

# **A History of Ancient Greece: Athens in the Fifth Century B.C.**

John David Lewis

[www.johndavidlewis.com](http://www.johndavidlewis.com)

**Objectivist Summer Conference 2010  
Las Vegas, Nevada**

## **SYNOPSIS**

Athens in the fifth century B.C. was fueled by enormous intellectual and artistic energy, guided by the world's first citizen government, and defended by a magnificent navy. She was the intellectual center of the Greek world, the "school of Hellas." This course will consider the political events of this century, beginning with the establishment of the Athenian democracy ca. 508 B.C., moving through the growth of the Athenian naval empire, pausing on its defeat in the Peloponnesian War, and ending with the death of Socrates in 399. After establishing this political timeline, the course will turn to the conflict between philosophy and traditional belief in the gods, as embodied in Aristophanes's *Clouds*.

## **Major Persons**

### **Democratic (or populist) leaders**

Cleisthenes: reformer/leader  
Themistokles: hero of Salamis  
Xanthippus: naval leader; father of Perikles  
Ephialtes: stripped powers from the Areopagus  
Perikles: leader into the Peloponnesian War

### **Oligarchic (or aristocratic) leaders**

Aristides "The Just"  
Miltiades: hero of Marathon; father of Cimon  
Cimon: built Athens's power in the Aegean  
Thucydides, son of Melesias, opp. to Perikles

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Primary Sources

- Aristophanes. *Lysistrata/The Acharnians/The Clouds* (NY: Penguin, 1973).
- Aristotle. *The Athenian Constitution*. P.J. Rhodes, tr. (NY: Penguin, 1984).
- Aristotle. *Politics*. T.A. Sinclair, tr. (NY: Penguin, 1981). Esp. book 2.12 on Solon and other lawgivers.
- Diodorus of Sicily. *Library of History*, books 11, 12 and 13. C.H. Oldfather, tr. (Loeb Classical Library, Harvard: 1946/1950). A first-century B.C. Roman compiler.
- Fornara, C., ed. *Translated Documents of Greece & Rome. Vol. 1: Archaic Times to the End of the Peloponnesian War* (Cambridge: 1983).
- Herodotus. *The Histories*, A. de Sélincourt, tr. (NY: Penguin, 1996).
- Plutarch. *Lives of Theseus, Solon, Themistokles, Aristides, and Cimon*. J. Dryden, tr. (Modern Library, undated); or use the Loeb editions by Harvard University Press.
- Robinson, E.W. *Ancient Greek Democracy: Readings and Sources* (Oxford: 2004). Readings and interpretative essays.
- Sprague, R.K. *The Older Sophists* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001).
- Thucydides. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. R. Warner, tr. (NY: Penguin, 1972).
- Xenophon. *A History of My Times (or Hellenika)*. R. Warner, tr. (NY: Penguin, 1979). Books 1 and 2 complete the Peloponnesian War from 411 B.C., where Thucydides left off.

### Secondary Sources

- Bauman, R.A. *Political Trials in Ancient Greece* (London: 1990).
- Bury, J.B. *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. V, Athens 478–401 B.C. (Cambridge: 1927 [1983]).
- Hale, J. *Lords of the Sea* (NY: Viking, 2009).
- Lewis, D.M., et al. eds., *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 2nd edn., vol. V, The Fifth Century B.C. (Cambridge: 1992).
- Lewis, J.D. *Early Greek Lawgivers* (London: 2007); esp. the chapter on Solon of Athens.
- Lewis, J.D. *Nothing Less than Victory* (Princeton: 2010) (Chapter 1, on the Persian Invasions).
- Lewis, J.D. “Oh Mist! Science, Religion and History in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*,” in *Themes in European History: Essays from the Second International Conference on European History*. M. Aradas and N.C.J. Pappas, eds. (Athens: 2005).
- Meiggs, R. *The Athenian Empire* (Oxford: 1972).
- Munn, M. *The School of Hellas: Athens in the Age of Socrates* (Berkeley: 2002).
- Roberts, J.T. *Accountability in Athenian Government* (Madison, WI: 1982).
- Erratum in lecture 4: Esarhaddon is ca. 600 B.C. (not 1500 B.C.). The relief statue of the ruler with two slaves is in J.B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East*, vol. 1, and *Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton 1958), plate 121.

