

Athens, Sparta and Rome compared: The importance of ideology



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CAN Athens, Rome and Sparta be compared?

ATHENS

DEMOKRATIA

Democracy



ROME

RES PUBLICA

Competitive
oligarchy



SPARTA

EUNOMIA

A totalitarian
society?



A: Eupatridai/ Pentikosiomedimnoi

S: Homoioi

R: Patricii/ Nobilii

A: Hippeis

S: Homoioi

R: Equites

A: Zeugitai

S: Homoioi

R: Classis, pedites

A: Thetes

S: Hypomeiones

R: Proletarii

A: Douloi

S: Heilotas

R: Servi

NOBILITY

KNIGHTS

HOPLITES

SUB-HOPLITES

SERVILE LABOUR

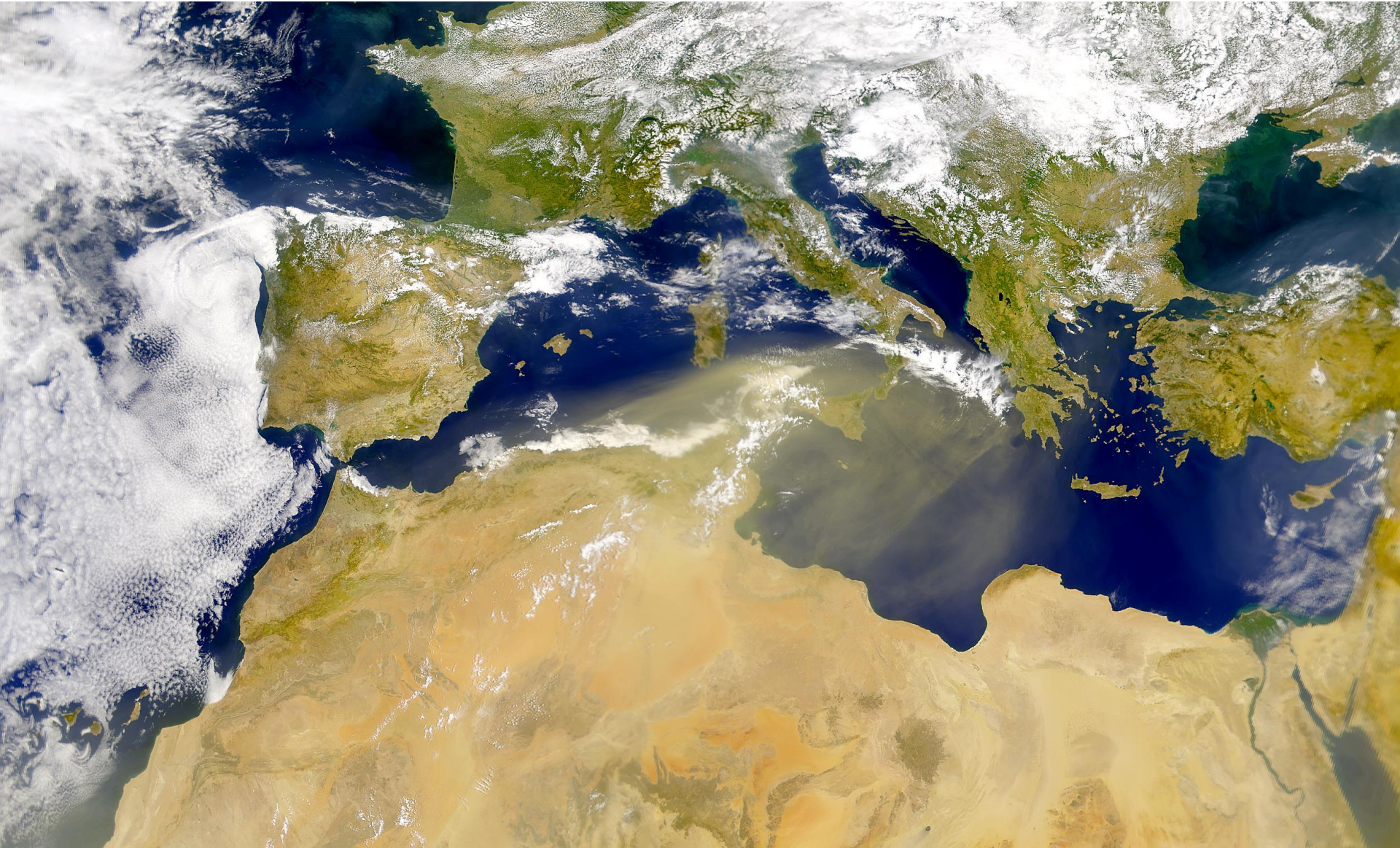
**FREE
NON-
CITIZENS**

Metoikoi
(Athens)

Perioikoi
(Sparta)

Peregrini
(Rome)

A political laboratory



SENATE

Life tenure

Indirectly (former magistrates) or
directly chosen from the Elders

Preparation of agenda for the Assembly

Guardianship of the constitution and
control of magistrates

PEOPLE'S COUNCIL (Greek)

