

SECTION  
**4**

# Athens and Sparta

## TWO CITIES IN CONFLICT

**BEFORE  
YOU  
READ**

### Reach Into Your Background

All people are different. Because of their backgrounds, people place different values

on different things. How are some of your values different from those of some of your friends?

### Questions to Explore

1. How did Athens differ from Sparta?
2. What was the result of the war between Athens and Sparta?

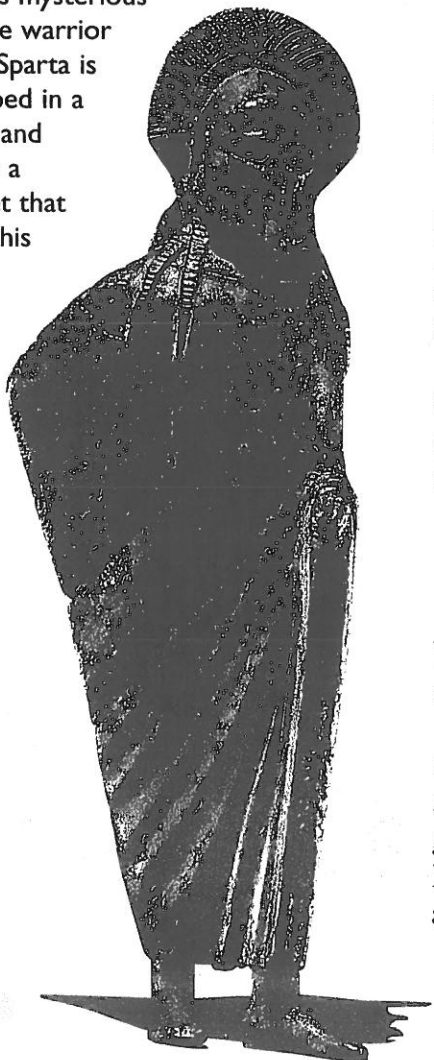
### Key Terms

plague  
blockade

### Key Places

Sparta  
Persia  
Marathon

► This mysterious bronze warrior from Sparta is wrapped in a cloak and wears a helmet that hides his face.



**T**he boy stood still and straight beside his companions as their trainer approached. “You,” the trainer barked. “Are you sick? Don’t think you’ll get out of sword practice—and why are you holding your belly? 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 boy had stolen the fox and hidden it beneath his cloak.

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, this was the sign of true character.

## A Spartan Life

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

If the life of the citizens of Athens was free and open, the life of the citizens of Sparta was the opposite. Life in Sparta was harsh and even cruel. 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.



## Sparta in the Mist

Like the warrior on the previous page, Sparta's sheer mountains sometimes wear a cloak of mystery. The city lies in a fertile valley with mountains on three sides. Sparta spent its money and energy on its army instead of fine buildings. Today, few ruins remain to tell us about this important city-state.



**A Different Kind of City** In its early days, Sparta seemed to be developing as the other Greek cities were. 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 an awesome war machine. The city-state 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 slaves. Helots (HEL uts) did all the farm work on the land owned by Spartan citizens. This left the Spartans free to wage war. However, the helots far outnumbered the Spartans. Living in fear of a helot revolt, the Spartans turned their city into an armed camp. They treated the helots very harshly.

**Growing Up in Sparta** The life of every Spartan was in the hands of the government from the first moment of life. Only the healthiest children were raised. This was because the Spartans wanted only the healthiest males as its soldiers. Training began early. At seven, a Spartan boy left his mother 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. This was to 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.



## CITIZEN HEROES

**Working Together** In one of the wars against the Persians, some 6,000 Greeks had to defend a mountain pass leading into southern Greece. They faced almost 200,000 Persians. Most of the Greeks retreated, but 300 Spartan soldiers stood their ground. All died in the battle. They didn't hold back the Persians. But they earned undying praise for their brave sacrifice.

Like their brothers, 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 a somewhat better life than women in other Greek city-states. They were allowed to own land and even take some 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, 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. This was the growing might of Persia. By 520 B.C., the Persians had already gained control of the Greek colonies on the west coast of Asia Minor.

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 (40 km) 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.

