

Poem of Solon: tenet and civic piety:

Ἡμετέρη δὲ πόλις κατὰ μὲν Διὸς οὐπποτ' ὀλεῖται 1

Αἶσαν καὶ μακάρων θεῶν φρένας ἀθανάτων

τοίη γὰρ μεγάθυμος ἐπίσκοπος ὄβριμοπάτρη

Παλλὰς Ἀθηναίη χεῖρας ὑπερθεν ἔχει. 4

Εὐνομίη δ' εὐκοσμία καὶ ἄρτια πάντ' ἀποφαίνει 32

καὶ θαμὰ τοῖς ἀδίκους ἀμφιπίθησι πέδας.

Τραχέα λειαίνει, παύει κόρον, ὕβριν ἀμαυροῖ,

εὐθύνει δὲ δίκας σκολιάς, περήφανά τ' ἔργα 36

πραύνει, παύει δ' ἔργα διχοσπασίης,

παύει δ' ἀργαλέης ἔριδος χόλον, ἔστι δ' ὑπ' αὐτῆς

πάντα κατ' ἀνθρώπους ἄρτια καὶ πινυτά. 39

Our city will never perish through the dispensation of Zeus 1

or the intentions of the blessed immortal gods;

for such a stout-hearted guardian, Pallas Athenaie/ Athena,

born of a mighty father, holds her hands over it. 4

Eunomia, Lawfulness reveals all that is orderly and fitting: 32

and often places fetters round the unjust.

She makes the rough smooth, puts a stop to excess, weakens insolence,

straightens out crooked judgements, tames deeds of pride,

She puts an end to acts of sedition and to the anger of grievous strife;

Under Her, Eunomia, all things among men are fitting and rational. 38-39¹

4 Dem. 19. 254-56 Demosthenes, *On the Embassy*

¹ Solon's poem: West 1972: Solon 4, 121-122; D. Gerber 1999: Solon 4, LCL, 112-117. Bowra 1938: Solon 71-80-86-104.

When Solon chose Athena among other gods as the Patron-god/ *Episkopos* of Athens expressing the fundamental tenet of civic piety in his poem, the conception of the city-god was for the first time expressed in Athens/ the Greek world, and a little later reactions to it occurred in Athens.² We will see why this poem was issued by Solon, particularly how this tenet was formed in Solon, and concerning its theme, its intention, its social background.

The social conditions

Everywhere in Greece at this phase, the end of the 7th century and the early 6th century, conflict and struggles always occurred among the leaders, wealthy people, and towns about internal and external problems, due to the lack of well-organized social systems and good wise, appropriate leaders who had constructive ideas with perspective and dynamic spirit and activities.

The Greeks at this time particularly had an acute aim for the formation of their new society reviving gradually from the long disastrous condition after the collapse of the Bronze Age centralized palatial social system. The Greeks were in intense need and were urgent to find the most appropriate methods for the aim. The reopening of the east-west contact opportunely led their search for methods towards the well-developed civilizations in the East.

Simultaneously cultural floods from the East occurred. First by human-exodus which was caused by the outrageous and violent Assyrian conquest, and by the Greeks' expansion to the East, who returned with direct knowledge and experience of that land. So much deeply influential to an even revolutionary degree, oriental cultural impact of the advanced civilizations occurred in Greece in this formative stage in overall spheres not just in literature and arts, but even conceptions and practices of the religious sphere were openly and positively accepted. Social-political matters were not exceptions.³

News of current historical incidents on the opposite shores of the Mediterranean may have reached Greece through these human media: achievements of rulers, social systems and religious activities in the cities of Neo Assyria and Neo Babylonia in this

² Parker 1996: 68-69; cf. Snodgrass 1980: 33.

³ Rhodes & J. Davies, both 1997: in Rhodes & L.G. Mitchell, (eds.), 1-2-8, & 24-33-6-38.

period.⁴ The Greeks may have recognized the practical conceptions and activities in the eastern society. The relation between divine power and human matters was particularly marked, that is, how and what the people did when they wished divine sanction on human matters. The Greeks learnt what to do now for their goal. They too should rely on divine power and pray to the divinity in order to obtain divine sanction, help and support for the construction of their new society. The Greeks followed eastern religious principles and practices: to trust in one particular deity, to build a divine dwelling of the deity (temple), to dedicate offerings to the deity, and to celebrate the deity in rituals and festivals for the divine favour of the deity. Here occurred profound changes in religious conceptions and practices for divine help.⁵ Religious conception was shifted to the Gods from the dead, and to heaven from graves.

Athens in crisis

Now we concentrate on the case of Athens. We begin with the social conditions in Athens in the last quarter of the 7th century to the first quarter/ half of the 6th century in the Early Archaic period. (c. 625- c. 550 BC)

There was a power conflict for the leadership among the wealthy aristocrats. The movement to govern a large community of increasing population had already begun in the 8th century. The confused large community, indeed, was in acute need of being organized in good order by wise proper brains. Landowning wealthy ambitious aristocrats desired to hold the role in their hands, and conflicts arose among them for it. It was getting worse in disordered conditions without any appropriate formal orders, laws and dominant positive responsible leading figures. Moreover it was even becoming a tyrannical reign.

