

The Middle Period: Athens and Sparta



This Athenian sculpture dates to 600 B.C.

The Dark Ages

After the fall of Mycenaea, Greece entered the **Middle Period**, which is sometimes called the **Dark Ages**. It lasted from about 1100 B.C. until about 800 B.C. During the Middle Period, the culture declined. Little is known about this period in Greek history since there are no written records.

The Polis

We do know there were various groups of people living in villages on the mainland as well as the islands in the Aegean Sea. Since these villages were separated by mountains and the sea, there was little contact among the various villages. As a result, each village was concerned with its own needs, not caring at all about those living in other villages. Gradually, the people organized themselves into several small city-states, almost like separate nations, each called a **polis**. Each polis was a separate unit that developed

its own government. It not only consisted of the city, but included the area surrounding the city as well. Each polis had a marketplace called an **agora**. An area that was higher than the rest of the polis was called an **acropolis**. A wall to protect the polis was often built.

Greek Civilization

We consider all of the city-states in Greece to be the Greek Civilization, because they shared the same language, religion, and culture. However, the Greeks living in this time were not loyal to Greece as a nation, but to the city-state in which they lived. Many city-states began to develop during the Middle Period, but the best-known and most powerful were Athens and Sparta. People from Athens were called **Athenians**. Those living in Sparta were **Spartans**. Sparta was located on the **Peloponnesian Peninsula** of Greece. Athens was located on the **Attic Peninsula** in a region called Attica.

Government in Greece

Athens and Sparta were just developing during the Middle Period, and they could not have been more different. One difference between the two was the manner in which they governed themselves. In order to understand how different Athens and Sparta were, it is important to understand how government developed in the Greek city-states. Several different types of government were tried over the years by the Greeks. At one time they had leaders similar to a king, but the people thought they could govern better than one person. So they established an aristocracy. An **aristocracy** is a government by a ruling class. The ruling class in this case was the landowners. This type of government was eventually replaced by an oligarchy. An **oligarchy** is run by only



This figure made in Sparta in approximately 1400 B.C. shows a woman in a typical costume from Crete.

a few people. In the case of the Greeks, the rulers were the wealthiest in town. Many city-states eventually abandoned this type of government and established a democracy. A **democracy** is a government run by the people who are being governed. *Demos* is a Greek word that means "people." In the Greek democracy, all citizens were able to vote and to decide how the city-state was to be run. However, slaves and women were not allowed to vote or participate.

Athens

Athens had a democracy. Every Athenian man, rich or poor, was a member of an assembly, which met to discuss issues concerning Athens. Each citizen was allowed to speak and give his opinion at these assemblies. Each year a council consisting of 500 citizens was chosen by lot. The council managed the city and decided what should be discussed at the assemblies. Citizens also took turns as judges and public officials. This open-minded attitude extended into other aspects of Athenian life. Artists, writers, philosophers, architects, and scientists flourished in Athens.



The Areopagus, on the Acropolis in Athens, was where Athenian democracy was born.



Ruins of Ancient Sparta

Sparta

Sparta, on the other hand, was ruled by two kings and a council. They did not have a democracy. This type of government worked well for Spartans who were not interested in the "finer things in life" that the Athenians pursued. Spartan life was simple. There was no art, music, poetry, or fine clothing. They cared little for ideas or new invention. Their whole existence was built around war and military discipline. Beginning at age seven, all men were trained as soldiers. They were given little food and were treated harshly to make them ready for the hardships of war. Even women were required to become strong and healthy so that they could have strong and healthy children. The Spartan army was strong and feared throughout the area.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Knowledge Check

Matching

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| _____ 1. Middle Period | a. rule by only a few people |
| _____ 2. polis | b. rule by a ruling class of people |
| _____ 3. agora | c. rule by all the people being governed |
| _____ 4. acropolis | d. the marketplace of a Greek city |
| _____ 5. aristocracy | e. an independent Greek city-state |
| _____ 6. oligarchy | f. time in Greece from about 1100 to 800 B.C.; also called the Dark Ages; culture declined during this time |
| _____ 7. democracy | g. a high place or hill in a Greek city |

Multiple Choice

8. Which city-state in Greece encouraged artists, writers, philosophers, architects, and scientists?
- | | |
|-----------|------------|
| a. Thebes | b. Sparta |
| c. Athens | d. Mycenae |
9. Where were Sparta and Athens located in Greece?
- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| a. in northern Greece | b. on peninsulas in southern Greece |
| c. on Aegean islands | d. on the coast of Asia Minor |
10. Which city-state in Greece trained its men to be soldiers by giving them little food and treating them harshly?
- | | |
|-----------|------------|
| a. Thebes | b. Sparta |
| c. Athens | d. Mycenae |

Constructed Response

11. Describe the types of government tried in ancient Greece. Use details from the reading selection to help support your answer.
