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## Exploring Ancient Athens: How Democracy Worked in the Birthplace of Democracy



In ancient Athens, the birthplace of democracy, the concept of self-governance was born, and the citizens actively participated in decision-making processes. Let's delve into how democracy functioned in ancient Athens.

### Democracy in Ancient Athens

Ancient Athens was a city-state located in Greece around 5th century BCE. Unlike modern democracies, where all citizens have equal voting rights, ancient Athenian democracy was limited to free, male citizens. This excluded women, slaves, and foreigners from participating in the political process.

### The Assembly

The heart of Athenian democracy was the Assembly, known as the Ekklesia. It was an open forum where eligible citizens gathered to discuss and vote on various matters. Meetings were held regularly in a large open-air space called the Pnyx. Citizens could propose laws, debate issues, and make important decisions, ensuring their voices were heard.

### The Boule

To manage day-to-day affairs, Athens had a council called the Boule. It consisted of 500 citizens, 50 from each of the ten tribes, who were chosen by lot. They served for one year and were responsible for preparing and presenting proposals to the Assembly, as well as overseeing the execution of decisions made by the Assembly.

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### **Courts and Magistrates**

The judicial system in Athens played a crucial role in democracy. There were popular courts where citizens acted as jurors, deciding the outcomes of legal cases. Magistrates were chosen by lot and served for limited terms. They were responsible for implementing the laws and policies decided by the Assembly.

### **Direct Democracy**

A unique aspect of Athenian democracy was its direct nature. Citizens had the power to directly influence decisions through voting and participation in discussions. This direct involvement in governance made them feel a strong sense of ownership and responsibility for their city-state.

### **Ostracism**

To prevent the rise of tyrants or individuals who might threaten democracy, Athens had a procedure called ostracism. Citizens could vote to banish a prominent figure from the city for ten years if they believed that person posed a threat to democracy.

### **Participation and Responsibilities**

Citizens in ancient Athens were expected to actively engage in the democratic process. They were responsible for staying informed, attending meetings of the Assembly, and voicing their opinions. Failure to participate could result in penalties.

### **The Legacy of Athenian Democracy**

Ancient Athens's democratic experiment had a profound influence on the development of modern democracies. The principles of citizen participation, rule of law, and decision by majority vote continue to shape the democratic systems of today.

