

Greek Law

The first form of democracy was born in Greece, although it was not democracy as we know it today. Only a percentage of the Athenian people, known as "citizens," actually had political rights. Athenian citizenship, excluded women, children, illegal, aliens, and slaves.

What important principle of Greek democracy was citizen involvement. Athenian citizens were expected to participate in major decisions affecting the running of their country. For example, voting was a major responsibility. Another responsibility was jury duty.

The jury system can be traced to Athens, Greece, and approximately 400 BCE. Athenians employed in enormous juries, with the largest recorded jury at over 6000 members. Later, their juries were limited to 101, 501, or 1001 citizens. Women who were on trial were not allowed to speak on their own behalf: citizens had to speak for them.

The Greeks also use democratic means to decide on the sentence of an accused. If a person was found guilty; both the accused, and the accuser would suggest a sentence. The jury then voted on the most appropriate sentence. One of the best-known examples of this process was the trial of Socrates, a Greek philosopher. Socrates was arrested in 399 BCE. His accusers claimed that his ideas, misled Athenian use and undermined Athenian democracy. After a lengthy trial, the 501 jurors found him guilty (the vote was 281 to 220). His accusers recommended the death penalty. Socrates, argued that the law, under which he was charged, was unfair, but acknowledge that he had been tried fairly by his peers. As instructed by the court, he drank a cup of poisonous hemlock.