

Creating the Greek City-State

With the collapse of the Mycenaean civilization at the hands of the invading Dorians, city life in ancient Greece nearly evaporated. The culture on the Peloponnesus became more primitive. The arts of pottery and metallurgy reverted to simpler designs. Political systems became little more than tribal. People in the Aegean region forgot old trade connections. They even lost the ability to read and write. This is one reason the Dark Age of Greece (from 1100 to 800 B.C.) was so dark.

The villages of the Dark Age operated independently from one another. Each was ruled by a tribal leader called a *basileus*, a Greek word meaning "king."

About 800 B.C., the Greek villages began developing into larger units centered on towns. Such towns were typically built on a high place and consisted primarily of walled fortifications protecting a marketplace, where people bartered and bought goods. Such towns developed into a new type of Greek community—the *polis*, or city-state, which became the most significant contribution made by the ancient Greeks to our modern concept of government. The polis consisted of the town or city and the surrounding land. The word polis gives us our word *political*.

After 800 B.C., city-states emerged throughout the Aegean world. On the Greek mainland, the city-states of Athens, Sparta, Thebes, and Corinth emerged. On the west coast of Anatolia or Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), the Greeks established the city of Miletus. On islands in the Aegean Sea, the city-states of Naxos and Samos were created.

The city-states of the Greeks differed from one another in size and population. Greek Sparta was three times larger than Athens (3000 square miles vs. 1000 square miles), yet most city-states were smaller than 100 square miles.

Sparta and Athens were not only two of the largest city states, they were also the most populous. Each boasted a population of between 300,000 and 350,000 people.

Review and Write

The Greek city-states operated with different types of government. Define the government listed below and express your opinion about each one. Would you have liked living in any of these types of cities?

Five Types of City-State Government

	Definition	Opinion Concerning
Monarchy		
Aristocracy		
Oligarchy		
Tyranny		
Democracy		

Inventing the Greek Alphabet

The rise of the polis in ancient Greece engendered two important developments. One was the revival of trade between the Mediterranean peoples and other cities and civilizations in the Aegean world. The other was the creation of a new Greek alphabet.

As trade systems expanded throughout the Mediterranean, so did the need for keeping records of transactions. Early Greek writing relied on the use of symbols to communicate syllables.

The new system of writing, however, borrowed an alphabet from the Phoenicians. (The Greeks traded with these sea-going people located on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean.) This alphabet assigned symbols for individual sounds.

The Phoenician alphabet of 22 letters, however, did not seem complete to the Greeks. It did not include vowels. The result was that sometimes words were difficult to understand. The Greeks changed that by adding vowels. In the Greek language, the vowels are alpha (A), epsilon (E), iota (I), omega (O), and upsilon (U). (Our word *alphabet* comes from the combination of the first two Greek letters *alpha* and *beta*.)

This change helped to create a simple alphabet which the Greeks used to develop their writing. It was a system easily learned by many people. Because of its simplicity, the Greek alphabet helped spread literacy throughout Greece and the Aegean region. They did not have to rely on a class of special writers, or scribes, who monopolized the skill of reading and writing.

Therefore, many Greeks were able to communicate with their written language. They kept their own household and trade records, and managed the titles of their property. This capacity to control one's own business helped to expand trade even more, making

the ancient Greeks some of the greatest traders in the Mediterranean world.

By the 8th century B.C., the Greeks were busy establishing trade colonies throughout the Mediterranean Sea. Thousands of people migrated from the Greek mainland. The greatest migration period was between 735 and 600 B.C.

Colonies were built in southern Italy and on the island of Sicily. Others could be found as far west as

modern-day eastern Spain and southern France.

Important Greek-based communities, such as Croton on the southern end of Italy and Syracuse in Sicily, developed and flourished. Between the Aegean and Black Seas, the

Greek city of Byzantium was built. This site would become an important trading community between the Persians and the Greeks.

Other Greek colonies developed into rivals for Persian trade. In time, this rivalry led to war between the powerful Persian Empire and the Greek city-states in the 5th century B.C.

Greek Alphabet			English Sound			Greek Alphabet			English Sound		
A α	alpha	arm	N ν	nu	now	Ξ ξ	xi	ax			
B β	beta	but	Ο ο	omicron	for	Π π	pi	pie			
Γ γ	gamma	get	Ρ ρ	rho	ran	Σ σ	sigma	sat			
Δ δ	delta	do	Τ τ	tau	tar	Υ υ	upsilon	rude			
Ε ε	epsilon	held	Φ φ	phi	fill	Χ χ	chi	elkhorn			
Ζ ζ	zeta	adze	Ψ ψ	psi	upset	Ω ω	omega	hold			
Η η	eta	they									
Θ θ	theta	thin									
Ι ι	iota	machine									
Κ κ	kappa	kite									
Λ λ	lambda	lamb									
Μ μ	mu	man									

Research and Write

The English language has the largest vocabulary of any language in the world. This is due, in part, to its rich classical heritage. Many English words come from Greek words, some of which came to us indirectly through Latin. Some of these words are: *atom*, *biology*, *botany*, *architect*, *music*, *poetry*, *economics*, and *zoology*.

Look up each of these words in a good dictionary and find out what they meant in the original Greek language.

Sparta: Raising an Army

Each city-state in Greece was unique in population, size, and government. Some city-states were unique in other ways. One of the largest city-states in ancient Greece was Sparta.

Located on the Peloponnesus, Sparta contained at least 300,000 people. Its government was an oligarchy. Five men, known as *ephors*, or overseers, wielded great power. Spartan government also included a council of 30 members including 2 kings and 28 men over 60 years old. Known as the *Gerousia*, or "council of old men," this assembly created proposals which were voted on by all free adult Spartan males.

