

## Ancient Greek politics

### Four kinds of government

monarchy: the city was ruled by one person, a king or sometimes a queen, who passed power on to their children. In very early times, many Greek cities were ruled by kings, but almost all cities got rid of their kings.

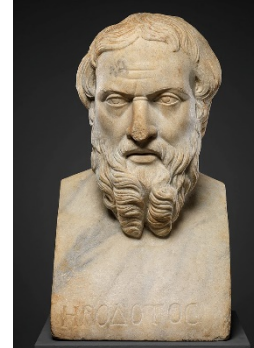
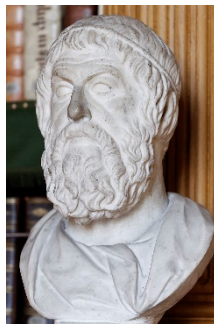
oligarchy: the city was ruled by a few people. These people might be the wealthiest or belong to certain families or be over a certain age. Sometimes the rulers were chosen by the people, but they made all the important decisions.

tyranny: the city was ruled by one person, the tyrant, who had taken over the city. Sometimes tyrants seized control in order to break the power of an oligarchy.

democracy: the city was ruled by all its citizens. The word 'democracy' means 'the power of the people'. Most decisions were taken by the assembly of citizens. There were rules for who counted as a citizen.

### A play by Sophokles, an Athenian playwright

The brother of a woman named Antigone uses a foreign army to try to take over power in his own city. He is killed in battle. The city tells Antigone that she cannot bury his body because of his crime. The law of the gods says that a sister should bury her brother. What should Antigone do?



**In a book by Herodotus, an ancient Greek historian, a character says:**

In my opinion, the best monarchy is far better than the best oligarchy or the best democracy. If you have one person ruling and if that person is the best person in the world, how could you improve on being ruled by him?

### Two comments by an Athenian writer

The Athenians should not let everyone speak equally or serve on the Council, but only the cleverest and best people. At the moment, anyone, no matter how poor, can stand up and speak and obtain what is good for himself and for others like him.

If you want good government, let the cleverest men make the laws. Then the good citizens will punish the bad ones; they will make the decisions for the city and not allow fools to take part, or give their opinions or meet in the Assembly.

### Part of a speech by Perikles, an Athenian politician

In our democracy, when we have to settle an argument, every citizen is equal in the law and must be treated equally. When we have to choose someone to do a job for the city, what matters is not the family the man belongs to, but the ability he has to do the job.