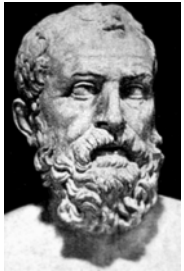


The Rise of Greek Democracy

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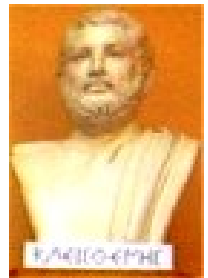
To understand the rise of Greek democracy, we have to look at the differences between our modern nation-state, which is a large collection of people, cities, and states, and the city-states like ancient Athens, which occupied the urban center of Athens and the surrounding countryside of Attica. The compact size of the city-state enabled **interpersonal communication** and greater participation in the political affairs of the city. Thus, we can say that, while we have a representative democracy, insofar as we elect politicians to represent our districts in the city council, the Ohio general assembly, or the senate in Washington, Ancient Athenians had a **participatory democracy**, insofar as the citizens, (*adult males over 30*) partook daily and directly in their political affairs.



How did Athenian democracy emerge? It is generally agreed that **Solon**, [pic] who died in 559 BC, laid the foundations of Athenian democracy. What did he do? He was a reformer who first transformed agriculture and the economy to make Athens **self-sufficient**. In 594, he was invited to reform the political system and draw up new laws for Athens. He first **cancelled all debts** and set free all those **enslaved by debt** since failure to pay debt used to result in that person becoming a bond slave to his creditor. He also ended the practice of using birth as criterion for office. And then he **created four classes of people** according to what each produced.

To break down the power of noble families, he made the chief administrative positions (archon, polemarch, and king archon), previously limited to the aristocracy, now **open to all citizens** according to wealth. This was the first major step by which positions of power were opened to other citizens even if they were still limited by wealth. He introduced a council of 400, one hundred from each tribe. Of major importance was his move to **inscribe laws** on wooden tablets, *axons* [αξων]. Each citizen was expected to take an **oath to obey laws**.

The significance of Solon lay in the fact that he conducted his work **constitutionally**. He prevented tyranny by gradually giving more power to the people. His reforms marked a permanent improvement but, as is the case with strong leadership, he displeased many. After his departure, **Peisistratus** took over, having established a **constitutional tyranny**. When he lost his power in 527 BC, Athenians had to deal with a series of crises in both domestic and foreign affairs and called upon aristocrat **Cleisthenes** [pic], 570-508, [Κλεισθενης].



Cleisthenes realized that Solon's reforms had to be revised as the authority still lay with tribes and clans. He knew that he had to break the power of these **blood-based organizations**. So what he did was to distinguish three regions: city (αστοι), coast (παραλια inland of Attica (μεσογαια). He also created new groupings called φηλαε (tribes), which were composed of arbitrary groupings of towns from the three parts: city, coast, and inland. This move created **territorial units** that cut down the influence of the **clans**.

Cleisthenes introduced measures that were truly democratic and progressive. For instance, he created a Council of 500 representing the ten tribes. The delegates from each tribe were chosen by lot. The Council prepared the business for the **General Assembly**, known as the *Ecclesia*. There were built-in measures to prevent the usurpation of power. Each tribe, for instance, took its turn to serve as presiding committee for entire council. No citizen was allowed to sit more than twice in this council in his lifetime. The latter measure was a form of **term limits**.

The Assembly served as the general deliberative body, which **any citizen could attend** and which functioned on the principle of **one man one vote**. Any citizen was free to speak on any issue before the Assembly. To prevent the abuse of power in the Assembly, Cleisthenes introduced the law of **ostracism** according to which citizens could vote in secret ballot whether they wanted someone to go into exile for ten years [*Athenians used this law frequently such as war heroes like Themistocles, Alcebiades, Aristides, et al*].

Cleisthenes's reforms, **far-reaching and radical**, are generally believed to have led to the **birth of democracy in Athens**.

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