



Solon

Athens Builds a Limited Democracy

The idea of representative government also began to take root in some city-states, particularly Athens. Like other city-states, Athens went through power struggles between rich and poor. However, Athenians avoided major political upheavals by making timely reforms. Athenian reformers moved toward **democracy**, rule by the people. In Athens, citizens participated directly in political decision making.

Building Democracy The first step toward democracy came when a nobleman named Draco took power. In 621 BC, Draco developed a legal code that attempted to meet the needs of Athenian society. The code was based on the idea that all Athenians, rich and poor, were equal under the law. Draco's code dealt very harshly with criminals, making death the punishment for practically every crime. It also upheld such practices as debt slavery, in which debtors worked as slaves to repay their debts. The harshness of Draco's laws did not resolve the tensions between rich and poor, however. It only made things worse.

Social Structures More far-reaching democratic reforms were introduced by Solon (SOH·luhn), who came to power in 594 BC. Stating that no citizen should own another citizen, Solon outlawed debt slavery. He organized all Athenian citizens into four social classes according to wealth. Only members of the top three classes could hold political office. However, all citizens, regardless of class, could participate in the Athenian assembly. Solon also introduced the legal concept that any citizen could bring charges against wrongdoers.

Forms of Government

Monarchy	Aristocracy	Oligarchy	Direct Democracy
State ruled by a king	State ruled by nobility	State ruled by a small group of citizens	State ruled by its citizens
Rule is hereditary	Rule is hereditary and based on family ties, social rank, wealth	Rule is based on wealth or ability	Rule is based on citizenship
Some rulers claim divine right	Social status and wealth support rulers' authority	Ruling group controls military	Majority rule decides vote
Practiced in Mycenae by 2000 BC	Practiced in Athens prior to 594 BC	Practiced in Sparta by 500 BC	Practiced in Athens by about 500 BC

Even though Solon outlawed debt slavery, Athens continued to be a slave-owning society. Persians and other non-Greek peoples from neighboring lands were enslaved and put to work. So long as slaves toiled at labors such as working in silver mines, the Athenian aristocracy was afforded time to develop wealth and pursue cultural interests.

Further Reforms Around 500 BC, the Athenian leader Cleisthenes (KLYS•thuh•neeZ) introduced further reforms. He broke up the power of the nobility by organizing citizens into ten groups based on where they lived rather than on their wealth. He also increased the power of the assembly by allowing all citizens to submit laws for debate and passage. Cleisthenes then created the Council of Five Hundred. This body proposed laws and counseled the assembly. Council members were chosen by lot, or at random.

The reforms of Cleisthenes allowed Athenian citizens to participate in a limited democracy. However, citizenship was restricted to a relatively small number of Athenians. Only free adult males were considered citizens. Women, slaves, and foreigners were excluded from citizenship and had few rights.

Athenian Education For the most part, only the sons of wealthy families received formal education. Schooling began around the age of seven and largely prepared boys to be good citizens. They studied reading, grammar,

Reading Check
Contrast
How is Athenian
democracy different
from modern
American democracy?

poetry, history, mathematics, and music. Because citizens were expected to debate issues in the assembly, boys also received training in logic and public speaking. And since the Greeks believed that it was important to train and develop the body, part of each day was spent in athletic activities. When they got older, boys went to military school to help them prepare for another important duty of citizenship—defending Athens.

Athenian girls did not attend school. Rather, they were educated at home by their mothers and other female members of the household. They learned about child-rearing, weaving cloth, preparing meals, managing the household, and other skills that helped them become good wives and mothers. Some women were able to take their education farther and learned to read and write. A few even became accomplished writers. Even so, most women had very little to do with Athenian life outside the boundaries of family and home.

Sparta Builds a Military State

Located in the southern part of Greece known as the Peloponnesus (pehl•uh•puh•NEE•sus), Sparta was nearly cut off from the rest of Greece by the Gulf of Corinth. In outlook and values, Sparta contrasted sharply with the other city-states, Athens in particular. Instead of a democracy, Sparta built a military state.

Sparta Dominates Messenians Around 725 BC, Sparta conquered the neighboring region of Messenia and took over the land. The Messenians became **helots** (HEHL•uhts), peasants forced to stay on the land they worked. Each year, the Spartans demanded half of the helots' crops. In about 650 BC, the Messenians, resentful of the Spartans' harsh rule, revolted. The Spartans, who were outnumbered eight to one, just barely put down the revolt. Shocked at their vulnerability, they dedicated themselves to making Sparta a strong city-state.

Sparta's Government and Society Spartan government had several branches. An assembly, which was composed of all Spartan citizens, elected officials and voted on major issues. The Council of Elders, made up of 30 older citizens, proposed laws on which the assembly voted. Five elected officials carried out the laws passed by the assembly. These men also controlled education and prosecuted court cases. In addition, two kings ruled over Sparta's military forces.

The Spartan social order consisted of several groups. The first were citizens descended from the original inhabitants of the region. This group included the ruling families who owned the land. A second group, noncitizens who were free, worked in commerce and industry. The helots, at the bottom of Spartan society, were little better than slaves. They worked in the fields or as house servants.

Spartan Daily Life From around 600 until 371 BC, Sparta had the most powerful army in Greece. However, the Spartan people paid a high price for their military supremacy. All forms of individual expression were

discouraged. As a result, Spartans did not value the arts, literature, or other artistic and intellectual pursuits. Spartans valued duty, strength, and discipline over freedom, individuality, beauty, and learning.

Since men were expected to serve in the army until the age of 60, their daily life centered on military training. Boys left home when they were 7 and moved into army barracks, where they stayed until they reached the age of 30. They spent their days marching, exercising, and fighting. They undertook these activities in all kinds of weather, wearing only light tunics and no shoes. At night, they slept without blankets on hard benches. Their daily diet consisted of little more than a bowl of coarse black porridge. Those who wanted more to eat were encouraged to steal food. Such training produced tough, resourceful soldiers.

Spartan girls also led hardy lives. They received some military training, and they also ran, wrestled, and played sports. Like boys, girls were taught to put service to Sparta above everything—even love of family. A legend says that Spartan women told husbands and sons going to war to “come back *with* your shield or *on* it.” As adults, Spartan women had considerable freedom, especially in running the family estates when their husbands were on active military service. Such freedom surprised men from other Greek city-states. This was particularly true of Athens, where women were expected to remain mostly out of sight and quietly raise children.

Reading Check

Compare

How would you compare the ideals of Spartan and Athenian societies?