

Lesson 3 The City-State and Democracy

MAIN IDEAS

Government Instead of being a unified country, Greece was organized into separate city-states.

Government Different political systems evolved in the various city-states. Some governments changed because of conflicts between rich and poor.

Government The city-state of Athens developed democracy, which is rule by the people.

The Rise of City-States

ESSENTIAL QUESTION How was Greece organized politically?

Greek City-States

- Geographic features separated Greece into small regions
- Form of government in Greece, including colonies, was the city-state
 - the **polis**—Greek name for a city-state—common around 700 B.C.
- Most city-states were small—fewer than 20,000 people—due to geography
 - Athens and Sparta were largest
 - small size caused people to form a close community

Layout of the City

- Center of life was the agora—open space for business, gatherings
 - political discussions, festivals, athletic contests
 - statues, temples, public buildings
- Many cities had a fortified hilltop—acropolis, or “highest city”
 - used for military at first, but later had temples, palaces

REVIEW QUESTION

What was the role of the agora in a Greek city?

Forms of Government

ESSENTIAL QUESTION What different political systems evolved in the city-states of Greece?

Monarchs and Aristocrats

- Each city-state was independent, used its own form of government
 - some kept political systems for centuries, others changed systems
- Earliest governments were monarchies ruled by king or queen
- **Aristocracy**—upper class, nobility; in Greece, born into a high family
- Most city-states, like Corinth, began as monarchies
 - by 700s B.C., most were ruled by an aristocracy

Oligarchy

- **Oligarchy**—means “rule by the few”
 - people rule because of wealth, land, not birth

Tyrants

- In monarchy, aristocracy, oligarchy, poor lack power—at times rebelled
 - wealthy person seeking power could use anger of poor to gain support
- **Tyrant**—someone who took power illegally, was not of royal birth
 - not necessarily cruel in Greece—some tyrants helped the poor
- Tyrants helped overthrow oligarchy, united people for change

REVIEW QUESTION

How were oligarchy and aristocracy similar?

Athens Builds a Limited Democracy

ESSENTIAL QUESTION How did limited democracy develop in Athens?

Citizenship

- People learned they could influence government, demanded more power
- Greeks invented idea of citizenship
- **Citizen**—person loyal to government and protected by government
 - in Greece, must be born to free citizens, either upper or lower class
 - in much of Greece, only upper-class citizens had power
- Lower-class citizens demanded power; slowly created major change

Solon and Cleisthenes

- Poor farmers who owed money worked for others or became slaves
- Solon, elected around 594 B.C., made reforms to prevent revolt
 - no citizen could be enslaved; social class based on wealth, not birth
 - all citizens could serve in assembly, elect leaders
- Around 500 B.C., Cleisthenes took more power away from nobles
 - organized citizens into groups by residence, not wealth

Direct Democracy

- In **democracy**, all citizens make political decisions in government
- Athens had direct democracy— all citizens meet to decide on laws
 - United States has indirect democracy— people elect representatives

Limited Democracy

- Athens had limited democracy— only free adult males were citizens
 - women, slaves, foreigners could not take part in government
 - noncitizens could not become citizens

REVIEW QUESTION

How did reformers change the government of Athens?

Lesson Summary

- The people of Greece lived in independent city-states.
- Greek city-states had various types of government: monarchy, oligarchy, and direct democracy.
- Over time, the male citizens of Athens gained the power to make political decisions.

Why It Matters Now . . .

Athens is often called the birthplace of democracy. Many people in today's world are seeking to replace other forms of government with democracy.