

# Was Athens a Democracy?



# The Classical Age (479-338 BCE)



From the Hellenic League →

The Delian League







# The Delian League, Founded 477 BCE

## Hellenotamiai (Treasurers)







J. McInerney, *Ancient Greece*, p. 198

“Seizure and massacre were the vocabulary of empire, and the Athenians spoke this language from the very beginning.”

# DEMOCRACY

*demos* (“people”) + *kratos* (“power”)

Important concepts to weigh:

- Distribution v. centralization
- Access within distribution
- Limits on power (rotationality, non-repeatability of office, term limits)
  - **Exception: GENERALS**  
(*strategoi*) → Perikles
- Role of money
- Choice and randomness





# *Ekklesia* (the Assembly)



Pnyx Hill, Athens  
(site of open-air  
*Ekklesia* meetings)

# Randomizing the Eponymous Archon ("Chief Operating Officer")

- Polemarch (military magistrate)
- Archon Basileus (religious official/high priest)
- **Eponymous Archon** (nominal head of state for one year)

487 BCE → Random selection of eligible candidates (*klerosis ek prokritôn*)

458/7 BCE → Third category of Solonian class-system (*Zeugitai*) became eligible



*misthos*



# Who can be most popular?

“In the beginning, as has been said, pitted as [Perikles] was against the reputation of Kimon, he tried to ingratiate himself with the people. And since he was the inferior in wealth and property, by means of which Kimon would win over the poor — furnishing a dinner every day to any Athenian who wanted it, bestowing raiment on the elderly men, and removing the fences from his estates that whosoever wished might pluck the fruit — Perikles, outdone in popular arts of this sort, had recourse to the distribution of the people's own wealth. And soon, what with festival-grants and jurors' wages and other fees and largesses, he bribed the multitude by the wholesale.” – Plutarch, *Life of Perikles*, ch. 9



*theorikon*



# Kimon (510 – 450 BCE)

Bust of Kimon in  
modern-day  
Larnaca, Cyprus





# Further Parts of Athenian Government (*Politeia*)

- ~~Ekklesia~~
- ~~Archons~~
- ~~Juries~~
- Council of the Areopagus
- *Boulê* = Council of the 500 Hundred

# Ephialtes and Democratic Reforms

- Diminished power of the Council of the Areopagus  
Areopagus composed of former archons in lifetime role  
Chief functions: *dokimasia* and homicide court
- Ephialtes' reforms shift power away from older aristocratic holdover (Areopagus) to other institutions (*Boulê*, *Ekklesia*)

## *Dokimasia* (conducted by the Boulê)

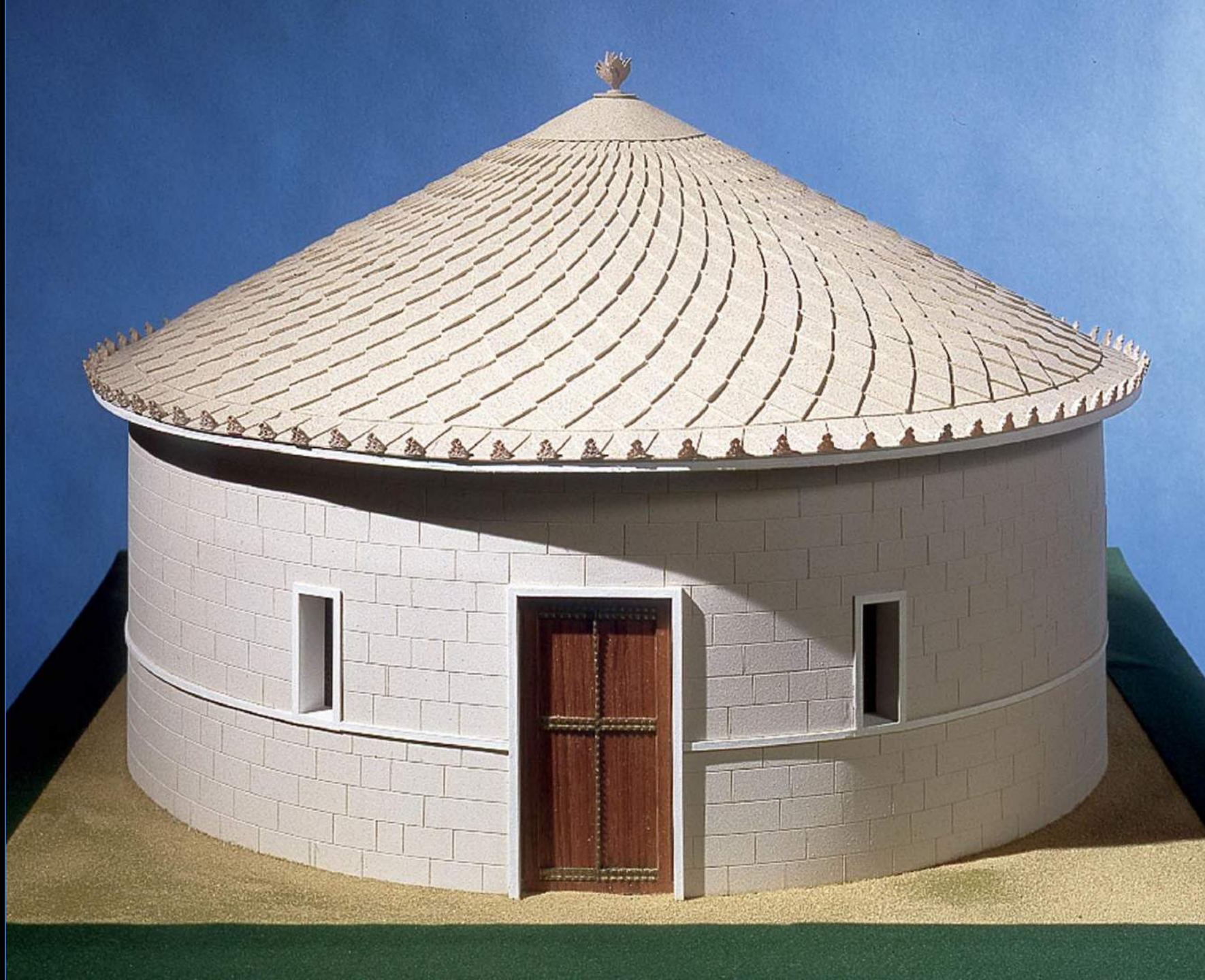
- 1] one must not have abused or neglected his parents
- 2] one cannot have refused military service or thrown away his shield
- 3] one cannot have sold himself for sexual pleasure to another man
- 4] one must not have spent his patrimony



