

## Phenomenons of the Ancient world

### 2. Greek *polis*, Athens and Sparta

#### Polis

In ancient times, however, most Greek towns were self-governing and independent; there was no state called Greece. The Greeks knew they belonged to a race with a shared homeland and a language of its own. But generally they were loyal only to the *polis* (city state) they came from.

When Greeks spoke of a *polis* they could mean **the people** as well as **the place**.

A *polis* was a small community. Only Athens, Syracuse and Acragas in Sicily ever had more than 20,000 citizens. Women and slaves have to be added to this figure as only free men with ..... were called **citizens**.

A *polis* had enough farmland to feed its people and was usually near the sea so that its citizens could earn a living by .....or..... In earliest times these cities were ruled by **kings**. Such ..... were often followed by the rule of a few **noble families** (called an *aristocracy*). Some cities were ruled for a time by a *tyrant*. The word did not mean that he was necessarily wicked or unpopular, only that he had seized power and not been elected. The city states eventually gave voting rights to either all their citizens (a ..... ) or just the richer ones (an *oligarchy*). Political rights were never given to women.

**Q:** Why do you think in ancient Greece women had never right to vote? .....  
.....  
.....

#### Athens

The most freedom-loving *polis* was Athens. Here every man was encouraged to help govern the city by attending its **assembly**. A citizen of a *polis* like Athens would never feel forgotten or ignored. His rulers would be known to him personally and he could argue with them if he disagreed with what they were doing. Nearly all government jobs were filled by drawing lots each year. In this way power was shared amongst as many men as possible instead of being concentrated into the hands of a few.

**Q:** Give at least two differences between athenian democracy and democratic system in our country?  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

#### Sparta

Most of the interesting or beautiful things about the Greeks were at their best in Athens. Its sculpture and pottery, its buildings, its plays, its ways of government are still copied and admired today. Its great rival, Sparta, was very different. Few ancient cities even looked like Sparta. Travellers approaching it noticed at once that it had no walls. This was to make its soldiers fight harder when attacked! Similarly, no lights were to be seen after dark – in order to make its soldiers skilled night-fighters.

The Spartans did not mix with other Greeks if they could help it. The only true Spartan citizen was called a *Spartiate*. Most outsiders or prisoners-of-war were made slaves – called *helots*. The helots were very badly treated. They were beaten if they

did not work hard enough and killed if they protested. The Spartans were able to live on the labour of slaves because they were **soldiers**.

In order to support their way of life, Spartans worked out a **training scheme** designed to produce magnificent soldiers. Selection began at birth. Only the strong were allowed to live. Weak or deformed babies were left to die. At seven years of age all boys were taken from their families and put in special barracks. ....

Sparta's citizens left no beautiful temples, fine plays or poetry, but today a rough, hard and disciplined way of life is often called *Spartan*.

**Q:** Would you like to live in Athens or Sparta in ancient times? Give a reason to your choice. If you need any additional information, use internet, or try to find it in a local library. ....

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**Task:** Who did rule in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt? How do we call such political system? Give any of its characteristics.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**Vocabulary:**