

story is that Medea delayed her father, who was pursuing them, by chopping her brother up and throwing his body overboard.

The return trip was also filled with many amazing adventures for the Argonauts. After defeating King Pelias in Iolcus, Jason and Medea married and fled to CORINTH. The later history of Jason and Medea is the subject of EURIPIDES' famous tragedy, *Medea*. (See also **Heroes, Greek; Myths, Greek; Myths, Roman.**)



See *Medusa*.



See *Ostrogoths; Visigoths*.



- * **monarchy** nation ruled by a king or queen
- * **oligarchy** rule by a few people
- * **city-state** independent state consisting of a city and its surrounding territory

The ancient Greeks developed several different forms of government, including monarchies*, oligarchies*, and democracies. These governments evolved over time as populations grew and social and economic conditions changed.

Until about 300 B.C., Greek society consisted of relatively small separate communities, without great extremes of wealth among its members. The earliest governments were monarchies centered around palaces. Many of these palace centers later evolved into independent city-states*. Neither palace centers nor city-states required many administrators or laws. After 300 B.C., as populations became larger and overseas empires and confederacies of states developed, the governments became more complex, requiring written laws and large numbers of paid professionals.

EARLY FORMS OF GOVERNMENT IN GREECE

The earliest known governments in Greece were the monarchies of the Mycenaean period, which lasted from about 1600 B.C. to about 1200 B.C. This period was followed by Greece's Dark Age, during which the monarchies disappeared, and for the next several centuries, Greek governments were controlled by aristocratic* elites.

- * **aristocratic** referring to people of the highest social class

EARLY MONARCHIES. Monarchies existed in many areas of Greece, such as SPARTA, ATHENS, and, especially, MYCENAE. The territory under a monarch's rule was organized around a town that had a central palace stronghold, where agricultural produce, luxury goods, and weapons were stored. The palace dominated the surrounding area both politically and economically. The *wanax*, or king, headed the palace center, and generals and other governmental officials reported directly to him. The central government distributed the surrounding lands among the people to farm, and it also organized the construction of roads, drainage systems, and the massive defensive walls that surrounded the palace. These palace settlements

were destroyed at the end of the Mycenaean period, and with one or two exceptions, monarchies disappeared from the mainland of Greece.

* **depose** to remove from high office

RISE OF THE ARISTOCRACY. The Dark Age of Greece, which lasted from about 1150 B.C. to 750 B.C., was a period of transition in Greek government. An aristocratic elite **deposed*** many of the kings and replaced the monarchies with oligarchies. The heads of aristocratic families served as warriors to defend the community as a whole. The warriors held great feasts for one another to display their status and power. Although some Greek cities retained this aristocracy until the end of the 400s B.C., the governments of most other cities changed greatly with the development of the **POLIS**, or independent city-state, beginning in the 800s B.C.

GREEK GOVERNMENT IN THE ARCHAIC PERIOD

* **Archaic** in Greek history, refers to the period between 750 B.C. and 500 B.C.

The polis developed, in part, because of two other changes that occurred during the Archaic* period. First, new sources of wealth arose, such as trade and craft manufacture. This weakened the economic status and political power of the traditional aristocratic elites. Second, a large new class of warriors, called the hoplites, emerged early in the 600s B.C., and they took over the traditional warrior role of the aristocrats. Hoplites often supported tyrant* leaders who opposed the ruling elites. The erosion in the power of the aristocracy opened the door for other forms of government, including democracy.

* **tyrant** absolute ruler

THE RISE OF TYRANNY. The hoplites were a large group of heavily armed troops that quickly evolved into a new political class. This group of warriors, which often comprised as much as one-third of the adult male citizens of a city-state, shared a sense of equality and solidarity. These feelings led, in turn, to a rejection of control by the aristocracy. Eventually, hoplite forces overthrew the governing elites in many city-states and instead supported a new group of leaders (tyrants). The Greeks used the term *tyrannos* to describe any leader who was not officially elected to his position.

The period of tyrannies began with the hoplite overthrow of the aristocracy in **CORINTH** in about 657 B.C. and the subsequent control of the city by the tyrant Cypselus. Tyranny spread rapidly to most of the larger cities in the area, including Athens. For more than a century, tyranny continued to be a common form of government in the Greek world. Among important Greek cities, only Sparta and Aegina did not have tyrants.

