At left is a statue of a Spartan woman athlete.



Chapter Summary

In this chapter, you learned about Athens and Sparta, two very different city-states in ancient Greece.

Comparing Two City-States Its location near the sea made it easier for Athens to develop relationships with other city-states. Sparta's inland location and its culture made it more isolated than Athens. The people of Athens valued art, culture, and education. The people of Sparta valued strength, simplicity, and military skills.

Government Athens was a democracy, though only free men could take part in government. Sparta was primarily a military state. Its government was an oligarchy in which a few men held most of the power.

Economy The economy of Athens relied on trade with other city-states and several foreign lands. The Spartan economy relied on farming and conquest. Sparta depended on slaves and other noncitizens to provide for many of its needs.

Education In Athens, boys were educated to be good citizens. Education balanced book learning and physical training. Girls learned skills for managing the household. In Sparta, boys and girls alike were educated to protect the city-state. Spartan boys began their military training at age 7, and men served in the army until age 60.

Women and Slaves In Athens, women and slaves had far fewer rights than men had. Spartan women had more rights than other Greek women, such as owning property.



This bronze statue is of a Spartan soldier.