

Purpose of Reading: *To become familiar with the differences between Athens and Sparta in the area of government*

27.3 Athenian Government

As you learned in the last chapter, Athens became a democracy around 500 B.C.E. But unlike modern democracies, Athens allowed only free men to be citizens. All men over the age of 18 who were born in Athens were Athenian citizens. Women and slaves were not citizens.

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, and 500 of those names were chosen. The council ran the day-to-day business of government and suggested new laws.

Proposed laws had to be approved by a much larger group, the Assembly. The Assembly met on a hill every 10 days. At least 6,000 citizens had to be present for a meeting to take place. If not enough people showed up, slaves would round up more citizens with ropes dipped in red paint. Men were embarrassed to appear at the meeting with their clothes stained with red marks.

The Assembly debated 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. Sometimes a water clock was used to time the speaker. One cup of water was set above another. The first cup had a small hole drilled into the bottom. The speaker could talk only until all the water ran out of the top cup and into the bottom cup.

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

Key Question: Why was Athens called a democracy?

Main Idea:

Important Details:

Key Words:

Questions I Still Have

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27.7 Spartan Government

Sparta was different from Athens in almost every way, beginning with its government. While Athens was a democracy, Sparta was an oligarchy. As you learned in Chapter 26, in an oligarchy the ruling power is in the hands of a few people. Like Athens, Sparta had an assembly. But the important decisions were really 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. The other 28 members of the council were elected by 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 Assembly members shouted for the man they wanted most. The candidates who received the loudest support were elected. Once they were 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 it had the power to stop any laws passed by the Assembly that the council members didn't like.

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

Key Question: Why was Sparta called an oligarchy?

Main Idea:

Important Details:

Key Words:

Questions I Still Have