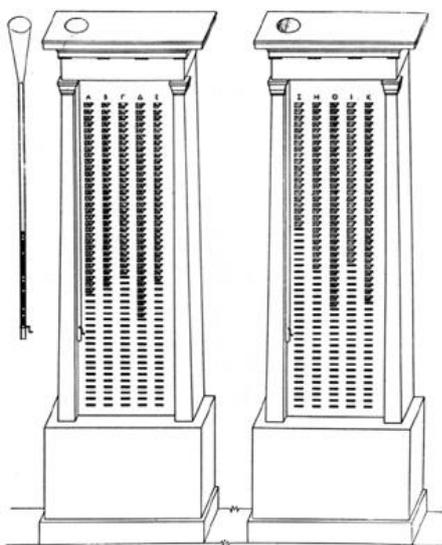


Government in action

Objects found in Athens' **Agora** (marketplace) help us to understand how Athens' democratic government worked. In a **democracy** ('rule of the people') citizens have power through choice. In casting a **vote**, each person chooses ideas (e.g., who is right in an argument), actions (e.g., whether to go to war) and people (politicians to lead them). By voting, the Athenians ran their city the way they thought was best for all.

Archaeologists in the Agora have found thousands of **ostraka** (meaning 'pot fragments') with words **inscribed** (scratched) on them [[Citizenship 21](#)]. Some were found alone and others in groups – in containers, wells or fill for potholes. Each ostrakon has an inscription that gives a man's name, his father's name and his home. Most of the names are those of famous men. This gives us a clue about the function of the ostraka. Each year the Athenians voted to send a politician away from Athens for a period of ten years. This would stop one person from becoming too powerful. Whoever's name appeared on the most ostraka (over 6000) was ostracised (sent away).



Some officials, such as **jurors**, were selected through allotment, not by election. Jurors decided who won each **case** (argument) brought to the law courts. They were randomly assigned using the following method: each person was given a **pinakion** (thin wooden or bronze ticket) engraved with his name, father's name and home. The pinakia were placed in rows in a **kleroterion** (allotment machine, shown overleaf). When black and white balls were poured into a tube on the side of the kleroterion they appeared in random order. As each ball appeared a row of pinakia was removed from the machine. If a white ball appeared for the row with your pinakion you would be juror for a day.

Athenian jurors used **psephoi** (bronze disks pierced with rods) to cast **votes** [[Citizenship 20](#)]. Each juror carried two psephoi, one with a hollow rod and one with a solid rod, but held them with his thumb and forefinger over the ends to keep his votes secret. After they heard the case, each juror put one psephos in a container as he left the courtroom. To vote for the man arguing the case, he deposited the hollow psephos; to vote against the case he deposited a solid or 'no' psephos.

Cameron Hahn and Amy Smith