

F. Solon

1. Debt Slavery

- a) In times of drought, Athens's commoners often starved. If they wanted to survive they had to turn to the aristocratic land-owners for help. To obtain loans of food or supplies, the commoners had to agree that if they could not repay their debt they would lose their property and become slaves.
- b) By 594 BC, the enslavement of commoners through debt had become such a common and hated practice that it caused a civil war.

2. Solon's Reforms (c.594 BC)

- a) In 594, with the civil conflict at its peak, the two sides agreed to submit their dispute to a respected archon named Solon.
- b) Solon was given absolute power to create laws for one year, and the people further agreed to follow his laws for ten years thereafter.
- c) Solon attempted to find a compromise between the desperate needs of the commoners and the power and right to own property of the aristocrats.
 - i) First, Solon *emancipated* the debt slaves, and returned their property to them.
 - ii) Second, he *abolished* the institution of debt slavery. Hence forth, it would be illegal to make any contract that would result in slavery.
 - ii) However, Solon refused to *redistribute* property from the aristocrats to the commoners, which would relieve their plight in times of drought.

G. The Rule of the Tyrannoi in Athens (560-510 BC)

1. Solon's laws of 594 were temporarily accepted by the Athenians. However, the commoners were not satisfied because Solon has not given them more land. This meant they would eventually have to turn to the lords for help again. The commoners did not want to be dependent in this way.
2. For their part, the lords resented the loss of slaves and property.
3. The commoners chose a respected military hero and nobleman named Peisistratus to champion their cause in the aristocratic assembly. His willingness to support the commoners earned him both the admiration of the commoners and the hatred of his fellow aristocrats.
4. With the help of the commoners, Peisistratus became the tyrannos of Athens.
5. By taking land from the aristocrats and giving it to the commoners, Peisistratus made himself very popular.
6. Those aristocrats who were the gravest threat to his rule were exiled.
7. In this way, Peisistratus ruled as tyrannos from 560 to 527, and even managed to have the Athenians accept his sons, Hippias and Hipparchus as the next tyrannoi.

H. The Return of Aristocracy

1. The nobles exiled by Peisistratus went to Delphi, where an important religious authority, the “Oracle” of Apollo was located.
2. They funded the construction of a new temple for the Oracle. In exchange, they obtained the Oracle's promise to find them help.
3. From then on, each time the king of Sparta (a powerful city-state) would seek out the Oracle's guidance, it would tell him that “Athens must be set free.”
4. Eventually, since most Greeks took the Oracle’s advice seriously, the Spartan king decided to provide the Athenian exiles with an army, which they used to retake their city.

I. Cleisthenes and the Birth of Democracy

1. The Rise of Cleisthenes

- a) Once the exiles had regained control of Athens, there was a contest for leadership between two of their champions, named Cleisthenes and Isagoras.
- b) Although Isagoras was elected archon, he was a harsh ruler, which led to yet another rebellion.
- c) If Athens continued to be racked by political violence, it would eventually disintegrate completely and be conquered by some other city-state.
- d) Cleisthenes was thus able to convince the aristocracy to accept a program of reforms to share power with the commoners.

2. Athenian Democracy

- a) To break up the power of the aristocratic families, Cleisthenes allowed all commoners to participate in a new, larger assembly that was made responsible for all the laws of Athens.
- b) To encourage the aristocrats and commoners to work together, Cleisthenes did not allow them to send representatives from their tribes to the assembly. Instead, he divided all the people into “demes” (areas like modern counties), in which they had to organize local governments that would send people to the main assembly. This made it harder for organize the government in terms of their *factions*. Instead they had to reorganize themselves as individuals in a certain area.
- c) Also, the aristocrats no longer had any special power. All important officials were chosen by elections, and all matters were decided by a majority vote in the assembly.
- d) Since the aristocrats no longer ruled over the commoners, this new form of government was a step up from the archaic plateau. Now every citizen could participate in the government, and the majority would rule.