

## Four Forms of Government in Ancient Greece

## Monarchy

A **monarchy** is a form of government in which the ruling power is in the hands of a single person. Most monarchies have been ruled by kings, usually with the help of a council of advisors. The word “monarchy” comes from the Greek terms *monos* (meaning “single”) and *arkhein* (meaning “rule”).

The Mycenaeans, who ruled ancient Greece from about 1600 to 1200 B.C.E., were warrior people who established monarchies to rule their city-states. The king of each city-state lived in a lavish fortress-palace in the capital city. Beyond the capital city was an outlying network of villages. The people of these villages paid taxes to the king, obeyed his laws, and depended on him for their defense. The king often relied on armed soldiers to enforce his rule and to make sure that the people paid taxes and obeyed his laws. He usually kept political power for life. His eldest son—the prince—succeeded him on the throne. When there was no prince to take the place of the king, the king’s closest military advisors often battled among themselves to become the new monarch.

The Mycenaean monarchies survived until about 1200 B.C.E. At that time, many of their eastern trade routes began to close because of fighting between kingdoms in Asia Minor. As a result, the Mycenaeans could no longer obtain raw metals, and their ability to make weapons and conquer other lands lessened. Eventually, the Mycenaeans began to fight among themselves for survival, and they slowly destroyed each other. Finally, a people from the northwest, called the Dorians, invaded Greece and destroyed what remained of the Mycenaean monarchies.

Monarchy as a form of government gradually disappeared in Greece. It was replaced by a system in which a small number of individuals shared power and ruled as a group.

## Oligarchy

An **oligarchy** is a form of government in which the ruling power is in the hands of a few leaders. The word “oligarchy” comes from the Greek terms *oligos* (meaning “few”) and *arkhein* (meaning “rule”).

Around 800 B.C.E., small groups of people began to share ruling power in several Greek city-states. Political power was often shared among aristocrats, who inherited wealth and power from their families, and a king. Over time, this ruling arrangement changed. Oligarchies developed in which political power rested with a few selected wealthy individuals. Some of these members of the ruling circle were of aristocratic birth, while others were wealthy members of the middle class.