Ancient Greece Society and Culture I

- The heart of Ancient Greece was found in the Aegean Sea between modern Greece and Turkey.
- This civilization was heavily dependent and oriented to the sea.
- Greece has nearly 3200 km coastline.
- The mainland was marked by mountains and rugged landscape, which made civilization difficult.
- The mountains made Greece very difficult to conquer but they also separated the Greek communities creating independent city-states that were often at war with one another.

### Minoans
- Located on the island of Crete.
- Named after king Mines.
- Information comes from the writing of Thucydides.
- Palace had 800+ rooms interconnecting.
- Toilets and baths were located in the living quarters.
- They piped water into the palace and had an advanced drainage system.
- Interior walls covered in frescoes.
- Worshipped a mother goddess who after appeared in snakes.
- Historians believe the Minoans were peaceful and were more occupied with nature than war.
- Had two written languages.
- Natural destruction of palace

### Mycenaens
- Lived in small simple farming communities.
- Invaders slowed development.
- Language of Achaen became basis of Modern Greek.
- Peloponnese was the main political center, which flourished for 500 years.
- Trade and piracy was the means to gain wealth for most kings.
- Famous expedition was to attack Troy.
- Homer’s epic poems Iliad and Odyssey, together with archeological discoveries are the bases of our knowledge.
- Mycenaean kings ruled each city.
- Agamemnon was most important.

### Government
- At the beginning of the 5th century BCE, the Greek city-states faced invasion by the powerful empire of Persia.
- The city-states were small, scattered units weakened by fighting on another and were ill prepared to defend themselves.
- The city-states fought for many years to regain their independence.
- Athens is famous for the development of democracy, but this political system did not develop over night.
- The development of government began with the polis or city-state.
- Each polis had its own independent form of government and protected its individuality fiercely.
Citizens were adult males born in the polis joined the army during wartime. Women, children, foreigners and slaves had no political power. There was no nation state or country, Greeks were united only through religion, language and the Olympic games. The city-state was ruled by a monarch who was either a ruler by birth or an elected ruler (Athens). Elected rulers were assisted by a council of elders who assisted in the daily operation of the government. The ruler was seen as the chief priest, judge and general but never view as gods. Over time the monarchs began to loose power to the local land holding aristocrats. The aristocrats profited with the new trade industry and thus had great economic power. The position of archon was created when the king of Athens lost his power. An archon was a land holding aristocrat who was responsible to supervise government administrations. By 682 BCE it became the practice for a citizen assembly of landowners to elect the archons for a term of one year.

**Tyrants**
- Colonization and the expansion of trade led to the rise of a middle class of wealthy merchants and artisans
- A feud developed between the new middle class and the aristocrats over trade routes and agricultural holdings
- The feud intensified as the middle class demanded greater influence in government
- The lower class also suffered from oppression by the aristocrats and had no political rights, they supported the middle class
- Tyrants, a power base who championed the cause of the middle class were able to seize power by 650 BCE
- Once a tyrant seized power, they often managed to keep it in their family for two or three generations
- Most tyrants were good administrators who encouraged naval development, promoted trade and carried out public works projects
- The current meaning of tyrant comes from the seizure of power by force and the memories of the tyrants who were cruel and unjust

**Rise of Democracy in Athens**
- Four men helped to bring about the transition from an aristocratic form of government to a democracy; Draco, Solon, Pisistratus and Cleisthenes

**Draco**
- Developed a code of Athenian law that would apply to all citizens
- Although the code favoured the interests of wealthy merchants and aristocrats over farmers and the poor, it offered the common people some protection and pointed the way to universal legal rights

**Solon**
- Gained wealth and prestige as a merchant and was elected archon in 594 BCE
Solon grew concerned for the plight of farmers who were indebted to wealthy landowners and often were sold into slavery

- He cancelled the debts and freed the enslaved farmers
- Solon also changed the criteria for holding political office
- All wealthy men, aristocrats or not, were now eligible for public office
- This gave the landless a voice in the citizen assembly
- Solon increased the number of archons from three to nine, giving the six new archons the responsibility of enforcing Athenian law
- He also set up the Council of Four Hundred, which drafted legislation for the citizen council to vote on

**Pisistratus**

- Ruled from 546 to 527 BCE and seized power with the help of a mercenary army and the support of the nobility
- Pisistratus drove many wealthy landowners out and divided their land up among the landless
- He established a system of state loans for small farmers and encouraged the large scale expansion of commerce
- He created thirty circuit judges who supervised the authority of local aristocracies

**Cleisthenes**

- Made significant changes in the organization of the assembly
- He created a new arrangement based on ten tribes which included precincts from different areas
- This division ensured that each tribe contained a cross section of Athenian society, allowing for fair representation of all classes of people in the assembly
- He gave all citizens membership in the assembly regardless of whether or not they owned land
- This assembly passed laws, served as a supreme court and elected ten generals to run the armed forces
- He continued to weaken the power hold of noble families by increasing the Council to Five Hundred, and ensured that fifty members from each tribe were chosen randomly each year by lot
- The Council of Five Hundred proposed and administered laws, organized religious festivals, controlled state finances, public works, shipping and foreign affairs
- Cleisthenes instituted measures to safeguard citizens from tyrants or anyone who sought to abuse their power
- The conduct and expenditures of all officials, even the generals, were held accountable to the assembly

- **Ostracism**, the practice of banishing a citizen by popular vote without trial or formal accusation was introduced
- A vote of 6000 would have you, the mistrusted member banished into exile for ten years

By the 5 century BCE, Direct Democracy had been established in Athens

- Every adult male over eighteen could speak and propose resolutions in the assembly, vote directly on every piece of legislation and stand for public office
- The assembly was the most important government institution, which elected a number of executive officers who met to debate and decide matters of domestic and foreign policy
- Public servants, jurors, members of the Council, military employees and all magistrates
received a small salary
· This allowed even the poorest of citizens the opportunity to take time from work to serve in the government

Terms at a glance

**Government** – rule or authority over a country, province or district

**Democracy** – a government periodically elected and thus controlled by the people

**Debt** – something owed to another, liability or obligations

**Archon** – chief magistrate; ruler

**Tyrant** – uses power cruelly or unjustly; absolute power and control
- in Ancient Greece, tyrants were more often good and concerned for the welfare of the common people