

# Archaic Athens



## \*Rough\* Outline for Week 3

- Monday: Introducing Archaic Athens
- Wednesday: Tyranny and its Fall + Democratic reforms of Kleisthenes (*with brief comments on first paper*)
- Friday – The Practice of the Symposium (drinking party); Statues & Songs

# Rough Outline for Today

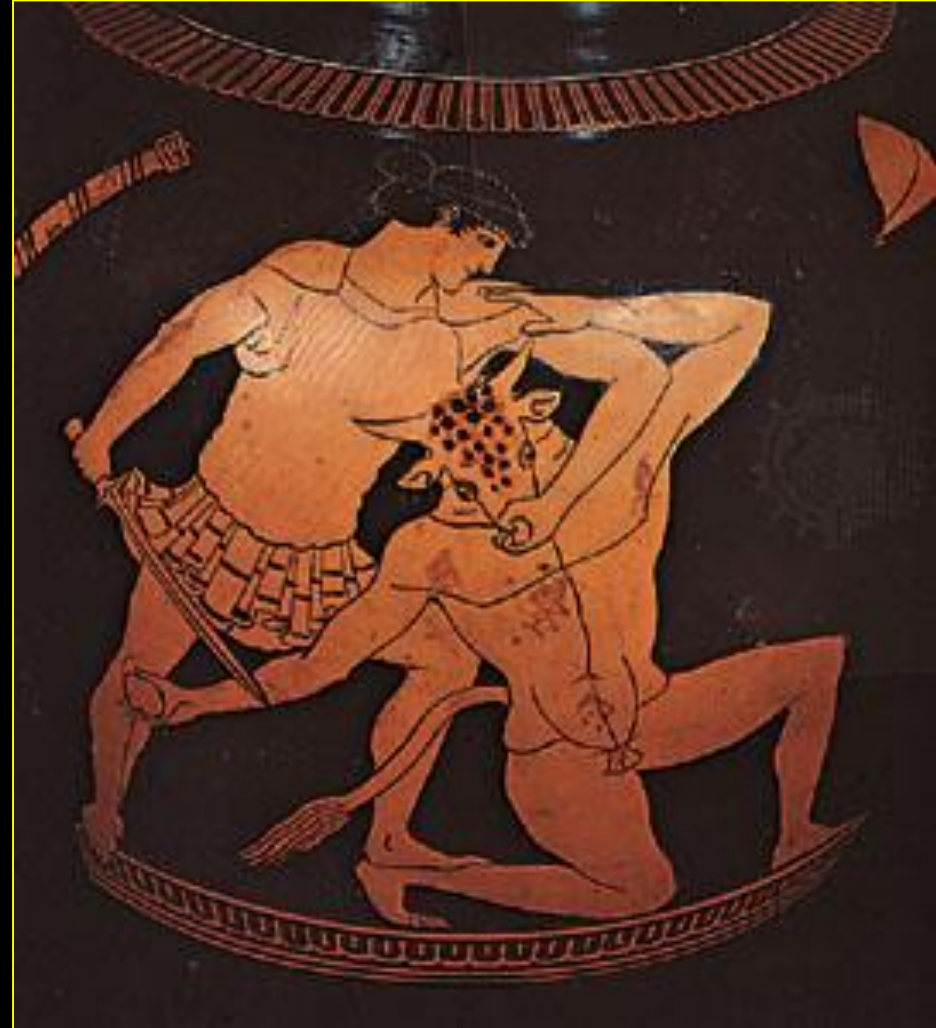
1. Aristocratic government and civil strife in Archaic Athens
2. Solon and his reforms to address civil strife
3. (The nature of tyranny under the Peisistratids):  
probably Wednesday

# Foundation Myths: Theseus and “Autochthony”

REGION:  
Attika/Attica

*asty* = urban area

*Polis* = total city-state, including surrounding agricultural and pastoral land;  
“The Athenians”



