

THE INSTITUTE FOR ANACYCLOSIS

EXCERPT FROM  
WHAT HAPPENED IN HISTORY  
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1942 A.D.

*Note: This text describes a process of political change occurring in some political entities in the Mediterranean Basin that correlates with Anacyclosis. The reader will note that in the Near East (i.e., the Orient), where the old economy was preserved, the old forms of political organization remained unchanged. The reason for this was because wealth was not generally diffused to form a middle class in those regions, so advancement to democracy was, accordingly, not possible in those regions.*

X. Government, Religion, and Science in the Iron Age

The economic changes of the Iron Age naturally found political expression. In the Orient indeed the Iron Age inherited the monarchical traditions of the Bronze Age. Assyria, Babylonia and Egypt were just continuations of Bronze Age states and preserved divine kingship with minor modifications as they preserved so much of the old economy. The new kingdoms like Israel, Lydia, Phrygia and Armenia (Urartu) tried to imitate them. The Medes and Persians took over the imperial machines that they had conquered though they improved them in details. The Chous created a feudal monarchy rather like the Egyptian Middle Kingdom.

In Mediterranean Europe on the contrary theocratic monarchy on the Oriental pattern had never become firmly entrenched even in Crete. The Mycenaean kinglets in Greece were ruined before the barbarian invaders arrived . . . . Admittedly the conquerors themselves had acknowledged patriarchal monarchs and war chiefs. But when peace returned they, ruling over a small and poor territory, could not aspire to the pomp of an Oriental court, and could not maintain their positions above the richer landlords among their vassals. For with iron weapons these were no longer dependent on royal arsenals but could arm themselves and even equip pirate vessels to win as privateers booty for themselves and their clients. So monarchy withered away or was reduced to a purely ritual office in most Greek states and also in Italy and the Phoenician colonies.

The typical Greek state and many Etruscan and Phoenician states too were becoming republics before the end of the Dark Age; magistrates elected for a year took over executive power, while general policy was determined by a council of elders (senate) and an assembly of leading families or clans. When barbarian kinship organization had broken down and a money economy had made land a commodity privately owned, the clan chief became the big landlord; the machinery of government fell into the hands of an hereditary landed gentry or *aristocracy* (rule of the best—*sic*). It was used to protect the creditor against the debtor and the landlord against the tenant and share farmer with such effect that Attica was becoming depopulated and general strikes were provoked in Rome.

But in commercial and industrial cities the landed aristocracy was forced, not without a struggle, to share its power with a new plutocracy. Turned into cash the proceeds of industry were no less potent than rents from land, and the profits of trade appeared no less honorable than pirate's booty. First perhaps in Ionia, then in Peninsular Greece the new merchant class successfully challenged the prerogatives of the landed gentry. The qualifications for executive office, seats on the council and assembly votes were reckoned in money as well as, or instead of, in areas of land owned. Aristocracy gave place to *oligarchy*.

In their struggles the middle class often sought allies among the poor—small landholders in debt, tenants and share farmers, even landless artisans and laborers. The development of tactics appropriate to Iron Age armament had given even these military value. Victory no longer depended upon the prowess of chariotry, the preserve of the rich landowner, but on the valor of an infantry recruited from yeoman farmers. Moreover, at sea—and in Greece sea-power was decisive—even a laborer, too poor to afford body armor, could serve his city in the fleet at an oar. In fact he could claim with justice some hope of success a vote in the election of magistrates and in the legislative assembly. The concession of such claims would transform the state into what the Greeks called *democracy* (rule by the people).

The conflict between the several classes often broke out into open violence—*stasis*. It gave moreover ambitious individuals, generally men who had grown rich in commerce or manufacture or in the control of mines and manipulation of currency, the chance to make themselves dictators with the support of one of the contending parties. Such were termed *tyrants*—a pre-Indo-European word appropriate to a despot of the Oriental type. And in fact, like these, tyrants did often protect the weak against oppression by the strong ... and expended much of their private wealth on reproductive public works and the beautification of their cities and encourage [*sic*] the development of new industries. But they never became divine kings, and seldom founded dynasties. Most were expelled by oligarchic or democratic revolutions.

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