**Sparta Overview**

The Greeks believed that each city-state in ancient Greece had a god or a goddess in charge of it, their special patron. For Sparta, the patron was surprisingly not Ares, the god of war, but Athena, goddess of wisdom and war. The Spartans also honored Artemis, the goddess of the hunt.

Life was very different in ancient Sparta than it was in the rest of ancient Greek city-states. The Spartans were proud, fierce, capable warriors. No great works of art came out of Sparta. But the Spartans, both men and women, were tough, and the Greeks admired strength.

Sparta's government was an oligarchy. The people were ruled by a small group of warriors. The Spartans spoke Greek, wrote Greek, thought of themselves as Greeks, but they were very different from the other Greek city-states, and proud of it.

In the Greek city-state of Athens, for example, [the goal of education](http://greece.mrdonn.org/education.html) was to create a strong citizen. But in Sparta, the goal of education was to create a strong warrior.

Boys were taken away from their parents at age 7. They lived a harsh and often brutal life in the soldiers’ barracks. Younger children were beaten by older children who started fights to help make the younger boys strong. Children were often whipped in front of groups of other Spartans, including their parents, but they were not allowed to cry out in pain.

Children, during their training process, were given very little food. They were encouraged to steal food, instead. If *caught*stealing, they were beaten. The children learned to be cunning, to lie, to cheat, to steal, and how to get away with it!

As adults, men did not live with their families. They visited their families, but men lived in soldiers’ barracks.

As adults, Spartan women, unlike women in the rest of Greek world, had a great deal of freedom. Women were also educated to be fighters. Many ran businesses. They were free to move about.