

Oligarchy = govt where a few wealthy aristocrats hold power

## ATHENS AND DEMOCRACY

The oligarchy of Sparta was radically different from the type of government practiced by the Athenians, who set up a *democracy*. The constitution was not in the hands of the few; rather, it was controlled by the many—the *demos* or people. Four men were responsible for the development of democracy in Athens. Solon, in 594 B.C., was the first. He made social and political reforms to lessen the conflict between the rich and poor in the city. In order to free all citizens from debt and enslavement, he cancelled all debts and abolished slavery. Politically, he reduced the power of the wealthy aristocrats by giving more power to the people.

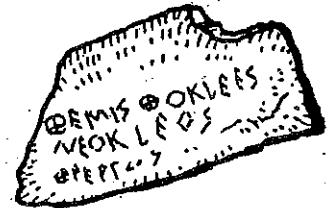
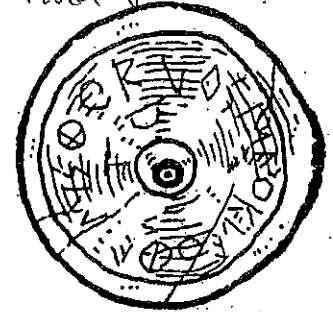
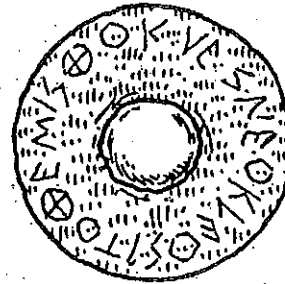
The government already consisted of two leaders called *archons* who held the executive power. These men were advised by an aristocratic council of elders called the Council of the Areopagus (the Areopagus was a hill in Athens where its meetings were held). To these Solon now added three new political bodies that gave more power to the average citizen: a People's Court where all disputes, public or private, were settled by the people; the People's Assembly (to which all Athenian citizens belonged) that decided on the matters of the state; and a Council of 400 (which consisted of 100 citizens from each of the four tribes that made up the Athenian citizenry) that prepared business for the Assembly to consider. Solon's reforms, however, pleased neither the populace, because not enough power was given, nor the aristocrats, because their power was decreased. Unrest followed.

Peisistratus then became tyrant in 560 B.C. Among his benefits to the city, he continued the process of democratization by redistributing the land (previously owned by the rich nobles) to farmers and making loans to poor farmers to start anew.

In 508 B.C. a third influential figure, Cleisthenes, came to power in Athens. He did much to develop Athenian democracy. Cleisthenes divided the citizens into ten new tribes (from the four old tribes) and mixed them up so that no one tribe was dominated by the rich as had been the case before. He increased the Council of 400 to the Council of 500, which now consisted of 50 citizens from each tribe. He also introduced the practice of *ostracism*. Every year the Athenians could banish from the city any man they deemed threatening. This was done by writing his name on a potshard or *ostraka*. The man with the most votes was then exiled for ten years.

It was in the time of Pericles (461–429 B.C.), one of Athens' best statesmen, that democracy was completely attained. He made all offices in the government payable, and all officers were elected by lot rather than by vote, so that even the poorest citizens now could participate in the government.

Athenian democracy has influenced many democratic governments in world history, including the American governmental system.



Examples of ostraka (potshards) cast against Themistocles

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## CHALLENGES

1. Define democracy.

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2. In which city was democracy first developed?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Which Athenian leaders were responsible for the development of democracy?

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Why was the aristocratic council of elders called the Council of the Areopagus?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. What is ostracism?

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Who were the real leaders of Athens?

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Which government today was influenced by the Athenian democracy?

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Who divided up the citizens of Athens into ten new tribes from the four old ones?

\_\_\_\_\_

9. Which Athenian leader started off the process of democracy?

\_\_\_\_\_

10. Why were Solon's reforms not completely successful in appeasing the aristocracy and the people?

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