

effort in a war in which they captured the island of Salamis from Megara.

In 594 or 592 – the accounts vary – Solon took office and, amid acute tension and excitement, announced his programme. To the bitter disappointment of the poor, he did not proclaim a redistribution of the land. Probably his fellow-nobles, when they accepted him as a dictator, knew very well that he was no revolutionary. But he forbade once and for all the enslavement of any free Athenian for debt; he cancelled all debts outstanding, and there was a joyful sweeping away of boundary-markers on the many mortgaged holdings; and he organized the re-purchase (an expensive operation, and we do not know how it was financed) of all Athenians who could be traced, who had been sold abroad. The rich must have paid heavily. Solon also placed an embargo on the export of agricultural produce, except olive oil, of which Athens had a surplus. There should be no more selling of grain in richer markets while men at home went hungry. Athens was given a decisive push in the direction in which the rise of population was driving her. She was soon importing grain from the Black Sea, and fought a war with Mytilene for a foothold on the Dardanelles near Troy, to secure her trade-route; the poet Alkaios recorded, like Archilochos, how he had thrown away his shield in a defeat in that war. Athens must import grain – and pay for it. The rise of a great export trade in Attic pottery, found throughout the Mediterranean, and presumably also of more perishable manufactures, is a feature of the following century.

Solon also took in hand the Athenian constitution. This had the usual essential elements of the city-state: the elected executive, the nine Archons (p. 67); the Council of the 'Best Men', Eupatridai or 'patricians', who met, as they had done since Athens was a village, to discuss all public questions; and the Assembly of the people (*ekklesia*, later the word for 'Church', *église*), which had to agree on important decisions. This was not a pure formality; even the chiefs in the *Iliad* recognize that you cannot make war if the troops will not fight. But the Assembly had no prestige, no organization, and

no initiative. The 'best people', meeting at the rock called Areopagus, discussed who should be Archons for next year, and any other matters to be put to the Assembly, and any counter-proposals from the 'floor', if made, which we do not know, had little chance of acceptance against those of the Council.

It was Solon who made the Assembly, not yet indeed supreme in Athens, but a reality, with which influential men would henceforth have to reckon. He laid down that all free men were to be admitted to it, even those who had little or no land. With the rise in the importance of tradesmen, this was important. He laid down that all men possessing enough *landed* property to support a war-horse might become archons; that archons, after their year, must give an account of their actions, financial and general, to the Assembly; and that only if this was passed might they, and no others, become members of the Areopagite Council. Rich merchants who bought land *could* therefore become Areopagites, though this was probably rare for a long time; and even noblemen could only reach that influential position if they secured election to office, and carried out their duties to the satisfaction of the people.

To make this a reality Solon introduced his most far-reaching innovation, the creation of a second or People's Council, usually called The Council in distinction from the Areopagus. It consisted of a hundred men from each of the four Tribes found (presidentially mingled) in Attica and in all Ionian cities. Admission to it was open probably to the middle-class farmers or 'owners of a yoke of oxen', defined as those with half (or, *aliter*, two-thirds) the qualification for a 'knight', and roughly equaling the class of armoured infantry; and election was by lot, so that one did not have to be well known in order to secure a place. To this body was transferred the discussion and presentation of business for the Assembly, including presumably the acceptance of candidates for the archonships. The Areopagus, a council of elder statesmen and a supreme court, allegedly founded by the goddess Athena herself, had great prestige. Solon left it, with vague powers, as 'Guardian of the Laws', in which capacity it could presumably arraign