Tyrants were sometimes oppressive, selfish dictators who ignored the law, disregarded the community, and exercised control over their unwilling subjects through the use of force. Many tyrants spent a great deal on public buildings and festivals and on expanding trade, but they often imposed unpopular taxes to accomplish these ends. However, some tyrants were strong, capable leaders. Ironically, tyranny contributed to the development of democracy by helping break the power of the aristocratic elite. When tyrants were eventually overthrown, power seldom reverted back to the aristocrats. Instead, it often went to the people.

THE POLIS. During the Archaic period, the polis came to be the characteristic social and political organization of the Greek world. The great Greek

* **philosopher** scholar or thinker concerned with the study of ideas, including science

philosopher* ARISTOTLE even believed that the polis was a natural part of human existence, writing in his *Politics* that “man by nature is an animal of the polis.” This sentiment has also been expressed as “man is a political animal.”

Decision making and the settlement of legal disputes were two activities that were central to the polis. Major government issues were debated and decided in assemblies, which were regularly scheduled, open-air meetings attended by all adult male citizens who wished to participate in the affairs of the polis. A smaller council was often appointed or elected to coordinate the affairs of the assembly, but it remained answerable to the assembly. The law courts were also part of the political system of the polis.

The Greek city-states shared certain physical characteristics. They were centered on an urban settlement, usually with walls (and docks, if near a body of water). Each had a public square or marketplace called an AGORA. By 700 B.C., wealthier communities had begun to construct TEMPLES in and around the agora.

The few officials needed to run the affairs of the polis were appointed or elected by a show of hands in the assembly. Priests protected temple treasures and directed sacrifices and other rituals*. The generals oversaw the military and defended the polis. MAGISTRATES and other administrative officials enforced the laws and managed the affairs of the polis. Even though there were no formal checks on their powers, these officials usually submitted to the will of the assembly. The revenue required for the administration of the government was provided by tolls on ships using ports, taxes on sales in the marketplace, and government fees and fines. In times of emergency, wealthy families were called on to give large donations of money or supplies.

* **ritual** regularly followed routine, especially religious

As early as 700 B.C., the polis was accepted as the standard form of social and political organization in Greece. By the end of the Archaic period in 500 B.C., there were hundreds of such communities throughout Greece. As the Greeks colonized the western Mediterranean and the coast of Asia Minor, they spread the idea of the city-state to these areas as well. Because of this Greek influence, the polis was eventually adopted by the Etruscans and Romans in Italy. In the late 300s B.C., the conquests of ALEXANDER THE GREAT carried the concept of the polis to the Middle East and beyond.

* **codify** to arrange according to a system; to set down in writing

CODIFICATION OF LAW. Codifying* laws was another important development in Greek government during the Archaic period. The earliest known political constitution, the *Rhetra* of Sparta, dates to the 600s B.C. This document spelled out Sparta’s political organization and administrative structure, and it established the rights of the assembly.

The first law code of Athens was established by DRACO in about 620 B.C. Little is known about this code except that it was extremely severe—the term *draconian* now means excessively harsh or cruel. Draco’s code was apparently a last attempt by the Athenian aristocracy to control the common people through repressive laws.

About 595 B.C., an Athenian magistrate named SOLON established a code of laws that served as the basis of the Athenian legal system for the next 300 years. Solon’s law code, which covered both criminal and civil law, was based on two principles. The first principle was that laws must be fixed in writing and, therefore, not easily altered. Second, there must be equality

before the law—that is, laws must apply equally to both commoners and aristocrats. Solon also suggested reforms in the administration of the government that gave more power to people of nonaristocratic birth. Solon's code was not revised until the end of the 400s B.C., and even then, its basic principles were retained. Solon was remembered by later generations of Athenians as the founder of democracy.