One year

Election (moderate oligarchy) or
sortition (democracy)

Preparation of agenda for the Assembly

Guardianship of the constitution and
control of magistrates

MAGISTRATES

One year

Chosen by the People's
Assembly

Executive power

Propositions to the Assembly

MAGISTRATES DRAWN BY LOTS

(democracies)

One year

Boards of ten

Only civilian and
very limited tasks

PEOPLE'S TRIBUNES

(Roman)

One year

Protection, veto power
and propositions to the
Assembly

PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY

Several meetings a year

All citizens

Laws, decrees, war, peace, (law court)

Chooses the magistrates (and senate)

LAW COURTS

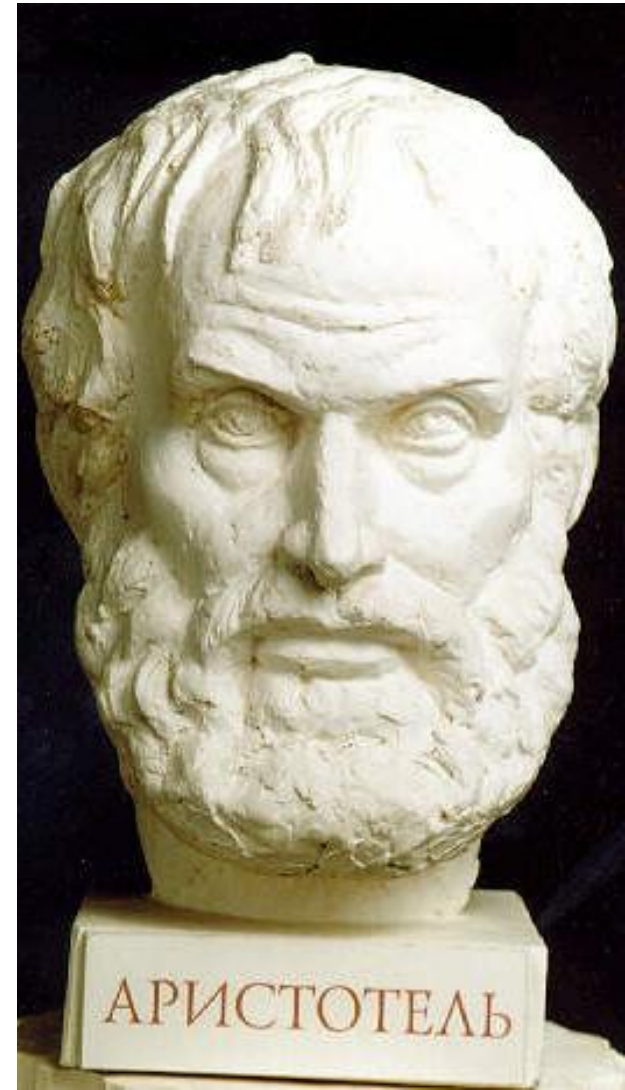
Sortition

Changing juries led by magistrates

Criminal, civil, religious and political
cases

SHOULD Athens, Rome and Sparta be compared?

- Similarities: General conclusions about the ancient city-states
- Distinctions: New questions about the particular systems
- Testing causal explanations
 - Why did democracy evolve in Athens?
 - Why did democracy not evolve in Rome or Sparta?
 - What part did ideology play, compared with other factors?



Constitutional development

ATHENS

- Civilian and military powers separated
- Reduction of the elected magistrates' power vs. the people
- Sortition for civilian magistracies
- Low property requirement for electability
- One man, one vote
- Broad popular participation
- The people control the magistrates
- The Senate (Areopagos-council) loses political power to the People's Council

ROME

- Civilian counter-power in the hands of the plebeian tribunes
- Increase of the elected magistrates' power vs. the senate
- Election for all magistracies
- High property requirement for electability
- Voting units favoring the rich
- Increased competition for office
- The elite controls the magistrates
- The Senate keeps the power but is increasingly challenged by tribunes and generals

Possible causes

ATHENS

- Leaders from the old elite (the Eupatridai)
- Reform through existing institutions
- Debate in the Assembly
- Constitutional development relatively unhindered by external threats
- Athens, a fleet power in the fifth century
- Democrats vs. Oligarchs

ROME

- Leaders from the new elite (the Plebeians)
- Reform through new, competing institutions
- No debate in the Assembly
- Constitutional development constantly interrupted by external threats
- Rome, a fleet power in the mid-third century
- Plebeians vs. Patricians

A detailed painting of a Roman Senate chamber. In the center, a man in a white toga stands at a podium, gesturing as if speaking. He is surrounded by other men in white togas, some seated in a semi-circular arrangement of wooden benches. The room features large classical columns and a high ceiling. The overall scene depicts a formal assembly or debate.

