

THE MEGARA OF THEAGENES AND THEOGNIS

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ANCIENTLY Megara was ruled by kings like most other Greek states.¹ Before the seventh century the little country had been conquered by the Dorians who imposed their institutions and established themselves as a ruling elite; by the same century the kingship had also been supplanted by an oligarchy (Paus. 1. 43. 3). The office of king was retained, presumably for its sacral importance, as in many other Greek states.² It is very likely that the Megarians also possessed a war chieftain, a polemarch.³ Typically, Megara had a council, and somehow connected with it (just possibly identical with it) a college of officials called the *aisimnatai*.⁴ Also according to expectation there was an assembly, called an *ekklesia* by a late source.⁵ The Dorian ascendancy is attested by the existence of the three characteristic Dorian tribes,⁶ as well as by the local dialect. It has recently been argued persuasively that the antago-

nism of Dorian and non-Dorian has been greatly overestimated as a force in Greek history;⁷ one is prepared to believe that this is largely true for later archaic Greece several centuries after the Dorian conquest or migration, and even (from similar examples elsewhere, notably England after 1066) that a great deal of intermarriage and amalgamation had taken place. Nevertheless, it seems likely that the situation of those at the top of the social order as well as of those at the bottom was determined by the coming of the Dorians, even if there had been considerable amalgamation at all levels. Theognis, for example, with all his prejudices, shows not the slightest trace of antagonism based on an opposition of Dorians and non-Dorians, yet the extremes of social, economic, and political differentiation he depicts seem likely to have originated in the Dorian coming.

In the seventh century Megara reached a height of economic development that

1. The legends of Megarian kings are collected by E. L. Highbarger, *The History and Civilization of Ancient Megara* (Baltimore, 1927), pp. 66-87; cf. G. Busolt, *Griechische Geschichte*, I² (Gotha, 1893), 221, n. 3 (on 222).

2. *SGDI*, 3003; for the ritual activities of the king, cf. Dieuchidas, *FGrH*, 485 F 10.

3. The point seems ordinarily overlooked, but Paus. 1. 39. 6 mentions a "leadership in war" apart from the kingship in legendary times (cf. Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 3. 2 in the case of Athens) and at 1. 44. 6 explicitly mentions the polemarch. The evidence is neglected by Schaefer, s.v. "Polemarchos" (4), *RE*, Suppl. VIII (1956), 1097-1134. The board of five polemarchs of Hellenistic times (cf. *SGDI*, 3020) is of course something different and undoubtedly owes its existence to Boeotian example; cf. K. Hanell, *Megarische Studien* (Lund, 1934), p. 145; Busolt-Swoboda, *Gr. Stsk.*, I, 257; II, 1438.

4. Paus. 1. 42. 4, 43. 3 (on the difficulties of relating the *bouleuterion* to the *aisimnion* [like *aisimnatai* for *aisymnatai* to be preferred in Meg. dialect to *aisymnion*] see Highbarger, pp. 17-18). On the antiquity of the *aisimnatai*, who occur also in Megarian colonies founded in the seventh century, cf. Hanell, pp. 149-50. The word is probably pre-Doric; whether the institution was is neither proved nor disproved by the linguistic fact (Hanell, pp. 148-49). It is commonly held that the *aisimnatai* acted with respect to the Megarian *boule* like the *prytaneis* in classical Athens (e.g., L. Whibley, *Greek*

Oligarchies [New York, 1896], p. 164, n. 8; Toepffer, s.v. "Aisymnetes" [1], *RE*, I. 1 [1893], 1088-91, at 1090-91; Hanell, p. 146; Busolt-Swoboda, I, 374), but the fact that this was apparently their function in the Megarian colony of Chalcedon centuries later (*SGDI*, 3054) is no proof for their function in the mother city in the seventh century. Greek words for functions and functionaries in government could change. How correct would it be to use Hdt.'s mention (5. 71. 2) of the *prytaneis* of the naucraries in seventh-century Athens to determine the function of the *prytaneis* two hundred years later in the same city? And it seems a bit difficult to think that seventh-century Megara had so sophisticated an institution as the *prytaneis* of Athens in the age of Pericles and later. On the form *aisimnatai* in Megara, see Felix Solmsen, *Beiträge zur griechischen Wortforschung*, I (Strasburg, 1909), 39.

5. Schol. Pind. *Nem.* 7. 155; the assembly is simply referred to as the *damos* in *SGDI*, 3005, but this is no proof against the name *ekklesia*; cf. the decrees of Athens. The existence of a functioning assembly of some sort in the seventh century is probably implied by the way in which Theagenes seized power (see below).

6. *SIG*³, 471, ll. 32, 49, 67 (see n. 14); cf. Highbarger, p. 99 with n. 19.