* **hereditary** passed by inheritance from one generation to the next

THE CASE OF SPARTA. In several significant ways, the city-state of Sparta was an exception to the typical evolution of government in Greece during the Archaic period. Sparta began as a monarchy, as did many other Greek city-states, but it had two hereditary* kings who shared royal duties and privileges. Each king had a personal bodyguard of 300. Sparta also evolved into a rigid hoplite warrior state. Virtually all adult male citizens in Sparta were professional warriors, permanently exempt from all nonmilitary duties. Noncitizens, including a class of slaves called **HELOTS**, performed agricultural and nonmilitary work. To control the slave population, Sparta's warriors directed much of their effort internally, and Sparta became essentially a police state. Sparta's citizen assembly had an unprecedented amount of power, while the two Spartan kings were little more than figureheads—leaders in name only.

All male citizens of Sparta underwent intensive military training, starting in their youth. Rigid obedience to the military hierarchy was required throughout one's lifetime. Men lived together from youth to old age, which helped them develop a high degree of solidarity. Although Sparta's society was dominated by men, women attained a relatively high degree of freedom and social standing, including the right to own land.

* **utopian** referring to an ideal place

Although the Spartan system of government lasted for hundreds of years, the rigidity of the military training, the inefficiency of the hereditary dual-king system, and a low birth rate all combined to lead to Sparta's eventual downfall. Sparta lost most of its territory and slaves in the Battle of Leuctra in 371 B.C. However, Sparta became a model for some utopian* societies. Like most such societies, Sparta was organized according to a single unifying principle—in Sparta's case, the perfection of the hoplite class.

GREEK GOVERNMENT IN THE CLASSICAL PERIOD

* **classical** in Greek history, refers to the period of great political and cultural achievement from about 500 B.C. to 323 B.C.

During the classical* period, the role of Greek government continued to be the management of religious, military, and administrative matters, although these functions were becoming more complex, detailed, and diverse. Most of what is known about Greek government during the classical period comes from Athenian democracy. What made the government of Athens different—and truly democratic—was the development of the concept of equal political rights for all citizens, not just for the aristocracy or the hoplite class. The citizen assembly held all political power, and the influence of the aristocracy was weakened by the establishment of a lottery system for the random selection of public officials. Many of these reforms were instituted by the Athenian statesman **CLEISTHENES** in the late 500s B.C. However, at this time, much of the adult population—including women, men who were not Athenian citizens, and slaves—did not share the rights of citizenship.

Athenian democracy itself evolved during the classical period. During the 400s B.C., government issues were almost always decided at the meetings of the assembly. This form of democracy, called customary democracy, was replaced by a constitutional democracy in which the assembly was required to abide by the written laws of the city-state.

CUSTOMARY DEMOCRACY. During the classical period, the assembly met regularly, probably at least once a month. This body of citizens was responsible for all political decisions, and it could change laws at will. The Athenian assembly held about one-fifth of the male citizen body. The **quorum*** needed for a number of decisions was 6,000. Numbers were not counted, but such decisions could only be taken if the assembly were clearly full.

Another important political institution of this period in Athens was the Council of 500, which met daily and regulated the business of the assembly. The council was chosen annually by lottery and consisted of 500 male Athenian citizens over the age of 30. In any given generation, roughly one-third of adult male citizens served on the council. Thus, most citizens had a good chance of being involved directly in the business and administration of the state. In fact, Athenian citizens of this time period were involved in the workings of the government to an extent that no other complex society has achieved before or since.

The carrying out of government business was entrusted to boards of officials that were supervised by the Council of 500. The boards were chosen for a year at a time, also by lottery, and they were accountable for their actions upon leaving office. The military was led by a board of ten generals who were elected directly by the people. Although the lottery system gave most citizens an equal opportunity to participate in government, it also led to inefficiency and incompetence.

In principle, the assembly had final say in all matters of state. For example, it could depose magistrates or conduct new elections. In reality, however, the assembly was controlled by just a few leaders. At first, the influential people tended to be traditional leaders, such as aristocrats and generals. The assembly was often led by people who were especially persuasive in gathering the support of their fellow citizens to decide issues a certain way.

