

Chapter 6 Section 4 --- Sparta and Athens

Key Terms:

Sparta – a city-state in the southern part of ancient Greece

Helot -- a member of a certain class of servants in ancient Sparta

Peloponnesian War – a war fought between Athens and Sparta in ancient Greece, involving almost every other Greek city state

Plague – widespread disease

Blockade – an action taken to isolate an enemy and cut off its supplies

The boy stood still and straight beside his companions as their trainer approached. “You,” the trainer barked. “Are you sick? You cannot escape sword practice --- and why are you holding your belly? Are you hiding something?”

The trainer gave the boy’s cloak a sharp tug. It fell to the ground, freeing a fox that streaked off into the underbrush. The boy sank down to the ground, shaking. His cloak was a crimson red. His side was shredded with deep cuts and bites. The hungry boy had stolen the fox for his dinner. Hidden beneath his cloak, the fox had clawed and bitten him.

Later, the boy died from his wounds. The people of his city, Sparta, celebrated his life. He had endured terrible pain without giving any sign of his distress. To the Spartans, such behavior was the sign of true character.

This Spartan story of the and the fox may or may not be true. Yet it tells us much about the people of **Sparta**, a city-state in southern Greece.

Living in Sparta:

If life in Athens was free and open, then life for the citizens of Sparta was the opposite. Life in Sparta was harsh. The Spartans themselves were tough, silent, and grim. Sparta’s army easily equaled Athens’ in the 400s B.C. However, Sparta never came close to equaling Athens’ other achievements.

A City Devoted to War: In its early days, Sparta seemed to be similar to other Greek cities. Then, in the 600s B.C., wars inside and outside the city led to changes in government and the way people lived. The changes turned Sparta into a powerful war machine. The city-state had made one basic rule: Always put the city’s needs above your own.

Early in its history, the Spartans conquered the land around their city. They turned the conquered people into **helots**, or servants of Sparta. Helots did all the farm work on the land

owned by Spartan citizens, freeing the Spartans to wage war. However, the helots far outnumbered the Spartans. Living in fear of a helot rebellion, the Spartans turned their city into a military society. They treated the helots very harshly.

Growing Up in Sparta: The life of every Spartan was in the hands of the government from an early age. Community leaders examined newborn infants. Those thought to be too sickly would be left to die. Military training began early for boys. At seven, a Spartan boy left his home to live in barracks with other boys. His training continued for the next 13 years.

By the age of 12, a boy had spent long hours practicing with swords and spears. He had only one cloak and a thin mat to sleep on. He could hardly live on the food he was given, so he was urged to steal. The Spartans believed that stealing would help him learn how to live off the land during a war. However, if the boy was caught, he was severely punished. After all, if a soldier was caught stealing, he would probably be killed. Boys were expected to bear pain, hardship, and punishment in silence.

Like the boys, girls also trained and competed in wrestling and spear throwing. No one expected the girls to become soldiers. But Spartans did believe that girls who grew up strong and healthy would have strong, healthy children. Spartan women had somewhat more freedoms than women in other Greek city-states. They were allowed to own land and even take part in business.

Spartan life lacked the beauty and pleasures found in Athens and some other Greek cities. But Spartan warriors were known for their skill and bravery. The Spartan fighting force played a key role in the Greek wars against the Persians, a people who lived across the Aegean Sea to the east of Greece.

The Persians Invade:

Much of the history of the Greeks tells of wars they fought among themselves. But near the beginning of the 400s B.C., a new threat loomed; the growing might of Persia.

The Expanding Persian Empire: By about the mid-500s B.C., Cyrus the Great had founded the Persian Empire. Cyrus and later rulers then extended the original empire. By 520 B.C., the Persians had gained control of the Greek colonies on the west coast of Asia Minor.

Battle at Marathon: In the fall of 490 B.C., a huge force of thousands of Persians landed in Greece itself. They gathered at Marathon, about 25 miles north of Athens. The Athenians hastily put together a small army. The Persians outnumbered them by at least two to one. For several days the armies stared tensely at each other across the plain of Marathon.

Then, without warning, the Athenians rushed the Persians, who were overwhelmed by the furious attack. By one account, the Athenians had killed 6,400 Persians and lost only 192

of their own soldiers. The Persian losses may be exaggerated. The truth is that in a short time, this tiny state had defeated the giant that had come to destroy it.

More battles with Persia followed. As a common enemy, Persia distracted the Greek city-states from fighting one another. Briefly united, the Greeks drove the Persians away.

Spartan Soldiers: In one of the wars against the Persians, some 6,000 Greeks had to defend a mountain pass, called Thermopylae, leading into southern Greece. They faced almost 200,000 Persians. Most of the Greeks retreated, but 300 Spartan soldiers stayed to fight. The Spartans all died in the battle. They didn't hold back the Persians. But they earned undying praise for their brave sacrifice.

Conflict and the Athenian Empire:

After the Persians were finally defeated, the influence of Athens spread over much of eastern Greece. Athens allied itself, or became partners, with other city-states. Athens worked to strengthen democratic groups within the city-states. In time, these cities became more like subjects than allies.

Sparta and Athens at War: Athens may have been a democracy at home, but it began to treat its allied city-states unfairly. At first, the allies had paid tribute to Athens for protection in case the Persians again became a threat. But later, Athens used this money for building the Parthenon and other projects. In response, the people of these city-states began to resent Athens' power. They looked to Sparta, which had not joined the alliance, to protect them. In 431 B.C., allies of Sparta and Athens fought. Thus, began the **Peloponnesian War**, a conflict between Athens and Sparta that lasted 27 years. It is called the Peloponnesian War because Sparta was located in Peloponnese, the Southern Greek peninsula.

The Fall of Athens: Most of what we know about the Peloponnesian War comes from Greek historian Thucydides (thoo SID ih deez). Thucydides saw the war first hand. He later wrote an eyewitness account of the war. Early in the Peloponnesian War, Athens was struck by a plague, or widespread disease. By the time the plague ended five years later, about one third of Athens' people had died from it among the dead was Pericles. His death was a great blow to Athens.

Athens never recovered from its losses during the plague. In 405 B.C, the Spartans staged a **blockade**, an action taken to isolate an enemy and cut off its supplies. The Spartans surrounded and closed the harbor where Athens received food shipments. Starving and beaten, the Athenians surrendered in 404 B.C. The victorious Spartans knocked down Athens' walls. Athens never again dominated the Greek world.

Review:

1. What happened during the battle at Marathon?
2. How did the Spartans finally defeat the Athenians?
3. What do you think was at stake for the people of Athens at the Battle of Marathon?

Guided Reading Questions:

1. A city-state in Southern Greece is called?
2. If life in Athens was free and open, then life for the citizens of Sparta was the what?
3. Sparta's army easily equaled Athens' in the 400s BC. However, Sparta never came close to equaling Athens' other what?
4. Sparta had one basic rule what was it?
5. A servant of Sparta is called?
6. Fearing a helot rebellion, the Spartans turned their city into a what type of society?
7. Describe how Spartan boys were raised?
8. Describe the role of Spartan Women?
9. Which fighting force played a key role in the Greek wars against the Persian?
10. Who founded the Persian Empire?
11. Who won the Battle of Marathon?
12. What did Athens do to lose their support of allied city-states?
13. A conflict between Athens and Sparta that lasted 27 years is called?
14. Widespread disease is called what?
15. Name three things that happened during the Peloponnesian War that led to the fall of Athens.
16. Who won the Peloponnesian War?