7. É. Will, *Doriens et Ioniens* (Paris, 1956); for Megara, pp. 39, 45, n. 2, 58.

she was never to attain again (while Athens, her great neighbor to the east, merely stagnated for the most part). But Megara had to pay the price for her economic activity and growth, as many Greek states did at a similar stage in the archaic period, whether in the seventh or sixth century.⁸ Largely on a priori grounds, we are probably right in thinking that Megarian manufactures played a role in Megara's trade, but specific references to products of the cheap woolen cloth of Megara, for example, are found no earlier than the late fifth century, although Theognis attests the more or less scientific raising of sheep (very likely for wool), asses, and horses (183–84). But Corinthian pottery, for example, dominated the market in Megarian colonies.⁹ Possibly some or much of that pottery and what it contained were carried in Megarian bottoms, for the power that sent out colonies, struggled for decades with Athens over the control of Salamis, and sent a sizable naval expedition against Perinthus (see below), must have been of considerable

importance on the sea. Clearly, however, the main interest in the establishment of Megarian colonies was land hunger; trade came second as an added benefit.¹⁰

There can be no doubt, therefore, that the economic growth of Megara was accompanied by a relatively rapid growth of population which pressed ever more harshly upon the means of subsistence in a land which was certainly one of the smaller in Greece and probably one of the less fertile.¹¹ As elsewhere under similar circumstances in Greece, the distribution of wealth was more than uneven; in fact a large part of the common people lived in a state of abject misery, greater perhaps than that of their fellows across the border in Attica.¹² At the top of the social order were the great noble landowners, who nevertheless sometimes engaged in trade. This latter phenomenon is known elsewhere in Greece, and is explicitly attested by Theognis (179–80) for Megara. If that reactionary could recommend voyages at sea as a means of attaining fortune for his beloved Cynrus, we may be sure that they

8. On Megara's economic importance, especially for trade, in the seventh century, see F. M. Heichelheim, *An Ancient Economic History*, I² (Leyden, 1965), 239, 241–45, 248. Megara's importance can be exaggerated; see the minimizing remarks of J. Hasebroek, *Trade and Politics in Ancient Greece* (New York, 1965), esp. p. 70, on the volume of archaic trade.

9. J. Boardman, *The Greeks Overseas* (Baltimore, 1964), p. 254. The first certainly Megarian coins belong to the first half of the fourth century; but certain coins of the sixth, it has been suggested, may belong to the city; Head, *Hist. Num.*², pp. 393, 358; E. Meyer, s.v. "Megara" (2), *RE*, XV.1 (1931), 152–205, at 184. Yet Heichelheim may nevertheless be right when he infers a money economy for Megara by the end of the seventh century (I², 253).

10. See C. Roebuck, *Ionian Trade and Colonization* (New York, 1959), pp. 111, 114–15; cf. G. Glotz, *Ancient Greece at Work* (New York, 1967), pp. 99–100; etc.

11. On the soil and topography of largely mountainous Megara, see Highbarger, pp. 5–6; Meyer, *RE*, XV.1 (1931), 158; G. Glotz, *Hist. grecque*, I, 327.

12. See the sneering description in Theog. 53–56; the impoverished people wore skins instead of cloth, whatever may have been the state or volume of the wool industry of Megara at the time. The many problems connected with the poems in the Theognidean corpus cannot be discussed here. Since much of this paper rests on testimony attributed to Theognis, however, the position assumed in this discussion anent the relevant problems should be made explicit: T. was a native of

mainland (Nisaeon) Megara and flourished in the middle of the sixth century B.C.; he spent some time, possibly years, in exile (possibly some of the time at Hyblaeon Megara). On these matters, the best recent brief survey of the difficulties and arguments is A. Garzya's ed. of T. (Florence, 1955), pp. 5–20. The view of C. M. Bowra, *Early Greek Elegists* (Cambridge, Mass., 1938), p. 144; W. Jaeger, *Paideia*, I (Oxford, 1954), 188, 189; and others, that the "seal" of authenticity in the poems is the name of Cynrus seems correct (this does not mean that all Cynrus poems are necessarily authentic, or that all non-Cynrus poems are necessarily pseudonymous) and is put almost beyond question by 237–54 ("I have made you immortal, Cynrus"). Only Cynrus poems, accordingly, will be regarded here as the probable testimony of Theognis. It may be worth noting in passing that I had had grave doubts that T. was, despite usual opinion, in fact passionately attached to Cynrus, but after rereading 237–54 several times (I exclude all of "Book 2" as probably not by T.), it occurred to me that this poem is the best proof of passionate attachment. Whether heterosexual or homosexual, the first part of the poem is a declaration of the lover's "what I have done for you," while the end (improperly doubted by many scholars) actually falls in the category of a lover's irritated reproach to his beloved for deception. Accordingly, the "previously" of 53–54, written in the middle of the sixth century (more or less) refers (in the nature of the presumably gradual character of the phenomenon involved) to the period before the radical "democracy," which began around 600 B.C. (see below).

