

THE GREEK CITY STATES and TRAGEDY: 3/2/09

Goals of the lecture

- 1) to give a broad account of Greek history and especially the rise to dominance of Athens.
- 2) to suggest that the “golden age” of Athens was more complex and Athenian imperialism less benign than Pericles’ funeral speech makes it seem.
- 3) to discuss some functions of tragedy in Athens and very brief details of its form and offer a few points of interest in some of our set texts (Herodotus, Thucydides and Euripides’ *Trojan Women*).

Brief Timeline of Greek history: all dates BCE

- c.2000 – emergence of first palaces on Crete
- c. 1700 – second phase of palaces: great age of Minoan civilisation.
- c. 1450 – Myceneans take over on Crete (Linear B script)
- c. 1200 – presumed date of the Trojan war
- c.1200 – gradual destabilisation in Crete and the rest of the Greek world, leading to so-called “Dark Age”
- 900-c. 650 BC - aristocratic rule
- c.800 onwards - Greek colonisation through Mediterranean and beyond
- c.735-15 – Sparta enslaves its neighbours (the helots)
- c. 750 – composition of the *Iliad*
- c.650 onwards - Cypselus of Corinth and rise of the "tyrants" in Greece.
- c.620 - at Athens - law-code of Draco
- 594 - at Athens - reforms of Solon (with some democratic tendencies)
- 550-510 - at Athens - tyranny of Peisistratus and his sons
- c.536 – tragedy first produced at the Dionysia
- 508/7 - at Athens - reforms of Cleisthenes after tyrants driven out

BEGINNINGS OF DEMOCRACY

490-478 THE PERSIAN WARS

- 490 - Battle of Marathon (near Athens); Persians defeated by Athenians
- 480 - Battle of Salamis (off coast of Attica); Persians defeated by the Greeks
- 479 - final defeat of the Persians on land at Plataea (near Thebes)
- 479 onwards - activities of the Delian League
- 454 - Treasury moved from Delos to Athens
- 431 - outbreak of the **PELOPONNESIAN WAR** (Athens v. Sparta)
- 429 - plague at Athens; death of Pericles
- 428 – near massacre at Mytilene
- 416 - massacre at Melos
- 415 – Euripides. *The Trojan Women*
- 415-3 – the Sicilian expedition
- 404 - defeat of Athens by Sparta.

Some important authors

- Homer – (?) somewhere between 850 and 750 B.C.E.
- Hesiod (?) 8th century BC: *Works and Days*; *Theogony*
- Sappho (late 7th/early 6th century): poems
- Solon (late 7th/early 6th century): poems
- Euripides (c. 485-406): *Trojan Women* and 18 other extant plays
- Herodotus (c.484-after 430): *History of the Persian Wars*
- Thucydides (c.460-400); *History of the Peloponnesian War*

Some useful secondary reading

The *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (3rd edition): an invaluable starting point for virtually everything
Early Greece (London, 1980) by Oswyn Murray. Extremely readable account of a period of
history about which very little is known for sure.

The Greek World, 479-323 (London, 1983) by Simon Hornblower. Very well-written and succinct
account by one of the best in the business.

The historical novels of Mary Renault (*The Praise Singer; The Mask of Apollo; The Last of the
Wine*) will also give you a great idea of what it was like.

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