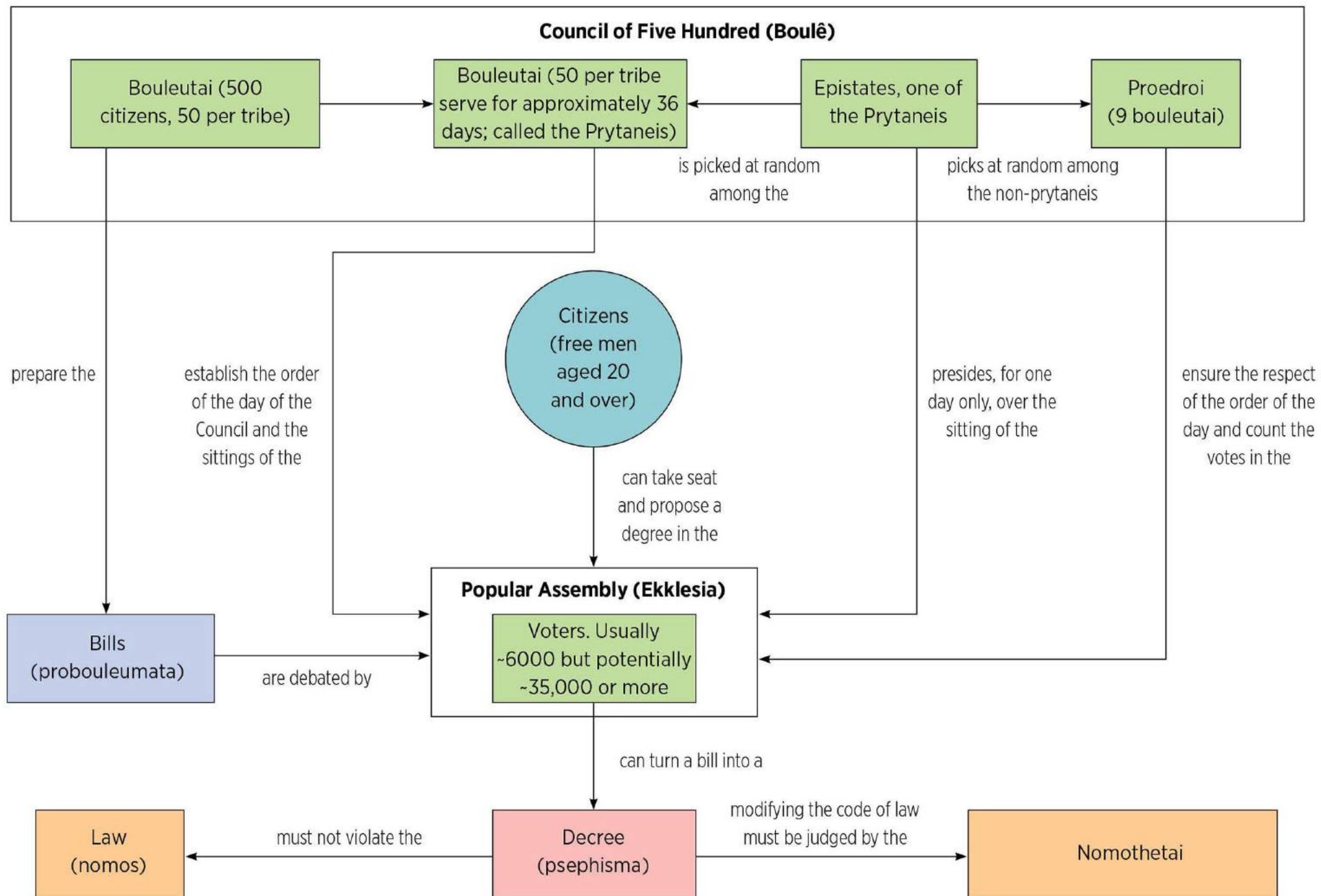
# *Boulê* (The Council of 500)