had been a noble vocation for some time before the middle of the sixth century. We may suggest that the poverty of some of the nobles (Theog. 315 [not to Cynus, but cf. lines 319–22, which are a Cynus poem]) may have been caused by a failure to engage in trade or by a lack of success thereat. After all, the important possessors of the original form of capital, the land, were necessarily those possessed of venture capital for something new.¹³ There are indirect reasons (see below) for assuming the existence of a middle class, based both on more recent trade and on more ancient agriculture; some such persons will have accompanied or followed their betters in new ventures, and will have been enriched by their venturing beyond the conservative peasant fixation to the soil which Hesiod recommends.¹⁴ “Rich men marry rich men’s daughters,” but Theognis (183–92) bitterly complains of aristocrats (“the good”) and the base (“the bad”) who intermarry. Surely it is right to see here a gradual process which, *pari passu* with Megara’s advance in trade, had begun long before Theognis’ own time, that is, well back into the seventh century.

The typical tyrant in ancient Greece or elsewhere is one who seizes upon popular discontent as an engine or force to propel himself into selfish power. In the later seventh century B.C. Megara was ripe for a tyrant. It would be wrong, however, to look for his potential or real supporters among the truly poor, those who wore skins and had no share in anything (Theog. 53–56). Regularly, revolutions are made

primarily by those who are only relatively well-off. Those who are absolutely abject have no time to meditate upon their grievances; they are too preoccupied with keeping alive. The implications of the evidence are that we should look to the middle class, not to the absolutely poor, to be the supporters of a tyrant in such times. And we may infer that the future tyrant, himself from the upper class who alone under archaic conditions have the time for much dabbling in politics, or for much self-consciousness, will be inspired by his ambition and intelligence to see that his support will lie in the ranks of those who are on the fringes of the men who matter. In Megara this ambitious man was Theagenes.

Doubtless Theagenes was a noble. Notoriously he married his daughter to the Athenian noble Cylon;¹⁵ this connection with Cylon offers the only means for establishing Theagenes’ date, since Cylon’s attempted coup to become tyrant at Athens with his father-in-law’s assistance occurred in the 630’s or 620’s, and the latter was tyrant at the time. It is futile to attempt, as scholars have in the past, to guess at the length of the Megarian tyranny; all that can be stated is that it existed for some years in the last half of the seventh century. At least Theagenes was tyrant long enough to build an aqueduct, presumably a considerable undertaking, to supply the city of Megara with water.¹⁶ Aristotle has two statements about Theagenes’ seizure of the tyranny. In the *Rhetoric* (1. 1357b31–33) he says

13. Cf. Busolt-Swoboda, I, 177, n. 6, speaking of Athens.

14. *Op.* 236–37, 618, cf. 641–94; H. would not have uttered this caution if there had not been those already in his time who transgressed it.

15. Marriage: Thuc. 1. 126. 3; Paus. 1. 28. 1, 40. 1. Cylon noble: Thuc. 1. 126. 3; cf. Hdt. 5. 71. 1 (almost certainly a *hetairia* in the seventh century meant a band of nobles). Athens was far less advanced in socio-economic development in the seventh century than Megara; presumably a Megarian at that time would have married a rich non-noble, but it is less

likely that an Athenian would have. Highbarger, p. 125 and nn. 27, 28, is surely wrong when he holds that it is equally possible that Theagenes was a wealthy and influential tradesman.

16. On the length of Theagenes’ tyranny, see F. Schachermeyr, *s.v.* “Theagenes” (2), *RE*, V.A.2 (1934), 1341–45, at 1342–43. On the aqueduct, *ibid.*, 1345, with Paus. 1. 40. 1, 41. 2; H. Berve, *Die Tyrannis bei den Griechen* (Munich, 1967), II, 536.

that Dionysius of Syracuse plotted for the tyranny by asking for a bodyguard; likewise Pisistratus of Athens in his plotting asked for a bodyguard, and, having gotten it (or, getting it) became tyrant. "And (likewise) Theagenes in Megara." But in the *Politics* (beginning at 5. 1305a7) he says that anciently generals and demagogues were usually identical, and tyrants had this origin; also anciently, offices of great power were frequently entrusted to one individual. He then reverts to a discussion of the practice of demagoguery in conjunction with the holding of military office; the demagogues inflamed the poor against the rich. So Pisistratus became tyrant. "And Theagenes [became tyrant] in Megara by slaying the flocks of the well-to-do, catching them pasturing their flocks on the lands of others by the river" (1305a24-26). Obviously there is no real contradiction here; Theagenes obtained the tyranny primarily through two things: his successful request for a bodyguard, and his slaying the flocks of the wealthy. Since the question of chronology here is generally not made explicit by modern scholars, it may be well to suggest that obtaining the bodyguard probably came first. Whether or not Theagenes was a noble, he would hardly have dared attack the valuable property of the rich without some assurance against probably violent reprisals. Thus he likely obtained the bodyguard first. The context of the passage in the *Politics* makes it almost certain that he inveighed against the rich and thus won the loyalty (*pistis*) of "the people"; Aristotle may mean that he had held or was holding some high military office with distinction, as Pisistratus had when he became tyrant at Athens. Such an office might well have done much to make him popular. It is tempting to