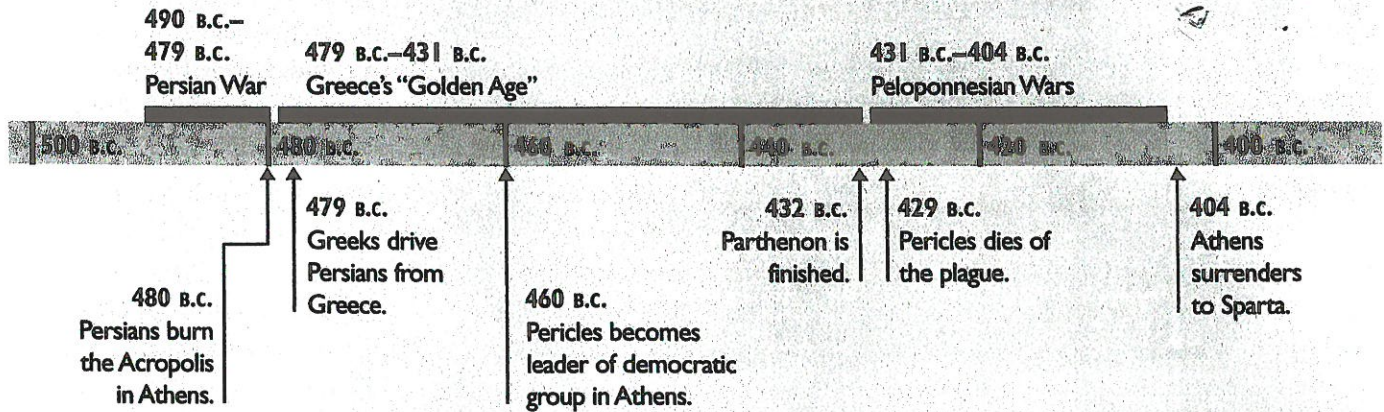
Then, without warning the Athenians rushed the Persians, who were overwhelmed by the furious attack. By the time the battle was over, the Athenians had killed 6,400 Persians and lost only 192 soldiers themselves. In a few hours, this tiny state had defeated the giant that had come to destroy it.



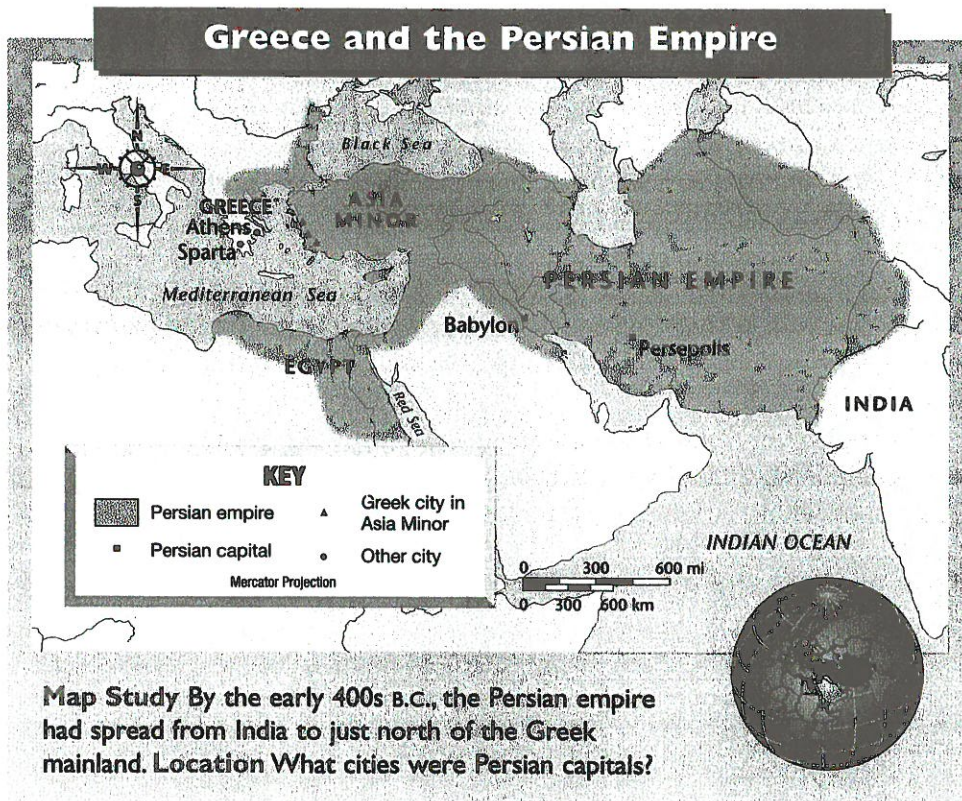
◀ A Persian duels with a Greek warrior (left) on this vase from the 500s B.C. To the left is the hand of another Persian raising a bow.



