Peisistratos to Perikles: Athens in the 5th century BC

Gillian Shepherd
The Reforms of Kleisthenes

• Division of Attica into 139 *demes* (municipalities)
• The demes were grouped into:
  – 10 *phylai* (tribes)
  – and each tribe divided into 3 *trittyes* (thirds)
• Citizenship, political and military organisation were based on these new units
• *Boule* (council) of 500 formed from 50 representatives of each of the 10 tribes
• NB *demos* = people, *kratos* = power
Sources of Evidence for Athenian Democracy

- Aristotle (?), *Athenaion Politeia (Constitution of the Athenians)*, late 4th cent. BC
- Pseudo-Xenophon, *Athenaion Politeia (Constitution of the Athenians)*, or “Old Oligarch”, c. 420 BC
- Political speeches (in assembly, law courts, other public gatherings like state funerals), late 5th cent. – 4th cent.
- Inscriptions (public decrees, inventories, accounts etc)
- Herodotus, Thucydides
- Drama (especially the comedies of Aristophanes)
Athenian Democracy

- Political rights restricted to adult male citizens (i.e., not women, slaves, or foreigners).
- Full political rights acquired at the age of 30 (i.e., could be a candidate for a magistracy, juror).
- *Ekklesia* (assembly): all adult male citizens over 20 yrs belonged to this; any could speak.
- *Boule* (Council of 500) met every day except on holidays; considered business to be put before the assembly.
- By the later 5th century, appointment to the *boule* was by lot for a year; by the 4th century, service was limited to 2 years for an individual.
- Each group of 50 men (from the 10 tribes) also served as *prytaneis* for a tenth of the year.
- Also law courts (*dikasteria*)
Kleroterion (allotment machine)

Bronze pinakion of Archilochos of Phaleron (4th cent. BC)
Restored plan of the Agora, end of the 5th cent. BC
Plan of the Tholos and New Bouleuterion, Athenian Agora
The Tholos (Athenian Agora)
5th cent. dining crockery
(ligature delta/epsilon ie DE = demosion)

Tholos reconstruction

Gateway to the New Bouleuterion

Reconstruction of the New Bouleuterion plan (NB with alternative arrangement of curved seating)


Gateway to the New Bouleuterion
The Pnyx

Ostraka (for voting for ostracism) cast against Themistokles, Kimon, Perikles etc
Restored plan of the Agora, end of the 5th cent. BC
The *Stoa Poikile* (Painted Stoa)
[Kimon] was the first to beautify the city with the so-called “liberal” and elegant resorts of which they were so excessively fond a little later; for the Agora he planted with plane trees, and the Academy he converted from a waterless and arid spot to a well-watered grove, equipped with clear running tracks and shady walks.

Plutarch *Kimon* 13.8

The Agora, La Trobe University

Photo © Gillian Shepherd
Theseus

- Athenian hero
- Accredited with the *synoikismos* (“dwelling together”) of Attica (i.e., political unification, symbolised by his labours)
- Died when thrown off a cliff on Skyros by Lycomedes (King of Skyros during the Trojan War, feared Theseus would dethrone him)
- Becomes symbol of Athenian democracy
And, understanding that the ancient Theseus, the son of Aegeus, when he fled from Athens and took refuge in [Skyros], was here treacherously slain by King Lycomedes, who feared him, Kimon endeavoured to find out where he was buried. For an oracle had commanded the Athenians to bring home his ashes, and pay him all due honours as a hero; but hitherto they had not been able to learn where he was interred, as the people of Scyros dissembled the knowledge of it, and were not willing to allow a search. But now, great inquiry being made, with some difficulty he found out the tomb and carried the relics into his own galley, and with great pomp and show brought them to Athens, four hundred years, or thereabouts, after his expulsion.

Plutarch, *Life of Kimon*

The sacred enclosure of Theseus at Athens was founded after the Battle of Marathon, when Kimon son of Miltiades devastated Skyros in revenge for the death of Theseus and brought home the bones to Athens.

Pausanias I. 17-2-7

... and rearranged

(from A. Mayor, The First Fossil Hunters. Paleontology in Greek and Roman Times, Princeton, 2000)
The Acropolis, Athens