think that this military popularity was associated with the perennial war between Athens and Megara over Salamis, which was waged intermittently during the entire period covered by this paper, that is, roughly from the middle of the seventh century to the middle of the sixth century B.C.; but, although this lasting hostility with Athens must never be forgotten in the background of the domestic history of Megara here discussed, it is vain to attempt to discover any specific connection or interrelation. The chronology of Megarian history is too vague and approximate and that of the war is too vague and contradictory to offer any hope of success.¹⁷ Whether or not Theagenes as tyrant occupied some official position cannot be determined.

The new tyrant's power was thus assured and his popularity consolidated by his slaughtering the flocks of the rich on other people's land. More can probably be deduced from this passage, however, than has hitherto been the case. Surely we may presume that at least part of the demagoguery which Theagenes had used to sway "the people" had been directed against these same rich men, undoubtedly nobles for the most part, but probably even at this date some others, who thus arrogantly exploited the lands of their inferiors. It is almost as certain that these inferiors are not the really poor, the miserable skin-clad wretches of whom Theognis was to speak so contemptuously. It sometimes, though not always, suits the latter's purpose to confound all the non-noble *kakoi* in an undifferentiated, disgusting mass. But obviously there must have been gradations; those who intermarried with the nobles were surely not wearers of hides. Theognis' is the rhetoric of contempt and probably of jealousy.

17. For an ingenious attempt to straighten out the chronology of the war and correlate it mainly with the internal history

of Athens, see A. French, "Solon and the Megarian Question," *JHS*, LXXVII (1957), 238-46.

Moreover, flocks are best pastured on well-watered lands; this is particularly true of horses, and the nobles of Megara, as generally throughout Greece, were horse folk, and undoubtedly formed a cavalry corps.¹⁸ Hence the pasturage "by the river." But the Megarid has no rivers, at least in modern times, although it does have a system of gullies which in the wetter conditions of the ancient Mediterranean area, before the forests were mostly cut down, may have been streams in winter and spring, and may possibly have contained a trickle of water in summer.¹⁹ Even in a Mediterranean summer, what water there was in the soil would tend to collect by such a stream, even if it had ceased to flow or be visible. Obviously such land is not marginal land, but among the best in the Megarid. "The people" to whom Theagenes appealed, presumably in his demagoguery as well as in his slaying of the flocks to dramatize that he had their interests at heart, could not have been the extremely poor, only the relatively so, who were thus victimized by the very rich and powerful. Perhaps we should interpret the quarrel between the small farmers and their probably capitalistic and wealthy opponents as a conflict arising from a desire on the part of the small farmer to engage in subsistence, that is, self-support, farming, as opposed to the wish of their foes to retain and

extend the more profitable development of animal husbandry, regardless of the pressure of population on the soil, as has been suggested for contemporary Attica.²⁰ We should probably think of the small farmers involved as more nearly resembling the zeugites than the thetes of Solon's Attica; presumably they were of hoplite status. Apparently Theagenes broadened the scope of politics in Megara, extending it from the narrow circles of the aristocratic and the wealthy to the small farmers, the agricultural middle class. In the light of the *palintokia* (see below) of a few decades later, we may perhaps guess that it was not without some justification of legal pretext that the rich pastured their flocks on lands not their own, and that it is likely they did this in connection with indebtedness of the small farmers to them.²¹

It has frequently been suggested that, apart from the megalomania of tyrants which not uncommonly expressed itself in the construction of great works of architecture and engineering, Theagenes built his aqueduct to give employment to the Megarian poor. This may well be so, but if it is, the undertaking would hardly have provided enough employment to go beyond mere tokenism. Perhaps the aqueduct should be seen primarily as an attempt to please the urban compeers of the same class to whom the flock-slaughtering

18. Theog. 551 (cf. 986-87, not to Cynus), 183-84. K. J. Beloch, "Theognis' Vaterstadt," *Jahrb. f. class. Phil.*, CXXXVII (1888), 729-33, at 733, says that 551 cannot refer to Nisaeon Megara because (he cites Thuc. 2. 9. 3, from which his conclusion by no means follows) Megara and the Peloponnese had no cavalry. But this is perverse.

19. See Meyer, *RE*, XV.1 (1931), 159, with map on 165-66. The springs which Theagenes tapped for his aqueduct are evidence that the Megarid was supplied with ground water. Had it not been, it would have been a summer desert; such water would naturally collect in the lowest points of the Megarian plain (the gullies).

