

WHO RULED?

At the beginning of the Archaic Period, most Greek states were governed by groups of rich landowners, called aristocrats. This kind of government is known as an aristocracy, which means 'rule by the important people'. Sometimes, if they were unpopular, the aristocrats chose respected, important men to rule instead. This is called an oligarchy, which means 'rule by the few'.

As trading activities increased, a middle class of merchants and craftsmen began to prosper. They resented the aristocracy and demanded a role in politics. This often led to riots between different social groups.

THE TIME OF TYRANTS

To bring peace, the people were sometimes prepared to let one very powerful man rule alone. This sort of leader was known as a tyrant.

In 621BC, the people of Athens appointed a man called Draco to lead them. He drew up a set of very severe laws. Even minor crimes, such as stealing food, were punished by death.



INTERNET LINK

For a link to a website where you can find out more about the city-state of Corinth and choose which kind of ruler you would have preferred, go to www.usborne-quicklinks.com

SOLON THE REFORMER

In 594BC, an aristocrat named Solon was given power and introduced popular reforms. He provided food for the poor, stopped people who owed money from being sold as slaves, and gave citizens a say in the city's affairs. But this didn't satisfy everyone. Solon was forced to leave Athens and unrest broke out again. Then, in 508BC, an aristocrat named Cleisthenes came to power, introducing a radical new system of government, known as democracy (see pages 192-3).



Solon

CITIZENS AND METICS

In Athens, free men were eventually divided into two groups: citizens, which meant men who were born in Athens, and metics, who were not.

Citizens could take part in politics, but they were also expected to serve in the army, act as officials and volunteer for jury service. Metics had to pay tax and serve in the army, but they could not own property or get involved in politics.

Metics often worked as craftsmen. This scene from a painted pot shows a cobbler.