ROME

SENATORS

CONTROL THE
PEOPLE

DISTRIBUTE POWER
EVENLY AMONG THE
ELITE



If we could only keep the admirable customs and principles which we received from our ancestors! But somehow or other they have slipped through our fingers. For our ancestors, those wise and upright men, would not permit that the power lay in the public assemblies. When it came to what the people might decree, they wished that this should be expressed only after the meeting (*contio*) was ended and the people were divided into centuries and tribes, according to rank, class and age, and after the proposal had been discussed and published in good time before the assembly (*comitia*).

Cicero: Pro Flacco 15.



But all the republics of the Greeks are governed by the rashness of the assembly while sitting ...When inexperienced men, ignorant and uninstructed in any description of business whatever, took their seats in the theatre, then they undertook inexpedient wars; then they appointed seditious men to the government of the republic; then they banished from the city the citizens who had deserved best of the state.

Cicero: Pro Flacco 16



ATHENS

THE PEOPLE

CONTROL THE ELITE

DISTRIBUTE POWER
EVENLY AMONG
ORDINARY CITIZENS



Our constitution does not copy the laws of neighboring states; we are rather a pattern to others than imitators ourselves. Its administration favors the many instead of the few; this is why it is called a democracy. If we look to the laws, they afford equal justice to all in their private differences; if to social standing, advancement in public life falls to reputation for capacity, class considerations not being allowed to interfere with merit; nor again does poverty bar the way, if a man is able to serve the state, he is not hindered by the obscurity of his condition.

Thucydides 2.37-40: *The funeral speech of Pericles*



Our public men have, besides politics, their private affairs to attend to, and our ordinary citizens, though occupied with the pursuits of industry, are still fair judges of public matters; for, unlike any other nation, regarding him who takes no part in these duties not as unambitious but as useless, we Athenians are able to judge at all events if we cannot originate, and instead of looking on discussion as a stumbling-block in the way of action, we think it an indispensable preliminary to any wise action at all.



The freedom which we enjoy in our government extends also to our ordinary life. There, far from exercising a jealous surveillance over each other, we do not feel called upon to be angry with our neighbor for doing what he likes, or even to indulge in those injurious looks which cannot fail to be offensive, although they inflict no positive penalty...

If we turn to our military policy, there also we differ from our antagoniststrusting less in system and policy than to the native spirit of our citizens; while in education, where our rivals from their very cradles by a painful discipline seek after manliness, at Athens we live exactly as we please, and yet are just as ready to encounter every legitimate danger.



SPARTA

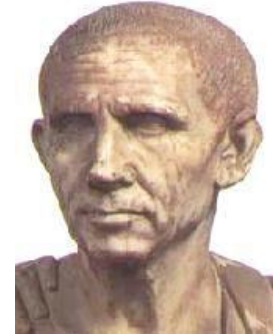
THE HOPLITES

CONTROL THE
HELOTS

PERMANENT
MOBILISATION,
SURVEILLANCE AND
MILITARY DISCIPLINE

Political camps in Rome

Optimates: The people shall only vote on what a majority in the Senate proposes.



CATO jr.

Populares: The people can approve or reject any bill, even if it does not have the backing of the Senate majority.



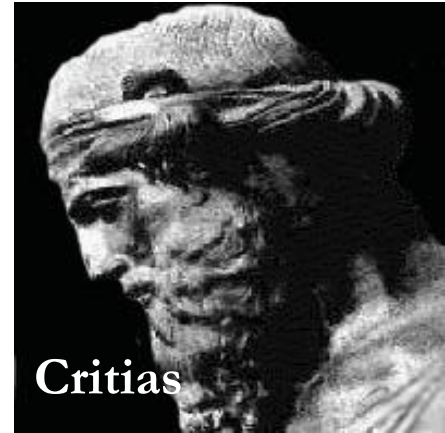
CICERO



CAESAR

Political camps in Athens

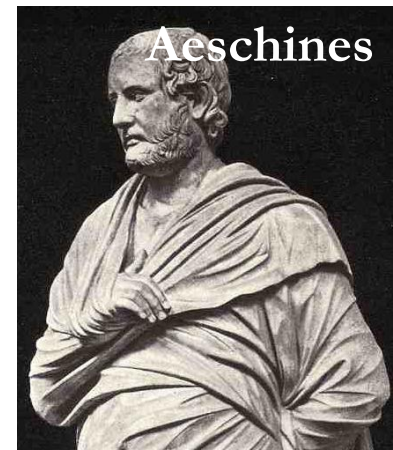
Oligarches: Only the rich should have the right to speak, propose and hold office, and the poor should lose their voting rights. No pay for political participation.



Democrates : More or less equal rights for all citizens. Political leaders should care for the people's interests, even against their own inclinations. Payment for office and jury duty.



Populists/ demagogues: The political leaders should be the voice of the people. More of state resources should be distributed to the citizens. The political participation of the poor should be stimulated by payment.



Sparta: The world's first totalitarian state?

- **"Abolish the family!"**
- **Comunal living**
- **"Similar" in life-styles**
- **Unequal status**
 - Birth
 - Wealth
 - Attainment
 - Age

