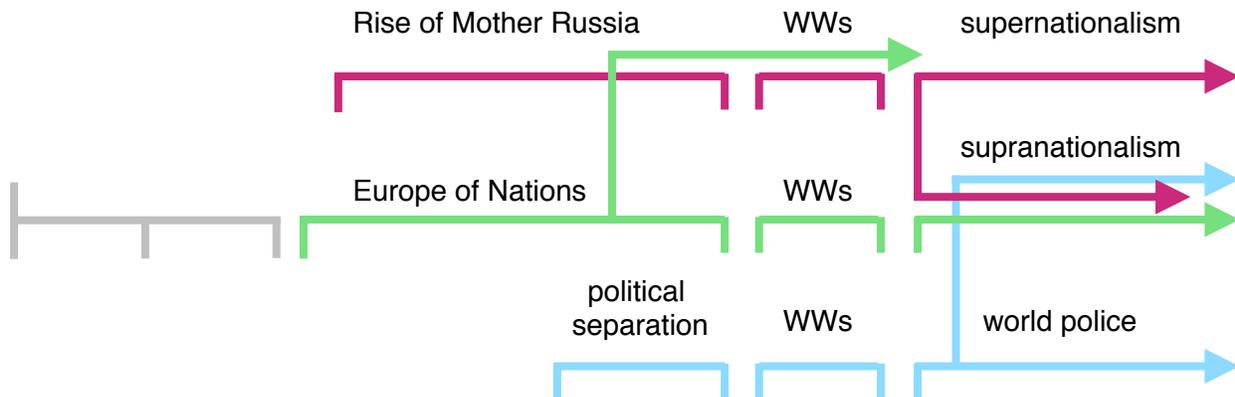


VII. The Greco-Roman Background

A. Completing the Big Picture

1. Everything we have learned about the history of Europe, Russia, and America is rooted in a background story of Greece and Rome.
2. Here's how we can show this on the timeline:



B. Athens: Monarchy and Aristocracy

1. Athens started with a simple model common to all ancient cultures. It had what is usually called a “monarchy,” i.e. the “rule of one.”
2. At the top was a king, who ruled for life, but he belonged to the most powerful family that had founded the city, which was allied to a large group of other families that referred to themselves as the “aristos” (the best).
3. No king could rule without the help of the aristos. All monarchies are, in fact, forms of aristocracy, with a large ruling group surrounding a single figure, who can only be a strong king, if he has a lot of charisma.

C. The Problem of Debt Slavery

1. The “aristos” were the accepted rulers in all ancient societies, but the harsh realities of life sometimes led the commoners to rebel against their rule.
2. In times of drought, Athens's commoners often starved. If they wanted to survive they had to obtain loans of food or supplies, and if they could not repay their debt they would lose their property and become slaves.
3. When too many commoners became slaves this way, they rebelled.
4. To stop rebellions, the aristos chose an “archon” named Draco, to make especially harsh laws. (The modern English word “draconian” comes from his name and it means rules that are very severe.)

D. The First Advance: Solon

1. After another war, an archon named Solon was given absolute power to create new laws.
2. Solon attempted to force the Athenians to change their way of thinking to better balance the desperate needs of the commoners and the power and property of the aristocrats.
 - a) First, Solon *emancipated* the debt slaves, and returned their property to them.
 - b) Second, he *abolished* the institution of debt slavery. From that point on, it would be illegal to make any contract that would result in slavery.
3. Even though this was a positive step, it did not solve the problem of famines.

E. The Rule of a “Tyrannos”

1. The commoners were not satisfied because Solon has not given them more land. This meant they would eventually have to turn to the lords for help again. The commoners did not want to be dependent in this way.
2. They chose an aristos named Peisistratus to champion their cause. With the help of the commoners, Peisistratus became the “tyrannos” of Athens after another round of violence. (The difference between a “tyrannos” and an “archon” was simply that an archon was chosen by the aristocracy. A tyrannos is someone who is chosen by the common people.)
3. By taking land from the aristocrats and giving it to the commoners, Peisistratus made himself very popular.

F. The Second Advance: Cleisthenes and the Birth of Democracy (c.508 BC)

1. The aristocracy regained control of Athens, but if the people continued to fight, the city would eventually be conquered by some other city-state.
2. **C.508 BC**, an aristocrat named Cleisthenes was able to convince the aristocracy to accept a new idea to share power with the commoners.
 - a) To break up the power of the aristocracy, Cleisthenes allowed all commoners to participate in a new assembly that was made responsible for all the laws of Athens.
 - b) Also, the aristocrats no longer had any special privileges. All important officials were chosen by elections, and all matters were decided by a majority vote in the assembly.
 - c) This system is called *democracy*, the rule of the people, which comes from the Greek words “demos”—people, and “kratia”—the rule of.)

G. Sparta: Ancient Communism

1. Sparta is the second most important city-state in Greek history because of its famous warriors.
2. Early in their history, the conquering aristocracy had belonged to two ruling tribes who chose to cooperate and have one king from each tribe at the same time.

3. This could be called a “duarchy,” but like most kinds of kingship, it was really an aristocracy. The two Spartan kings were monitored by five officials known as “ephors,” who could arrest a king, if he broke the law.
4. Every Spartan belonged to the government.
 - a) At age seven, they were taken from their families and lived in a public school until they were twenty.
 - b) At age 20, a Spartan male “graduated” and joined the army *for life*.
 - c) Only when a Spartan soldier had served in the military for ten years, he earned the right to join the government, and participate in the making of laws for Sparta.
 - d) Spartan girls were also educated by the government, however they did not train to become soldiers. Spartan women had one role only: to manage the land of their families. The choice of a husband was made by a woman's father, or, if the father was dead, by the government.
5. Any system of government in which the individual is controlled by the government so completely in the name of the “common good,” is known as “communism.”

H. Greece Stands Together

1. Soon after the birth of democracy in Athens, Greece was attacked by the massive Persian Empire the ancient Greco-Persian War.
2. In order to win this war, the Greeks had to work together. The most famous episode of this cooperation was the sacrifice of king Leonidas and his famous 300 Spartans warriors who delayed the Persian invasion at a mountain pass called Thermopylae. This allowed the rest of the Greeks to better prepare to better prepare and allowed Athens to lead the Greeks in a largely naval victory at the later Battle of Salamis.

I. Greece Falls Apart

1. In order to continue attacking Persia after the invasion, Athens formed an alliance, but Sparta was not invited and it formed a separate alliance.
2. The rivalry between the two city-states sparked the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC), in which Sparta defeated Athens, but all of Greece exhausted itself and became more susceptible to conquest from an outside power.
3. Soon Greece was conquered by neighboring Macedonia, under Philip of Macedon and his son Alexander “the Great.”
4. Although Alexander commanded the Greeks on a fantastic invasion of the Persian Empire, which was briefly successful, he soon died, and the Greeks were not numerous enough to maintain such an empire. Soon they would collide with an even greater power...