In Athens and the whole Attic land, agriculture was the primary economy, and their whole life depended on agriculture. Grievous problems occurred between landowning wealthy people and the common people who worked on their lands. The common people were under a heavy burden of debt to the rich, paying them a sixth of the product (τὸ ἕκτημόριον/ a sixth-part, ἕκτημόριου/ sixth-parters). As they pledged their persons for

4 Particularly of Neo Assyrian kings, Sargon II (721-705 BC), Sennacherib (704-681 BC), Assurbanipal (668- 633 BC), and of Neo Babylonian kings, Nabopolassar (625-605 BC), Nebuchadnezzar II (604-562 BC), for instance.

5 Polignac 1995: 152. The actual archaeological finds prove the result of this movement: cf. A. Mazarakis 1997.

debts, and could be seized by their creditors, many of them had to become their slaves. There was no law against it. ⁶

Plutarch describes the conditions in Athens and Attica that the disparity between the rich and the poor had culminated, and that the city was in an altogether perilous condition under grave economic and political discontroled conflict, torn by regional strife. ⁷

‘ ἡ χώρα διαφορὰς εἶχεν, εἰς τοσαῦτα μέρη τῆς πόλεως διαστάσης.’ (xiii 1)

‘ τότε δὲ τῆς τῶν πενήτων πρὸς τοὺς πλουσίους ἀνωμαλίας ὥσπερ ἀκμὴν λαβούσης παντάπασιν ἐπισφαλῶς ἡ πόλις διέκειτο, καὶ μόνως ἂν ἐδόκει καταστῆναι καὶ παύσασθαι ταρρατομένη τυραννίδος γενομένης.’ (xiii 2)

(‘The city being divided into as many parties as there were diversities in its territory
‘The disparity between the rich and the poor had culminated, and the city was in an altogether perilous condition; it seems as if the only way to settle its disorders and stop its turmoil was to establish a tyranny.’)

Thus uncontrolled economic collapse and chaotic social conditions were progressing to an extreme state by the time of Solon. The worst was the collapse of individual family-economy from heavy debts to greedy landowners, selling their own family members as slaves even out of the city and to foreign lands. 4/6 14.54 4Ag18SmQMBD

‘Οἱ μὲν αὐτοῦ δουλεύοντες, οἱ δ’ ἐπὶ τὴν ξένην πιπρασκόμενοι. (xiii 2)

‘Πολλοὶ δὲ καὶ παῖδας ἰδίους ἠνακάζοντο πωλεῖν, καὶ τὴν πόλιν φεύγειν διὰ τὴν / χαλεπότητα τῶν δανειστῶν. Οὐδεὶς γὰρ νόμος ἐκόλυε. (xiii 3)

Perspective of Solon

Thus, around 600 BC the social conditions in Athens were getting worse as Solon was concerned that his city would really ruin itself due to the lawless, unjust and insolent citizens greedy for wealth and power. Solon was indeed distressed that his city would perish by divine punishment against the lawlessness and arrogance of the citizens. This was Solon’s political perception facing the grievous socio-economic crisis.⁸ This conception came out because Solon lived in the age of the city-state, not in the age of

⁶ Cf. Rhodes 1981: 118-188: about Solon and Solon’s reforms; (cf. 84-117: Between Kylon and Solon; 189-240: Tyranny).

⁷ Plutarch: *The Parallel Lives: Solon*: 13. 1- 3, LCL Vol. I: 404-434-436-499 (tr. Perrin 1959).

⁸ Cf. In Hesiod hunger, pestilence, death, no birth were regarded as divine punishment.

individual heroes as in the Homeric and Hesiodic world. It was a matter of the city-state. Bowra comments on the matter as follows:

Athens was in a state of great moral danger, an inevitable penalty.

Divine punishment caused by wealthy ambitious individuals of a city will come to the city itself, all the city, everyone else of the city will be punished, not rather to those individuals, the cause of the problems. This is a traditional idea of Punishment of the wicked by Right.⁹

Then, What Solon Did:

Now Solon himself being chosen in the very position to deal with these matters, he sought peaceful methods for a solution of the perilous economic and political conditions. Though civil conflict was a desperate problem, its fundamental causes should not be suppressed by force. All the problems now were not matters of warfare. Forrest interprets this attitude of Solon thus: ‘Solon disapproved of bloodshed more than he disapproved of change.’

Facing the grievous uncontrollable reality in the city and its citizens, Solon prayed to divine power for the granting of a sanction for a peaceful solution.

Solon might have known of examples of the falls of great oriental cities by divine punishment, and also of great oriental cities which were prosperous having firm ties with their city-gods. Solon determined to take up this oriental doctrine and the city-god conception and system for the peaceful solution of the present crisis.

First of all he tried to make the lawless wealthy people realize the divine justice against the wicked. Solon appealed to the citizens to correct and save their city by human effort notifying them to be just and lawful, and trust in divine protection and the help of a particular deity, the patron/ city god to rescue our city. Solon named the protecting divinity ‘*Episkopos*’, and claimed the divine function for the ‘strong-hearted’ and ‘great-father-born’ goddess Athenaia. Thus in his poem Solon appealed to the Athenian citizens. This is Solon’s intention and what Solon is warning in his poem.

Parker regards this statement of Solon ‘the first expression of a fundamental tenet of civil piety in Athens’, and he admits the (immediate) reaction to this tenet, that is, the constructions of the Ramp and the first monumental limestone temple of Athena on the

⁹ Bowra 1938: Solon: 78-84- 86; cf. Hurwit 1999, 100: ‘a belief in justice’.

Acropolis by c. 575 BC. Hugh Lloyd-Johns highly appreciates Solon's policy: 'What is new and important is the way in which this ancient doctrine is applied to current political situation.' ¹⁰

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10. Parker 1996: 69; Lloyd-Jones 1971: 43-44.