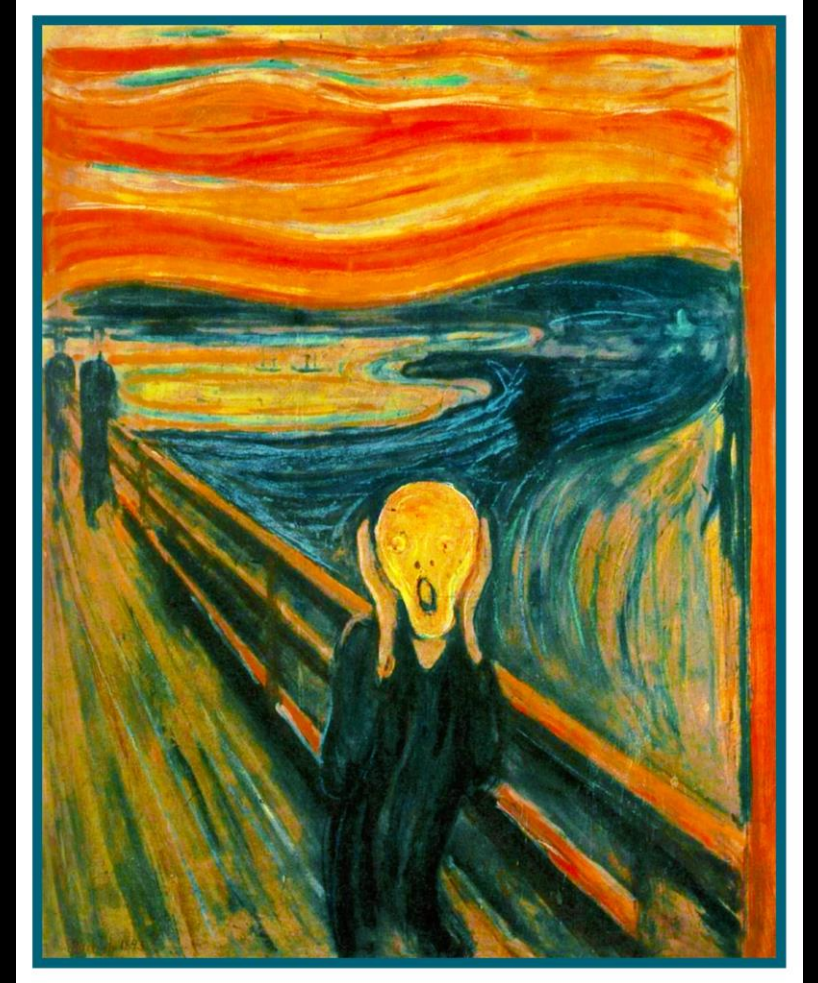
# Archaic Government at Athens (8<sup>th</sup>- end of 6<sup>th</sup> C)

- *ARCHONS*:
- *Archon basileus* – cults and religious matters, including sacred property
- Polemarch – commander of the Attic army
- **EPONYMOUS ARCHON**– leading **executive** office (“archonship of so-and-so”)
  - *Early 7<sup>th</sup> C* → Total of Nine Archons
  - Nine Archons (including six **judicial** archons), all elected to ten-year terms by “people of good ancestry” (Eupatrids); system in place until 508 BCE
- **Council of the Areopagus** (“hill of Ares”), composed of former archons (!)
- **Assembly** (*ekklesia*) – Male citizens; functions of assembly obscure
  - Various divisions and/or factions:
  - *phylae* (tribes)
  - *phratries* (brotherhoods → “Fraternity” in English)
  - *Genê* (s. *genos*) – “clan”



# Points.

- Athens, similar to Sparta, had somewhat “mixed” or distributed forms of power in the Archaic Age.
- The people who tended to fill those positions were the wealthy aristocrats.
- In-fighting between aristocrats became a source of political instability; elite groups or family clans (*genê*) in Athens experience and produce much political tension.



# Wealth ≠ Virtue

“Many bad men are wealthy, and many  
good men are poor;

But we shall not exchange with them

Our goodness for their wealth ...” (Theognis, *Elegies* 1.315-17)

“From these things come civil strife (*stasis*),  
The internecine slaughter of men,  
And tyrants.” (*Elegies* 1.49-52)

# Instability in Athens: an Example

## Kylon's Failed Coup (632 BCE)

- **Kylon** attempts to become tyrant.
- **Megakles (Archon)** – member of *Alkmaionid* family (*Alcmeonidae/s*) kills Kylon's supporters.
- *Alkmaionids* now under a **curse** or “polluted” because of murder of Kylon's supporters, who had taken refuge by tying themselves to the statue of Athena.