20. A. French, "The Economic Background to Solon's Reforms," *CQ*, L (1956), 11-25, at 11.

21. Heichelheim, I², 290, is surely exaggerating and thinking in terms too sophisticated for the seventh century when he holds that Theagenes' purpose was "to level the class of

large landowners and nobles economically." And merely killing the beasts would hardly be enough to "ruin" most of the nobles economically (Meyer, *RE*, XV.1 [1931], 184). Presumably they suffered heavy losses, but they presumably also had flocks grazing on their own lands, as well as resources they could employ in manufacture and commerce. The theory of P. N. Ure, *The Origin of Tyranny* (New York, 1962 [= Cambridge, 1922]), p. 267, that Theagenes may have wanted to monopolize the wool industry of Megara, seems fantastic for the time and place. On the other hand, the suggestion of A. R. Burn, *The Lyric Age of Greece* (London, 1960), p. 188, that there may have been strife between "cattlemen and crofters" is attractive, especially if "cattlemen" is not interpreted narrowly, although "crofters" may perhaps intend an economic class rather lower than the "poor" thus gratified by Theagenes.

appealed in the countryside. The nobles in town would have retainers to fetch potable water; lesser folk would not, especially not servants easily spared for the purpose. At any rate, the aqueduct is fairly good attestation to the urban development of the city, and therefore, by the probable concentration in the city of the services of manufacture, exchange, and distribution, to the essentials of an advanced economy.²²

The tyranny in Megara turned out to be relatively short-lived. All we are told is the bare fact that the Megarians expelled Theagenes (Plut. *Q. Graec.* 18 [295C]); apparently, however, he was at least able to save his life. We can only speculate as to the reasons for his downfall. It can be taken for granted that he was unpopular with the aristocrats and the rich whom he had assailed and despoiled in order to obtain power. It is quite probable that he sent some of his more obstreperous opponents among them into exile.²³ Certainly the memory of Theagenes left a lasting fear of tyranny in the minds of the nobles, if Theognis (39–52) speaks for his class as well as himself. Presumably the tyrant had done little or nothing to alleviate the lot of the very poor; apparently that was to happen, as far as it did, during the next regime. Likewise, especially if the difficulties of the small farmers were connected with their debts, the slaughter of the flocks of the rich, however temporarily heartening and showy, could have provided no lasting relief for the men concerned. Land redistribution was being talked of, at

least in Athens, about this time (Sol. Frag. 23 in context in *Ath. Pol.* 12. 3), but there is no certain instance of its occurring so early in Greece. In any case, had Theagenes actually embarked on a systematic program of *gês anadasmós*, it is less likely that his tyranny would have been overthrown. This does not exclude the possibility that he may have confiscated estates belonging to his enemies and used them to enrich himself, reward his supporters, or presumably to pay for such projects as the aqueduct.²⁴ In sum, it seems that Theagenes made no real effort to deal with the fundamental problems that beset Megara; at least there is not the slightest hint of it in our admittedly scanty information. Apparently his tyranny was merely the result of personal ambition and self-aggrandizement on the part of a man, probably a noble, desirous of winning in the typical struggles of an oligarchy or an aristocracy such as are documented for Athens in the next generation or so. Theagenes seems not to have had the wit or statesmanship to serve his political ambitions well enough to make his tenure of power lasting.²⁵

The regime that succeeded the tyrant in power in Megara is called moderate by Plutarch (*Q. Graec.* 18 [295D]). It is probable that the leaders of the opposition which had procured the tyrant's downfall were the noble and rich who were the most politically active among his foes;²⁶ by the same token they will have headed the new moderate government. Precisely in what the moderation of the new government consisted we are not informed, but

22. There seems little ground for the suggestion that Theagenes may also have constructed the second Megarian citadel, Alcathea; cf. Hanell, pp. 93–94.

23. Glotz, *Hist. grecque*, I, 328, suggests that the exiled Dorycleans of Paus. 1.40.5 were sent into their exile by Theagenes; this is possible, but it could equally well have happened under the "democratic" regime which succeeded the tyranny and under which in fact many nobles were

banished. The chronology of the Dorycleans' betrayal of Salamis to the Athenians is too obscure to permit any hypothesis.