Between these political groups, Sparta was a city which expected its people to obey the laws of the city-state. Yet the Spartans never wrote down their laws. They taught their children to obey and live rigid lives by training them as members of a highly disciplined army.

Nothing in Sparta was more important than service to the city-state through being a well-disciplined soldier. Nearly from birth, Spartan life revolved around the army and its discipline. Young boys were expected to leave home at age 7 and live in barracks with other youths until age 30.

These years were spent training for military service. Boys and young men regularly exercised, practiced with weapons, and hunted. Spartan discipline was tough. Boys were not allowed to speak without permission. They were not fed well so that they would learn how to steal food without being caught.

A Spartan story tells of one young man who stole a fox, hid it under his tunic, and allowed the animal to rip his chest open, rather than be caught with the fox and fail at being stealthy.

At age 20, Spartan men joined the regular military service, although their training was not considered finished. Such men could marry, but they did not live with their wives. They still lived in the common barracks. To visit their wives at night, Spartan husbands were supposed to sneak into their own wives' bedrooms without being seen.

Women in Sparta were also supposed to endure rigorous training. They were not expected to fight, but were to remain strong and fit for child-birth. The greatest



honor a woman could pay to her city-state was to bear healthy children. In fact, only women who died in childbirth had their names placed on their grave markers as an honor to their sacrifice.

To keep healthy, Spartan women exercised vigorously. Sometimes they worked out alongside the men, both sexes exercising in the nude.

The sacrifice of army life continued for another 10 years. Soldiers ate together in a common mess or meal, and their usual food was legendary for being bad-tasting. The basic Spartan meal consisted of a black broth or soup made from pork boiled in blood, salt, and vinegar.

By age 30, the training was completed. Spartan soldiers could return to their homes and live with their wives. Their service continued until age 60.

Review and Write

1. In Sparta, community service and sacrifice came first. Family life was considered less important. Do you believe a society should expect someone to surrender his or her family life in service to the government?
2. Young Spartan men were raised to serve in the military. Based on your reading of this page, make a list of anything Spartan boys were required to do which seems unreasonable to you.

Athens: Democracy in Greece

While the Spartans developed a military-based society, the people of another rising city-state were busy creating a different world for themselves.

Athens was similar to Sparta in some ways. Both city-states had large populations and extensive lands. But Athens came to be led differently. The city also became one of the most important trade centers and colonizers in the entire Mediterranean.

By the 8th century B.C., Athens was a united polis. Located north of Sparta at a distance of 100 miles, Athens controlled some of the best land in Greece—land abundant in olive trees and vineyards.

Prior to 700 B.C., Athens was ruled as an aristocracy. A representative assembly called the *ecclesia* existed, but it had little power. The aristocracy came to control so much of the economic and agricultural life of Athens that the common people began to talk about revolt.

The ruling aristocracy, in an attempt to avoid revolution and rioting, gave one merchant, who was known for his wisdom, the power to deal with the issues which were causing so much discontent.

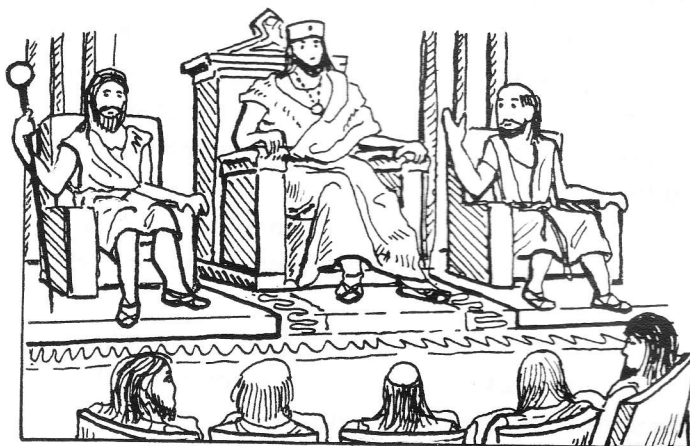
His name was Solon and he worked hard to introduce land reform and economic change to Athens. Solon also introduced some elements of democracy to government by allowing the poor to exercise veto power over the *ecclesia*.

Other rulers who followed Solon were tyrannical and his reforms did not last. However, by 507 B.C., a cunning aristocrat named Clisthenes gained power and helped bring stability to Athens. He introduced a new representative system to his city-state.

Clisthenes divided the population of Athens into 10 tribes, so that each tribe was representative of the whole population. Each tribe elected 50 citizens to represent them as members of a Council of 500. This body determined policy and made decisions for the city and its citizens.

Although Clisthenes only ruled for one year, his system lasted long after his influence. By 487 B.C., democracy in Athens was in place. Here's how it worked: Power rested in an Athenian assembly, which was made up of all the male citizens of the city-state. All important decisions, such as going to war or raising emergency taxes, were made by the

assembly. Forty thousand men qualified for membership in the assembly. (Generally, as many as 5000 men might actually meet together at any one time.)



In addition, a council was selected which had executive responsibilities in carrying out the decisions of the assembly. Special powers were also granted to a court, called the *Heliaea*, made up of several hundred men. The *Heliaea* heard court cases and lawsuits.

When seen in combination, the Athenian assembly (the *ecclesia*), the Council of 500, and the *Heliaea* constituted a democracy based on legislative, executive, and judicial branches.

However, despite these developments in creating Athenian democracy, many people were excluded from participation. Women, people from other city-states and countries, and slaves were not allowed any roles. This kept three out of four adults in Athens from participating in its newly formed democracy.

Research and Write

Athenian democracy was based on having a legislative, executive, and judicial branch. Study the government of the United States and explain what groups and individuals constitute these three important branches of our government.