# Game of **CONFUSION**: Brief Story of the Alkmaionids (Family of Accursed Megakles)

- Kleisthenes of Sikyon and his daughter Agariste
  - Hippokleides son of Tisander
    - Megakles II son of Alkmaion, Grandson of Aforementioned Megakles
      - Megakles II + Agariste →
        - Children : Kleisthenes (reformer of Athens; Wed.) and Hippokrates
          - Children of Hippokrates: *another* Megacles (III) and *another* Agariste
            - Agariste + Xanthippos → **PERICLES**

*More Details at see Herodotus 6.125-131 (not assigned) ...*



# Points.

- Aristocratic families (*aristoi*) jockeying for power. They don't go away, but their power will gradually be tempered.
- Meanwhile, tensions between the moneyed/powerful and the poor/indebted/powerless increase.
- Solon elected as eponymous archon to make reforms. These reforms address debt-bondage but do not fix things overnight.
  - *Instead, Solon's reforms should be seen as paving the way, laying the groundwork, for future reforms that move Athens toward a kind of democracy.*

# Solon (ca. 640-560 BCE)



HOI NOMOI ("The Laws")

# Solon as Moderate in his Poetry and Politics

[a] Such are the evils that roam among the *demos*, while, as regards the poor, many have arrived in foreign lands sold into slavery, bound in shameful fetters.

[b] For to the demos I gave so much honor as is sufficient, neither diminishing their honor nor adding to it in profusion.

As for those who held power and were admired for their wealth, I saw to it that they, also, had nothing shameful.

I took my stand, covering both in the protection of my mighty shield,  
nor did I allow either side to win unjustly.



# Solon's Reforms → *Moderating* the Strife

- *Seisachtheia* – “The shaking off of burdens”: a canceling of debts
  - *Hektêmoroi* (“sixth-parters”) – poor sharecroppers; system ended
  - Debt slaves – no longer possible to pay debt through property or person
- Classes based on agricultural wealth:
  - (1) *pentakosiomedimnoi* ( > 500 measures)
  - (2) *hippeis* ( > 300)
  - \*\*\*\*\*
  - (3) *zeugitai* (> 200)
  - (4) *thetes* ( < 200)
- Citizenship for foreign craftsmen (contrast with Sparta)

# Solon's Reforms (continued)

- Amnesty for exiles and **FORMER** attempted tyrants
  - New punishment for would-be tyrants → *atimos*
- Property dispersal to anyone a male wished (for the childless)
- Domestic and sumptuary (expenditure) reforms: *check your status!*
  - *Prothesis* (laying out of body) must be indoors
  - *Ekphora* (procession of corpse) before sunrise
  - Only older women could participate
  - No more than three cloaks per woman
  - Food and drink in procession could not be costly
  - Fathers could not sell children into slavery (unless unmarried daughter was found not to be a virgin)
- Laws on *axones* (tablets) placed in middle of Athens in *agora*







# Section Readings this Week

- Story of meeting between Solon and Croesus (Herodotus's *Histories* 1.29-33, 5<sup>th</sup> C BCE)
- Biography of Solon (Plutarch 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> C CE)

# Solon Visits King Croesus of Lydia (Herodotus 1.29-33)





# Solon to King Croesus (Herodotus 1.32)

“Someone with vast wealth is no better off than someone who lives from day to day, unless good fortune attend him and sees to it that, when he dies, he dies well and with all his advantages intact.

...

It is necessary **to look to the end of anything**, and to see how it will turn out, because the god often offers prosperity to men, but then destroys them utterly and completely.”

- (trans. Waterfield, adapted)

# Peisistratos' Tyranny and that of his Sons (560-510 BCE)



# Thucydides (late 5<sup>th</sup> C), describing the Tyranny of Peisistratus and Later that of his Sons

“These tyrants [the Peisistratids] actually operated with principles and good sense to a very great extent, and by exacting from the Athenians only a twentieth of their income they adorned the city beautifully, carried on its wars and conducted its ceremonies in the sanctuaries ...”

(Thucydides, *History* 6.54, trans. Lattimore)

# Tyrants are Not Always So “Tyrannical”?

- Elections annually
- Rural magistrates
- Loans to the poor at low interest
- Expanded silver mining at Laureion
- *Horos* inscriptions marking off the *agora*
- The *Dionysia* and *Panathenaia*
  - Latter open to all Athenians, regardless of regional identity
  - Honoring Athena with a new robe
  - Music festivals, athletic contests
    - → Civic identity and ideology





# Temple of Olympian Zeus (completed under Roman Emperor Hadrian 2nd C CE)





# Forgetting the Tyrants on Purpose

“Among those who held the annual archonship of Athens was Peisistratus, son of Hippias who became tyrant and bearing his grandfather’s name, who during his term dedicated the Altar of the Twelve Gods in the agora and the Altar of Apollo in the Pythian sanctuary ...”

...“When the people of Athens later built onto the altar in the agora and lengthened it, they erased the inscription, but even now the one in the Pythian sanctuary is still legible as saying the following, in faint letters: ‘Peisistratus son of Hippias set up this monument of his archonship in the precinct of Apollo Pythias.’” (Thucydides 6.54, tr. Lattimore).

