

## Athenian Envoy Speaks to the Argives on the Eve of the War

“None need fear Athens. Athenians have a free and open society, and we welcome all the other city-states throughout Hellas to see and observe, and to learn and benefit from what our polis has to offer the rest of the Greeks. Athens always turned outward to face the world. Solon, in his infinite wisdom, welcomed foreigners into our land, seeing the need for new industries and crafts in our polis to help Athens grow and prosper. It was Themistocles who convinced the Athenians to build the triremes that destroyed the battle fleet of Xerxes at Salamis, and that are now carrying goods and produce to the limits of the seas. We are a unique people who possess the wisdom never to stagnate or stand still, but to make a move, no matter how rash, and to try to make things better. Athens, too, had a king at one time. And we were also ruled by oligarchs. Pisistratus was a tyrant, tempered by kindness, and he reorganized the four tribes into ten and extended citizenship. Now Athens has evolved into a democracy with 45,000 citizens, and we extend citizenship to all who are eligible by owning land when they reach the age of 18 years. Not all Athenians are happy with the policies of Pericles, but it has allowed for more individuals to participate in government and politics. Five hundred citizens, chosen at random, make up the Council. They propose new laws that must be approved by the Assembly, which includes all Athenian citizens. Many people in Athens are slaves, but we do not treat these unfortunates with the same brutality that Sparta visits on the helots. Women have their place in our community, and it is in the home, taking care of the household and the children. Our society has a lot to offer, and 300,000 Athenians have found contentment and satisfaction in the way they live.

The Delian League should not be regarded as a threat to Sparta’s safety and security. Should the Persians again threaten Hellas, the treasure stored on the island of Delos will be the war chest of the Greeks, using the treasure to build ships and weapons to turn back the invaders from our lands. Our port at Piraeus is prosperous and thriving, as it is the hub for all the shipping and goods of the Mediterranean world as they make their way to Attica and the agora in Athens. The success of this port arouses Sparta’s suspicions as to our intentions, but they are simply envious.

In Athens we take pride in giving our youth the best education. Our young men attend schools and are given special instruction by tutors. The young girls also learn to read and write, but very early on they are prepared for marriage, motherhood, and taking care of the household. Our agora is much more than just a simple market place, for here citizens gather to discuss issues and politics, and intelligent conversation is valued above all else, while all around the business of the polis is transacted at a rapid pace. Athenian society encourages the symposiums, formal gatherings where men of Athens can speak their minds freely and openly. Our gymnasiums are places where Athenian youth exercise and work strenuously to attain the physical perfection expected among the Greeks.

In our small world, we have accomplished what no other polis throughout Hellas can equal. The Athenian society allows talent, creativity, and the imagination to expand and grow. High up on our Acropolis stands the Parthenon to honor our patron goddess, Athena, and the statue created by Pheidias is a worthy monument to her. Mnesticles is unsurpassed in his genius as an architect. We have shown the Greeks the gift of the theater, and brilliant minds like Sophocles and Euripides have given Athenian audiences tragedies and dramas that will endure for centuries to come. Here in our polis is the glory of the Greek world. Its foundation is a city-state where innovation is prized, brilliance and genius valued, where all citizens are encouraged to take part in their government, where great minds are encouraged to build and create, and where prosperity and security are recognized as the rewards of diligence and hard work.”

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“Hear me well, people of Argos, for you know as well as I that whom the gods would destroy they first make mad. Athens is gripped by the madness of power, and it will result in the destruction of their polis. They rule an empire that can only be seen by Sparta as a threat to our own well-being and security. Other city-states have joined the Delian League, but in their conceit and arrogance they did not even bother to invite Sparta. The gesture would have been worthy of what they profess all Athenians to be, even if Sparta would have spurned their offer, which we surely would have done. We Spartans take pride in being the best warriors throughout all Hellas. The other poleis (plural for polis) build impressive citadels and walls to protect themselves from their enemies, but in Sparta the fighting men are our walls. Our mothers and wives are proud that they have given birth to the best soldiers in all the lands of the Greeks.

Sparta has no need for the luxuries that are traded in the agora of Athens, goods that they bring to their shores from foreign lands. We have no need for foreigners in our midst. We will not allow our Spartan men to engage in trade, crafts, farming, or business. The Messenians, a conquered neighboring people, our helots, do all the chores and labor needed to sustain our community. We allow free people, who are craftsmen and work at different industries, to live amongst us. But our 10,000 citizens, our Spartan men, have but one purpose, and that is to train for war. For this reason alone are the unhealthy, deformed, or unwanted infants left to die in the night or to be eaten by wolves. We must have only those who are able, fit, and possessing the physical excellence to be great warriors. Yes, we wait until our young men reach the age of 30 before they become citizens, but they value the privilege of citizenship all the more for having endured the waiting. Spartans are subjected to insults because they seemingly lack the wisdom exhibited by other Greeks. Spartans are called ‘dull,’ ‘lacking in intelligence,’ ‘witless,’ and ‘slow moving,’ by all who seek to make us less than what we really are.”

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However, our young people learn to read and to write like other Greeks, but very quickly the boys know it is their destiny to be soldiers and the girls to be wives and mothers. It is true that our young boys are taken from their parents at the age of seven, to live in the barracks with the other men, and to undergo the hard and rigorous training that we demand of all citizens. From an early age until 60 years old, the Spartan serves the polis as a warrior. The boys are exposed to heavy physical exercise, mostly running, wrestling, throwing the javelin and the discus, as are the young girls. The married men continue to live in the barracks most of their adult lives, separated from their wives. We lead a simple existence, constantly training in the arts of war, to use the javelin, the sling, the bow, the sword, to fight in unison and together as a formidable phalanx that has no equal in all the world. Many criticize the methods we employ to teach our young, training them to be treacherous, cunning, to tell lies and to steal, but always to be successful and to survive. We allow the young men to go out once a year, to hunt down those among the helots that pose a danger to Sparta. What is there to find fault with? The slaves must be controlled and kept in check, and for this we also have a secret police.

Our two Kings carry out the wishes of the Ephors, the elders who make the laws that govern the community. Our government is an oligarchy, stable and true, completely free of the mob and the demagogues that are always a threat to the peace and welfare of the people who live in a democracy.

We acknowledge the great sacrifice made by the Athenians, who abandoned their polis to the fire and sword of the Persians, to lure the fleet of the Great King Xerxes to their destruction at Salamis. Yet, Argives, do well to remember King Leonidas at Thermopylae, who, together with his 300 Spartans held the pass against the Persians, in spite of betrayal, and knew that they would all die. That was as great a sacrifice as any made by the Athenians.”

## Magnetic Debate Between Athens and Sparta Chart

Category	Athens	Sparta
<b>Government and Politics/ Citizenship</b>		
<b>Morals and Ethics</b>		
<b>Military and Naval Strength</b>		
<b>Slaves: Treatment and Population</b>		
<b>Attitude Towards Visitors/Trade</b>		
<b>Role of Men</b>		
<b>Role of Women</b>		
<b>Role of Boys</b>		
<b>Role of Girls</b>		
<b>Entertainment</b>		