## Classical Greece, 500 B.C. to 400 B.C.



▲ The time line shows important events in the 400s B.C., the high point in ancient Greece's history.

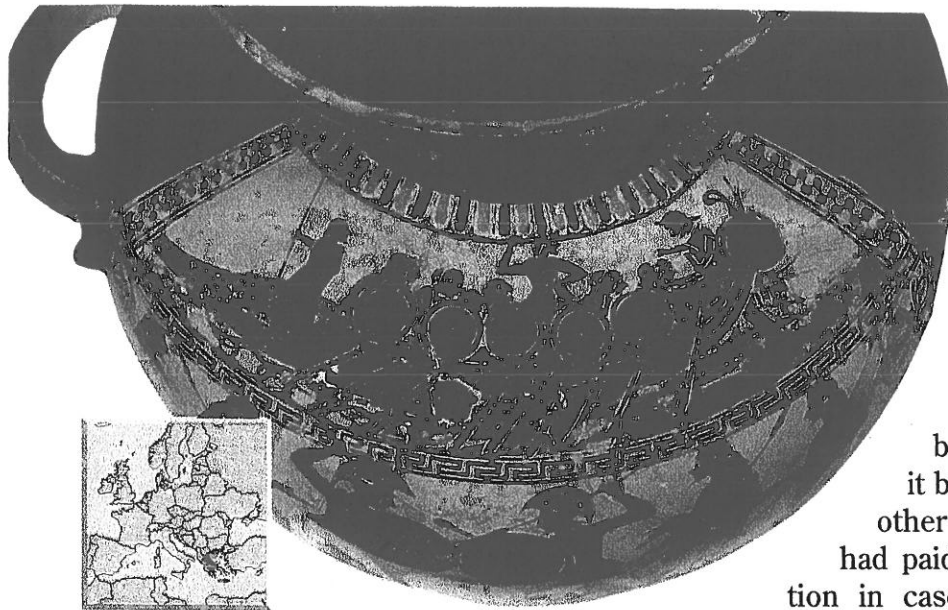


**A Run from Marathon**  
After Marathon, the Athenians sent their fastest runner to tell the people of Athens of the victory. His chest heaving, the runner covered the distance to the city and shouted to the people "Rejoice! We have won." Then he dropped dead. This valiant run is still honored today every time anyone runs the 26.2 miles of a marathon race.

## After Persia: Athenian Empire

After several more battles, the Persians were finally defeated. The influence of Athens spread over much of eastern Greece. Athens joined itself with other city-states and supported democratic groups within them. In time, these cities became more like subjects than allies.





◀ The Athenians put great faith in their fleet of warships. These ships played a huge role in defeating Persia.

peloponnesian

### **Sparta and Athens at War**

Athens may have been a democracy at home. But it began to act unfairly toward the other city-states. At first the allies had paid tribute to Athens for protection in case the Persians caused more trouble. But later Athens used this money for the

Parthenon and other projects. In response, the people of these city-states began to fear and resent Athens' power. They looked to Sparta, which had not joined the alliance, to protect them. In 431 B.C., Athens and Sparta went to war. The conflict lasted for 27 years. It is called the Peloponnesian War, because Sparta was located in the Peloponnesus, or southern part of Greece.

**The Fall of Athens** Early in the war, Athens was struck by a **plague**, or widespread disease. By the time the plague ended five years later, about one third of Athens's people had died from it. Among the dead was Pericles.

Athens never recovered from its losses during the plague. In 405 B.C., the Spartans staged a **blockade**, in which they 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.

### **READ ACTIVELY**



**Connect** If you lived in another city-state, how would you feel about the power of Athens? Why?

## **SECTION 4 REVIEW**

- 1. Define** (a) plague, (b) blockade.
- 2. Identify** (a) Sparta, (b) Persia, (c) Marathon.

- 3.** How was the life of citizens of Athens more free and open than the life of citizens of Sparta?
- 4.** What events led to the war between Athens and Sparta?

#### **Critical Thinking**

- 5. Recognizing Cause and Effect** How did the attitude of the people of Athens lead to their own downfall?

#### **Activity**

- 6. Writing to Learn** Pretend you are the trainer in the story that begins this section. Write a report explaining the event to other Spartan officers. Be sure to write the story from the Spartan point of view.