24. Highbarger, p. 125.

25. Cf. C. Mossé, *La tyrannie dans la Grèce antique* (Paris, 1969), p. 47.

26. Berve, I, 34; Meyer, *RE*, XV.1 (1931), 184; Highbarger, p. 126.

it is praised by contrast with the excesses that followed.²⁷ We may assume that the process by which the (rich) "base" married the noble "good," so bitterly castigated by Theognis (184–92), was by this time fairly well advanced, and hence the government in Greek terminology should be termed an oligarchy rather than an aristocracy. One supposes that the nobles and the rich, active participants in the government were frightened by the experience of Theagenes as Theognis was later on. Under the impress of their fears of another tyrant, they may have mollified the rigor of their factional infighting. But the problems of Megara were still unsolved and the discontent of its people still unappeased. The example of Theagenes in appealing to wider circles of the population was before the oligarchs' eyes, and "demagogues" among the oligarchs gradually came to embark upon a course that Aristotle and Plutarch in their conservatism in effect stigmatize as "intemperate democracy." Theagenes had originally appealed for support to the middle class. For some of his successors his example must have been irresistible; they came more and more to appeal not only to the middle class, but to the people at large, including the poor and dispossessed. These developments probably occurred about 600 B.C.: we need not presuppose a formal change in the basic constitution of Megara; the implication is that the development was gradual (Plut. *Q. Graec.* 18 [295D]). In their internecine struggles the oligarchs will have furnished leaders for the discontent of the people beyond the middle class. In turn they will have been fiercely opposed by other oligarchs who from principle or prejudice disdained such

expedients (cf. Theog. 331–32, whether written before or after his exile). The people thus appealed to were the skin-clad, the extremely poor, who had access neither to justice nor to law—"in the good old days," Theognis means. To the latter and his fellow diehards the situation meant the corruption and debasement of the life of the state. Apparently the very poor had been virtual outlaws, without recourse to courts or law. In the decades following 600 they attained both; the reference to their having access to laws (*nomoi*) may mean that they were now permitted participation in the assembly, as well as in the processes of justice. The language of Plutarch (*Q. Graec.* 18 *fin.* [295D]) may carry the same implication. In Theognis' eyes this is the subversion of the natural order of the universe (43–60). In the heady sensation that they could, perhaps, redress the grievances of generations, now articulated and expressed, the poor, like those in France in 1789, committed excesses. They arrogantly forced themselves into the houses of the rich and demanded a share of the feasts; if they met refusal they resorted to tumult and violence. Among other things, like most people throughout most of history, they were simply hungry as well as conscious of a new importance they thought they had acquired; like similar classes in other places and times their (presumptive) former servility was transformed into overweening insolence as they foresaw the end of their troubles (Plut. *Q. Graec.* 18 [295D]). But in all probability the Megarian convulsions in which they thus played a dramatic part in the end benefited the middle class more than the poor.

We have noted that it is likely that the

27. Cf. Arist. *Pol.* 5. 1302b30, and the other passages from *Pol.* to be cited in this connection. The judgment of Plut. so closely agrees with Arist.'s comments on the subject that the suspicion arises that Plut.'s source was Arist., presumably in the lost *Megaraeion Politeia*, or that Plut. and Arist. followed

a common and very conservative source, such as, perhaps, the Megarian historians, Dieuchidas or Hereas. Both belonged to the fourth century, but their chronological relationship to Arist. is obscure; see Hanell, pp. 11–12; Jacoby, *FGrH*, IIIb, p. 389. On the *Meg. Pol.* see Strabo 7. 322.

middle class was heavily indebted to the rich, and that Theagenes had done nothing to solve their fundamental problems. Sometime during this period of "radical democracy" there was engineered a reform known as the *palintokia*; it was accomplished by a *dogma*, probably a decree of the Megarian assembly. By this "repayment of interest" all the interest (on current obligations?) which debtors had paid their creditors was returned by the latter to the former. Plutarch (*ibid.*) might be deemed to imply that the same groups which had invaded the houses of the rich were primarily those who benefited from this relief measure, but that is unlikely. The middle class, at least its majority, is not likely to have insolently demanded a share in the food of the rich. On the other hand, the poor, skin-clad or not, have little to do with loans, and contracts, and interest; they are too preoccupied with the barest necessities of life. When they do go into debt their only real security is their persons. One would be quite prepared to assume debt slavery at Megara as at Athens, except that there is not the slightest hint in the sources that this situation prevailed in Megara. And it is likely, if for no other reason than that the example of Athens is so prominent in the sources, that Plutarch or Aristotle would have mentioned Megarian debt slavery had it existed. Accordingly the principal economic beneficiaries of the "immoderate" democracy must have been the middle class, which presumably already participated in the assembly and had probably voted Theagenes his bodyguard. But if Theognis has been correctly interpreted here, the political beneficiaries of the "democracy" were the lowest class,

who were no longer regarded as being without the law, and may well have been admitted to some participation in the assembly. It is also likely that some of them will have benefited to some extent from the *palintokia*. That a revolution having mainly economic roots should take a political form and have primarily political results will surprise no student of history. And, at the least, we may add the very poor to those Megarians possessing some degree of political consciousness.