PERICLES led the assembly, virtually unchallenged, from 460 to 429 B.C. He was an aristocrat who used populist* measures to maintain his influence. For example, Pericles constructed public buildings and gave citizens land overseas and revenues to maintain it. In fact, Pericles was so influential that the period of his leadership is referred to as the Age of Pericles. The Greek historian THUCYDIDES said of this period that Athens was “in name a democracy, but in fact the rule of the first man.” It was during this period that the word *demokratia*, meaning “rule of the people,” was first used to refer to a government like that of Athens.

When Pericles died in 429 B.C., Athens was, for the first time, controlled by an assembly without strong leadership. Demagogues—leaders who use popular prejudice and make false claims for personal gain—took advantage of this lack of leadership. Although many of the demagogues were men of wealth, they cultivated an aggressively populist image of

* **quorum** number of members of an organization required to conduct business

THE ARCHONS OF ATHENS

The political executive in many Greek city-states was the archon, meaning “leader.” Although the archonship was a relatively narrow job, it was a prestigious one. The three senior Athenian archons were the *basileus* (king), the *polemarchos* (war leader), and the *eponymos*, who had jurisdiction over cases of property rights and inheritance and who gave his name to the calendar year. At the end of an archon’s term in office, he joined the judiciary council known as the *Aeropagus*.

* **populist** referring to a belief in the rights of the common people



GOVERNMENT, GREEK

* **rhetoric** art of using words effectively in speaking or writing

themselves, using their powers of rhetoric* to persuade the assembly to support them. Although some of the demagogues were better managers than their aristocratic predecessors, the lack of a strong democratic leader led to a brief period of oligarchy in the late 400s B.C., when Athens was ruled by the Thirty Tyrants. The tyrants were soon overthrown, and their reign of terror was followed by a new type of democracy.

CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY. During the 300s B.C., constitutional democracy emerged in Athens in reaction to the role of the assembly during the preceding government. Some people thought that the assembly had grown too powerful and disrespectful of the law. The Athenians revised Solon's law code. Laws were passed that prohibited the Council of 500 and the assembly from making decisions that conflicted with the law, or from changing the law without following a fairly complicated legal procedure. The passage of these laws effectively removed the right of legislating from the assembly. While in the 400s B.C. the assembly ruled Athens, in the 300s B.C. the law ruled Athens, and the assembly was required to abide by the law. Even during this period of constitutional democracy, however, some assembly leaders continued to gain and maintain influence. By using their wealth to advantage, a handful of rich citizens were able to influence the public. By the end of the classical period, Athens, like many Greek city-states, was a democracy in name only but really under the control of an aristocracy.

GREEK GOVERNMENT IN THE HELLENISTIC AGE

After Alexander the Great's successful conquest of Persia and his death in 323 B.C., his empire was thrown into chaos by the bitter Wars of the Successors that lasted until 301 B.C. Most of Alexander's overseas conquests were converted into two huge Hellenistic* kingdoms, the PTOLEMAIC DYNASTY in Egypt and the SELEUCID DYNASTY in Syria and Mesopotamia.

The dynasties* were complex bureaucracies*. Greeks ran the governments in both kingdoms and exploited the native people of the regions they controlled. The dynastic leaders raised large revenues, which they used to mount showy displays of power, support the arts and literature, and carry on international rivalries. These practices ultimately weakened the dynasties and decreased their chances of remaining independent. Both kingdoms gradually declined in power, and the Roman Empire annexed* the lands of the Seleucid dynasty in 64 B.C. and those of the Ptolemaic dynasty in 30 B.C.

There were also many smaller states and kingdoms that emerged after the death of Alexander the Great, and for the first time, groups of states and kingdoms banded together for mutual protection. The development of such confederacies helped to overcome the fragmentation that had been caused by the polis, but it also meant an end to the polis as an independent political unit. However, even the confederacies could not resist the superior military and political organization of Rome, and by the 140s B.C., most had fallen to Roman rule. (*See also* Citizenship; Class Structure, Greek; Federalism; Law, Greek; Monarchs, Greek.)

* **Hellenistic** referring to the Greek-influenced culture of the Mediterranean world during the three centuries after Alexander the Great, who died in 323 B.C.

* **dynasty** succession of rulers from the same family or group

* **bureaucracy** large departmental organization that performs the activities of government

* **annex** to add a territory to an existing state