*Prytanis*  
(name for fifty  
Council  
members for  
the one-month  
period)









# Lawcourts

- Nothing like our modern-day rules of evidence and procedure
- Frequent use “character” assassination
- Asserting without good evidence, for instance, that someone did not pass *dokimasia*
- *Aischines, Against Timarchus* (346/5 BCE) → “You can’t bring a case against me because you took money for sex [violation of no. 3, previous slide].”



# Democracy and Empire

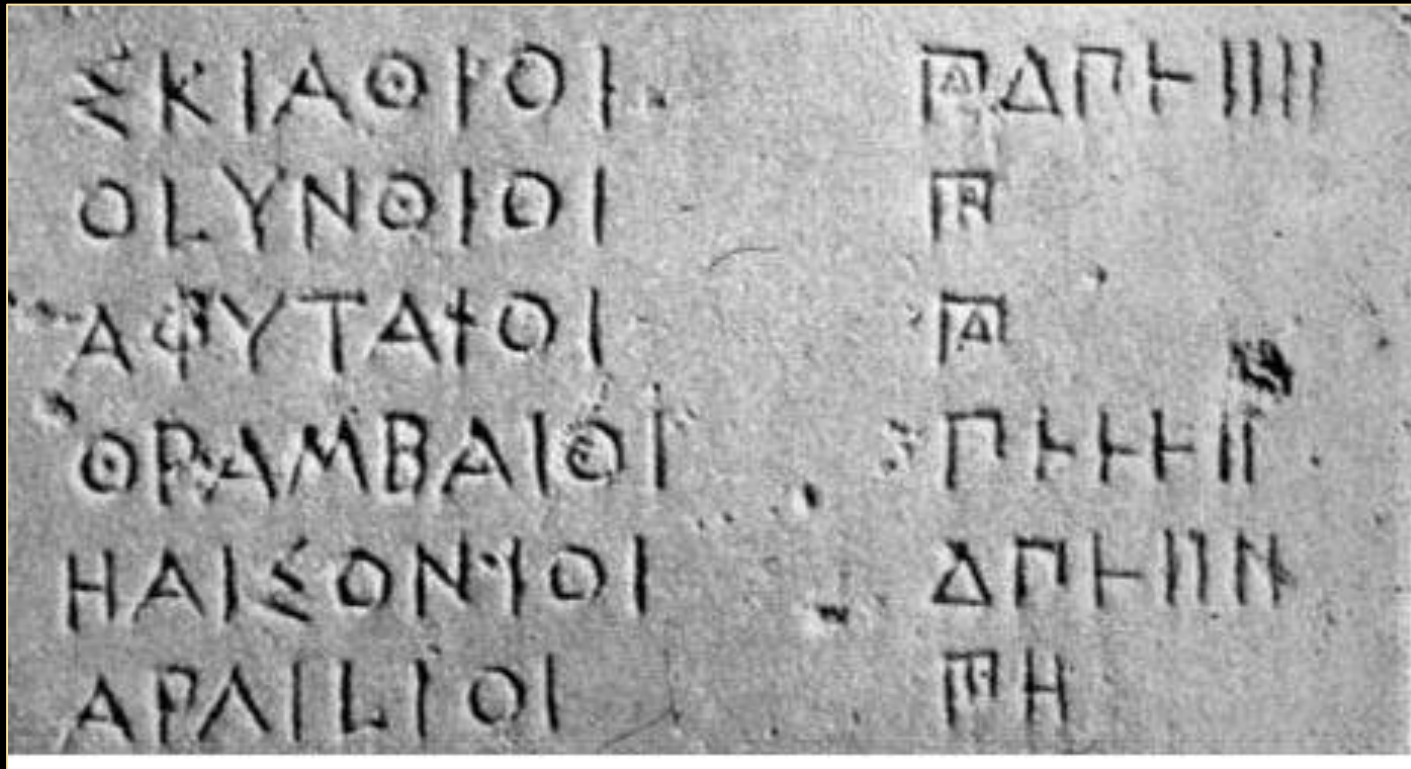




# More on Athenian Empire / Delian League? See Mc. pp. 206-13:

- Naval dominance/protection
- Oaths of allegiance
- Movement of treasury from Delos to Athens
- The manufactured (?) threat of Persia [and the Peace of Kallias?]
- “Dictating democracy” elsewhere (Inscription on Erythrae)
- Colonies and cleruchies (dispatched groups who remained loyal to Athens, esp. as soldiers)
- Tribute from allies

# Tribute (*phoros*)





# The Egyptian “Disaster” (460 BCE)





# Democracy and Empire