The excesses of the truly poor, probably the most wretched peasants and shepherds, had their counterpart in higher levels of society. The struggle among the ruling oligarchs, some appealing to the people in general, others no doubt bitterly opposing such a recourse, became ever more severe and violent. The bitterest opponents of the demagogues were expelled and their property confiscated (Arist. *Pol.* 5. 1304b35-37); given the vehement opinions of Theognis, it is no surprise to learn that he was one of those exiled and that his property was seized.²⁸

The sources use the terms *demokratia* and related words to describe this regime; yet there is nothing in the evidence to contradict the a priori belief that anything like a true democracy in the fifth- and fourth-century usage of the term is most unlikely in the early sixth century. Aristotle also refers to democratic reforms of Solon in contemporary Athens; not only is the term anachronistic as applied to Solon's day,²⁹ but it merely refers to developments that could lead to democracy, and at Athens did. Not even this was the case at Megara. Hence it is more realistic to understand an oligarchy, as depicted here, in which the oligarchs, for purely selfish

28. 1197-1202; cf. 209-210 (not to Cynus); J. Carrière, *Theognis de Mégare* (Paris [?], 1949 [?]), p. 11.

29. On the word "democracy," see J. A. O. Larsen, "Cleisthenes and the Development of the Theory of Democ-

racy at Athens," *Essays in Political Theory Presented to George H. Sabine* (Ithaca, 1948), pp. 1-16; M. Ostwald, *Nomos and the Beginnings of the Athenian Democracy* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 96-136.

reasons resulting from their struggle among themselves, acted to benefit wider circles of the state in order to win support; as in later Republican Rome, the oligarchs merely tried to harness the discontents of the people to their own ambitions. In the process some political and economic amelioration of the lot of the people outside the oligarchy occurred; that is all. And, amid these struggles, there is more than a hint that the government was reduced to relative impotence while disorders became endemic. The popular seizure of food from the rich may have been covertly or openly approved or incited by some of the oligarchs, but there was more. Plutarch³⁰ tells us that, in the time of the intemperate democracy, some Peloponnesian *theoroi*, passing through the Megarid on their way to Delphi, were set upon by night as they slept in their wagons with their wives and children and were thrown into a nearby lake by drunken hoodlums; many of them were drowned. Because of its weakness and disorder the Megarian government took no steps to punish the criminals. (So says Plutarch, but one wonders whether some policy of the state, irretrievably lost to us, might not have been the real reason for the government's inactivity.) Finally the Amphictiony punished the offenders by death or exile. If, as Plutarch implies, such conditions were characteristic of life under the "democracy," if sacred *theoroi* were not

safe, no man was. There was even plundering of the temples; such excesses were certain to produce general revulsion among the Greeks of archaic times.

The violence, disorder, and confusion of what was an immoderate oligarchy, rather than a democracy of any kind, eventually brought about the downfall of the government. So many of its opponents, perhaps even men of the middle class as well as the upper, were sent into exile that they eventually banded together and, returning under arms, defeated their enemies in battle and overthrew the "democracy."³¹ It seems doubtful that the numerical or military superiority of the returning exiles was so great as to win this battle for them without other contributing factors. It is likely that many or most Megarians of all classes had been alienated by the combined weakness and extremism of the regime, perhaps especially by its sacrilege. Among those thus restored to their fatherland by the counterrevolution was Theognis (333–34, probably 543–46). He may have moderated the vehemence of his expressed opinions, as would be natural in an older man and a returned exile (219–20); at any rate he seems to have become a judge of some sort.³² It is not certain that the new government exiled any of its defeated opponents, but it is likely; in any event, the latter were expressly excluded from any share in power. Only those who had returned from exile

30. *Q. Graec.* 59 (304E–F); we should like to know whether this was merely hooliganism, or whether the fact that the envoys were Peloponnesian was important. Also how was the Amphictiony able to inflict punishment of death or exile on the culprits? Did the event, perhaps, occur near the end of the "radical" regime, and the restored conservative oligarchs hand the offenders over to Amphictionic vengeance? Or was the League able to bring so much pressure on the Megarians, ultimately, that they were compelled to punish the criminals at Amphictionic insistence?

31. *Arist. Pol.* 4. 1300a17–18; 5. 1302b31, 1304b34–39. It has been argued, but improbably, that the events referred to by *Arist.* occurred in 424 B.C. (*Thuc.* 4. 74. 4); see T. Hudson Williams, "Theognis and His Poems," *JHS*, XXIII (1903),

1–23, at 6; W. L. Newman, ed., *The Politics of Aristotle*, IV (Oxford, 1902), ad 4. 1300a17, pp. 264–65; Whibley, pp. 74, n. 7; 130 and n. 20; Meyer, *RE*, XV.1 (1931), 185. *Arist.*'s description does not agree with *Thuc.*'s account of the revolution of 424 B.C.

32. 543–46; it seems natural to put this judgeship under the restored oligarchy rather than under the radical "democracy" that Theognis detested, although the continuing intermarriage of "base" and "good" will have not ceased to disturb him. On the judgeship, see the suggestion of C. M. Bowra, *On Greek Margins* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 105–108; cf. B. A. van Groningen, ed., *Theognis* (Amsterdam, 1966), ad *Theog.* 543–44 (pp. 215–16).

and fought against the "democracy" were eligible (Arist. *Pol.* 4. 1300a17–19). If this be pressed, and if Theognis' judgeship was in fact held after his return from exile, then he must have participated in the actual fighting against the "democrats."

