

GREECE

2400 years ago

Issue 6

HOW DID THE GREEK GOVERNMENTS CHANGE OVER THE YEARS?

Aristotle said, "He who is to be a good ruler must first have been ruled." American leaders are not born into the job of President, like some other countries ruled by a king or aristocracy. Instead, voters elect the president. Each president has been "ruled" by other elected officials. Therefore, American voters have to be careful in choosing their leaders in a democracy.

Greece is often compared to the United States because of its history of democracy. In this and the next lesson, you will not only learn about the changes Greek government went through over time but also compare and contrast Greek democracy with that of the United States.

Aristotle divided the government types into categories: monarchies, oligarchies, tyrannies, and democracies. He was born in 350 B.C., over 2300 years ago, and we still use his definitions to categorize governments today!



The ruins of Sparta.

Greek Suffixes:

ism= forms nouns and means "the act, state, or theory of"

ist=forms nouns from verbs like copy becomes copyist (a person that copies things).

ize= forms verbs from nouns and adjectives like modernize (to become modern)

gram= something written or drawn = cardiogram (heart information from a test)

graph= something written or drawn & the instrument used to write or draw= seismograph (recording the size of an earthquake)

Early in its history, Greece, like Mesopotamia, was made up of many city-states, each with their own laws and traditions. Most city-states had **monarchies** for their government. Mono means "one" and archy is defined as "ruler". In the epic Iliad by Homer, many kings came together to fight for Greece. These monarchies had almost totally disappeared by about 1200 B.C. with the exception of Sparta. Sparta had two kings, often brothers or cousins, so that one could stay home and rule while the other went off to lead the men in war. You will read more about Sparta in later lessons.

Other city-states eventually evolved into **oligarchies**. **Olig** is a root word that means "rule by few," so the government was ruled by a few rich men. These few men took over the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the government. They were in charge of the economy, making decisions about trade and pricing of goods. As generals, these rich men made decisions about allies and enemies. They also were the judges and the jury members.

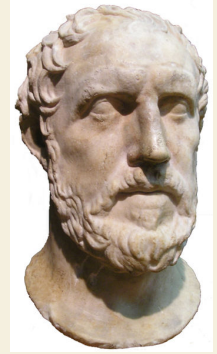
Eventually, some aristocrats became more popular than others and were given sole control. These leaders were **tyrants**. One of these leaders was named Draco, the ruler of Athens in the 621 B.C.E. He made laws so harsh that almost every transgression was punishable by death. Today we call very harsh laws "draconian." Draco did several important things in his reign as tyrant. He **codified**, or wrote down, the first laws in Athens. He also made **vendettas**, or killing people as a punishment without using the law, illegal by saying that the government was to punish murder, not the family of the murdered.

Around 590 B.C.E., a ruler named Solon came to power in Athens and relaxed the harsh laws. He made every free man in the area a citizen with a vote in the new government and he helped the economy by encouraging the production of olive oil and wine, two very **lucrative** trading products. He was still the ruler and the aristocracy was still in charge, but it was a step toward freedom.

But in 561 B.C.E., Peisistratus, an Athenian **aristocrat**, tried to take power from the oligarchy and become a tyrant. He failed in his first attempt to take over the government of the city and was driven out, but eventually he hired **mercenaries**, or hired fighters, to help him take the city over in a popular **coup**.



By 546 B.C.E., he was in complete control as a tyrant. A tyrant rules like a king, but his family has no right to rule after he is gone. His right to rule is based solely on his power, usually of the military. Many Greek tyrants, like Peisistratus, were peaceful and good rulers. He ruled for 19 years. He lowered taxes and increased Athens' economy. He banished those who opposed him and took their lands. Like Robin Hood, he gave the land to the poor (and his supporters). He built Athens up and was well-liked by Athenian citizen.



Thucydides

However, by 510, Peisistratus tried to create a monarchy and have his two sons become tyrants after his reign. With the help of Sparta, a wealthy family overthrew the sons. Sparta then put their hand-picked Athenian leaders in the government. The Athenians would not stand for a new and terrible tyrant. They had some freedoms and did not want to give them up. Cleisthenes was a wealthy aristocrat who could have seized power, but instead, he formed Athen's first **democracy**. He reformed the government, giving equal powers to each part of government: the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the government. The Athenians refined their government over the 170 years that the government was a democracy. Athens became a center for art and literature, rich in architecture. Unfortunately for the Athenians, the Macedonians from the north conquered and ruled over the Greeks.

The Athenian democracy lasted a mere 170 years. It does not seem like a very long time, but you should realize that the American democracy has only been around for just over 200 years. In those 200 years, our democracy has almost been changed to other forms of government several times. George Washington was a man similar to Cleisthenes. He was a wealthy, well-liked leader poised to be a tyrant or a king. He, like Cleisthenes, refused to exert his power solo, but created a democracy based on freedom. Like Greece, the United States only allowed some Americans to vote. Slaves were not allowed to vote for 80 years and, likewise, women were not allowed to vote for 130 years. However long it took for the voting franchise to become equal, both Greek and American democracies allowed for more freedom for all citizens.

Write a word using each suffix (not using the example words.)

1. ism _____

2. ist _____

3. ize _____

4. gram _____

5. graph _____

1. Vocabulary: Oligarchy: _____

2. Monarchy: _____

3. Tyrant: _____

4. Democracy: _____

5. Codified: _____

6. Vendetta: _____

7. Lucrative: _____

8. Mercenary: _____

9. Coup: _____

1. What is the difference between a monarchy and an oligarchy?

2. Describe the rule of Draco, the tyrant.

3. Discuss what Cleisthenes did for Athenian government.

