

## Greek and Roman Political institutions

Man is a polis-dwelling creature. A flourishing life is only possible to those involved in the life of the polis.

Thus the citizens of Athens felt the state was theirs—more individualistic than India or China

The polity of the Greco-Roman world was more like India than China: no strong central authority, regions retained a great degree of autonomy. Many Greek city-states were ruled by a tyrant, or strong individual.

Around the Peloponnesian Wars, the state of Athens began to develop democracy.

Most major decisions of the state were made by assemblies of citizens

It was direct, not representative democracy.

The label citizen applied to less than half the male population

Despite the advances of Athens to democracy, the most common form of government in the classical Mediterranean world was aristocratic assemblies. Aristocracy means rule by the best, demonstrates bias toward virtue.

## Rome

Borrowing some ideas from the Greeks, the Romans came up with their own form of government. All citizens met in local assemblies to elect representatives. These representatives then met in the Senate.

Regions still had a measure of local rule. Palestine in Jesus' day: Pilot and Herod. Rome was very tolerant of local customs and religions. What held to empire together was Roman law.

Law was the great achievement of the Romans. Some laws were determined locally, but basic principles were established across the republic. The Twelve Tables were intended to prevent the aristocracy from acting any way it wanted to. Law brought consistency to the Romans. It stood for the idea that objective rules, not personal whim, should regulate social life.

Law took over responsibilities formerly left to fathers and landlord. The idea of a fair and reasonable set of laws, to which even the leaders of the state would be subject, was a key political contribution of the Roman Empire, comparable to the Chinese bureaucratic system.

## Religion and Culture

Government supported a state religion and sponsored ceremonies and holidays that expressed loyalty to the state. Most local religions were supported too, unless they conflicted with state loyalty (as Christianity did.)

The official religion made no room for spiritual passion; many lower classes longed for more. Several mystery religions swept through the lower classes. They were ripe for Christianity.

## Science and Math

Although the Greeks were very religious, philosophy developed in Greece without the interference of religion. There was no official priesthood or religious caste in Greek society. Philosophy celebrated the human ability to think and deemphasized the importance of human spirituality.

This interest in rationality extended over into science; the Greeks wanted to know what the physical world was like and developed theories. They developed many theories about the physical world but had not yet learned the other half of the scientific method: experimentation to test those theories. Thus some of their theories are wrong; Ptolemy believed the earth to be the center of the solar system. Nevertheless, advances in physical science in Hellenic culture exceeded that of other civilizations. They advanced in mathematics, geometry, astronomy, anatomy and medicine.

The Romans were more practical than theoretical excelling in engineering and architecture.

## Economy and Society in the Mediterranean

As in most other cultures of the time, most people in Greece and Rome were farmers. It was the rise of commercial agriculture that led to efforts to establish an empire. The Greeks started colonies to grow grain. The Romans placed such high cultivation requirements on North Africa that its soil became depleted and led, in part, to the region's lack of fertility later on.

Slavery was a key ingredient of the Mediterranean classical world. Because of it, most Greek or Romans were not much interested in technological advances in the area of agriculture.

In upper class Roman homes women often had a lot of power and influence. But in law and culture they were seen as inferior to men.