The date of the counterrevolution must be some time shortly after 550 B.C.³³ The restored oligarchy of Megara was probably moderate, as the consensus of modern scholars holds (only because of the cessation of references in the sources to troubles in Megara until the fifth century, it must be admitted). Probably the reforms of the "democracy" were not openly undone: the *palintokia* stood; and presumably the admission of the poorest class to private citizen rights (which Theognis so deplored) and possibly to some public ones, e.g., participation in the assembly, was not tampered with. Especially if this last is true, one may suppose that even a moderate oligarchy will have strictly limited the assembly's effective share in the government in some way; this would be particularly likely in view of what had just happened under the "democracy." The

moderation of the new oligarchy would have consisted in avoiding the excesses of its predecessor, duly respecting the rights of property and the gods. It will have been largely helped by revulsion from the character of Megarian history for the last century. Nevertheless, as was to be expected, there was discontent with the new regime, as the aftermath of the expedition against Perinthus and the event against the oligarchs of Samos show.³⁴ Megara joined Sparta's Peloponnesian League; unfortunately we do not know when, but it must have been some time in the later sixth century. Undoubtedly one motive was desire for protection against Athens and Corinth, which had far outdistanced Megara, but another motive may have been protection against the possibility either of tyranny or of "radical" revolution again in Megara.³⁵

Perhaps we may conclude with an invidious comparison. Megara had no Solon; she did not even have a Pisistratus. Theagenes seems to have understood nothing beyond opportunism and ambition. Megara finally attained a sort of

33. Heraclea Pontica was founded about 550 or 549 B.C. (when Cyrus the Great gained power over the Medes, [Scymnus] 971–75; cf. A. T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire [Achaemenid Period]* [Chicago, 1948], p. 37; M. S. Drower, s.v. "Cyrus" [I], *OCD*). Highbarger, p. 113, dates the foundation of Heraclea Pontica to 559. The colony was founded by Megarian democrats, who were shortly thereafter overthrown (Arist. *Pol.* 5. 1304b31–34). Hence the colony was founded at the time the "democrats" were still in power in Megara. The attempt to date the radical "democracy" by the time of the presumptive invention of comedy by the Megarians during the "democratic" regime (Arist. *Poet.* 1448a30–34) at best establishes the existence of the "democracy" in the first half of the sixth century; but the whole matter is dubious, since the claim to comedy is probably fictitious. Cf. Highbarger, p. 140; Meyer, *RE*, XV.1 (1931), 185. One of the failures of the "democracy" was a military expedition against Perinthus, founded about 600 B.C. The Megarians were defeated by the Samians who came to the rescue of Perinthus, but then, on invitation, helped overthrow the oligarchy of the Geomoroi at Samos, and those who wished were allowed to settle in Samos (Plut. *Q. Graec.* 57 [303E–304C]). This event obviously took place at Samos before the tyranny of Polycrates and his family. Unfortunately the date of the beginning of that tyranny is contested (M. White, "The Duration of the Samian Tyranny," *JHS*,

LXXIV [1954], 36–43; T. J. Cadoux, "The Duration of the Samian Tyranny," *ibid.*, LXXVI [1956], 105–106; R. Meiggs and D. Lewis, *GHI*, pp. 30–31), but it probably began not long after 550 B.C. Since the Geomoroi were in the ascendant and were succeeded by a more liberal government, the expedition must have taken place before the tyranny. Since the Megarians who overthrew the Geomoroi were "democratically" inclined (otherwise they would not have been asked in the first place to help the Samians, or been trusted by the latter), and were invited to stay and accept Samian citizenship, it is a reasonable inference that the Megarians concerned were opposed to the regime at home, i.e., that the "democracy" had been overthrown there. Alternatively the expedition must be put before the "democracy" came into being at Megara ca. 600 B.C. At any rate, if we may trust the date for the foundation of Heraclea Pontica, the Megarian "democracy" was overthrown after 550 B.C. This agrees well with a *floruit* for Theognis about the same time. He must have been born rather early in the sixth century and have died some time after 550, restored to his country from exile. This disregards the question, which cannot be debated here, of the authenticity of some Theognidean verses which refer to events ca. 500 B.C.

34. See previous note.

35. Highbarger, pp. 145–46.

peace; she could not, if only from disparity of size, compete with Athens or Corinth despite her head start over the former. Yet, the *palintokia* notwithstanding, Megara's archaic history apparently did not prepare the way even for relative

satisfaction on the part of the majority of her citizens. The greatness of Solon, the true founder of classical Athens, never appears so marked as when one scrutinizes the history of other Greek cities.

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