## Chronology of Political Events and Developments (All Dates B.C.)

Date	Athenian Internal Political Affairs	Interstate Affairs
?	Theseus, Myth-historical Lawgiver	War of the Lelantine Plain (Euboia)
621	Cylon Affair: Curse of the Alcmaeonid family	
612	Drakon, Lawgiver	
594	Solon, Lawgiver and constitution-maker	
560	Pisistratus, 1st Attempt at tyranny	Cyrus the Great of Persia rises
547	Pisistratus, 3rd and final seizure of tyranny	Persian Conquest of Lydia
530s	Dramatic festivals begin	
522		Darius I, King of Persia
527	Hippias and Hipparchus, sons of Pisistratus, tyrants	
514	Harmodius and Aristogeiton murder Hipparchus	
	Simonides, poet, active (until 470s)	
510	Spartan intervention overthrows Hippias	
<b>508</b>	<b>Cleisthenes proto-democratic reforms</b>	
499		Ionian Revolt against Persia
494		Sparta defeats Argos at Sepea
493	1st Trial of Miltiades. (Themistokles, archon)	
492		Persian expedition into Europe fails
<b>490</b>	<b>Miltiades, Hero of Marathon</b>	<b>1st Persian Invasion: Marathon</b>
489	2nd Trial of Miltiades; son Cimon inherits fine	Miltiades' expedition v. Paros
488	Ostracism of Hipparchus (Pisistratid)	
485		Xerxes, new King of Persia, suppresses revolts
484/1	Themistokles creates the Athenian Navy	Xerxes builds his army
	Exile of Xanthippus	Hellenic League forms, under Spartan leadership
<b>480</b>	<b>Athens sacked by Persians</b>	<b>2nd Persian Invasion: Thermopylae, Salamis</b>
	Themistokles, Hero of Naval Battle off Salamis	Persian king retreats
479	Oath of Plataea against the Persians	Spartan-led victories at Plataea, Mycale
		Greek offensive into the Aegean; capture of Sestos
478		Spartans recall Pausanias; leave the Aegean to Athens
<b>477</b>		<b>Athens given leadership of the Delian League</b>
	Cimon leads Athenian navy (until 461)	Spartans assert leadership over Peloponnesus
		Athens capture of Eion
474	Ostracism of Themistokles	
	Aristocratic Council of the Areopagus at apex of power	
472	Aeschylus <i>Persians</i> (Perikles is choreogus)	
466	Cimon, son of Miltiades, leads pro-Spartan policies	Battle of the Eurymedon River; Cimon leads
		Revolt/siege of Naxos, and Thasos
465		Spartans battle Messenians at Isthmus
464	Aeschylus <i>Suppliants</i> ; "demokratia" coined	Revolt of Aegina
	Trial of Cimon	Messenian Revolt (Sparta); Cimon's aid rebuffed
462		Spartans settle with Messenian rebels
461	Ostracism of Cimon; end of pro-Spartan policy	Athens allies with Argos, Thessally (v. Sparta)
460		Athens fleet sails to Cyprus
<b>450s</b>	<b>Ephialtes strengthens the democracy</b>	<b>457–446: 1st Peloponnesian War</b>
	Assassination of Ephialtes; Rise of Perikles	Spartans attack Argos
	Phidias creates monumental sculpture of Athena Promachos	
	Citizenship law; perhaps first pay for jury service	
458	Aeschylus, <i>Oresteia Trilogy</i>	
457	Oligarchs urge Spartans to intervene against Ephialtes	Spartan Force in Boiotia to counter Athenian actions;
	Office of archon opened to poorer citizens	Battle of Tanagra
		Athens defeats Boiotians at Oinophyta
456		Athenian Navy circumnavigates Peloponnesus
		Persian forces gather to retake Egypt

**Date Athenian Internal Political Affairs**

455	
454	
453	Circuit courts re-established
452	Cimon returns from ostracism
451	Cimon negotiates 5-year peace with Sparta Citizenship law passed
450	Decree defines Delian League obligations Athenian building program begins
<b>440s</b>	<b>Perikles opp. by Thucydides son of Melesias</b> Protagoras, sophist, in Athens Flight of philosopher Anaxagoras
447	Building of the Parthenon begun
<b>446</b>	<b>Decree of Clinias requires tribute from allies(?)</b>
443	
442	Thucydides son of Melesias ostracized Oligarchic opposition to Perikles ended
440	
437	
430s	
435	
434	Athens moves Delian League treasuries to Athens
432	
<b>431</b>	<b>Peloponnesian War: Athens v. Sparta</b>
430	Perikles fined (Alcmaeonid curse raised)
429	Plague; death of Perikles
427	Gorgias of Leontini brings rhetorical theory to Athens
425	Temple of Nike built
424	
423	Aristophanes' <i>Clouds</i> performed
421	
416	
415	Profanation of the Mysteries religious scandal Recall/flight of Alcibiades; Diagoras of Melos tried for impiety Protagoras' book <i>On the Gods</i> likely burned
414	Aristophanes' <i>Birds</i> parodies empire
411	Oligarchic counter-revolution Re-inscription of ancestral laws begins
406	Trial of the Arginusae Generals Euripides flees Athens (?); <i>Bacchae</i> performed
405	Aristophanes, <i>Frogs</i>
<b>403</b>	<b>Defeat of Athens; Rule of the Thirty</b>
403/2	Ionic alphabet adopted for official business
<b>399</b>	<b>Death of Socrates</b>

**Interstate Affairs**

Athens' two-front war: Boiotia, and Egypt  
Athenian Navy (at Cyprus) aids Egypt against Persians  
Athens withdraws from Egypt; ends actions in Boiotia  
Athens focuses on control of the Delian League

Cimon expedition to Cyprus; his death  
30 years peace, Sparta and Argos  
Athens first founds cleruchies (on Andros)  
Peace of Callias with Persia (?)  
**Crisis of the 440s: allies resent Athenian tribute**  
Coinage, weights, and measures decree (?)

**Thirty-years Peace with Sparta begins**

Revolt of Megara  
Revolt of Euboia; Sparta invades Attica (Pleistoanax)  
Athens invades Boiotia v. Theban League; Coronea  
Perikles expedition to Chersonnese  
Athens founds Thurii (near Sybaris, Italy)  
Democracy forced on Miletus  
Revolt of Samos (in war with Miletus)  
Blockade, siege of Samos  
Athens colony at Amphipolis  
Perikles Black Sea expedition; cleruchy at Sinope  
Epidamus v. Corcyra; Corinth defeated at sea  
Athens allies with Corcyra (against Corinth)  
Megarian Decree isolates Megara  
Revolt/siege of Potidea  
**Spartans declare of war; 1st invasion of Attica**

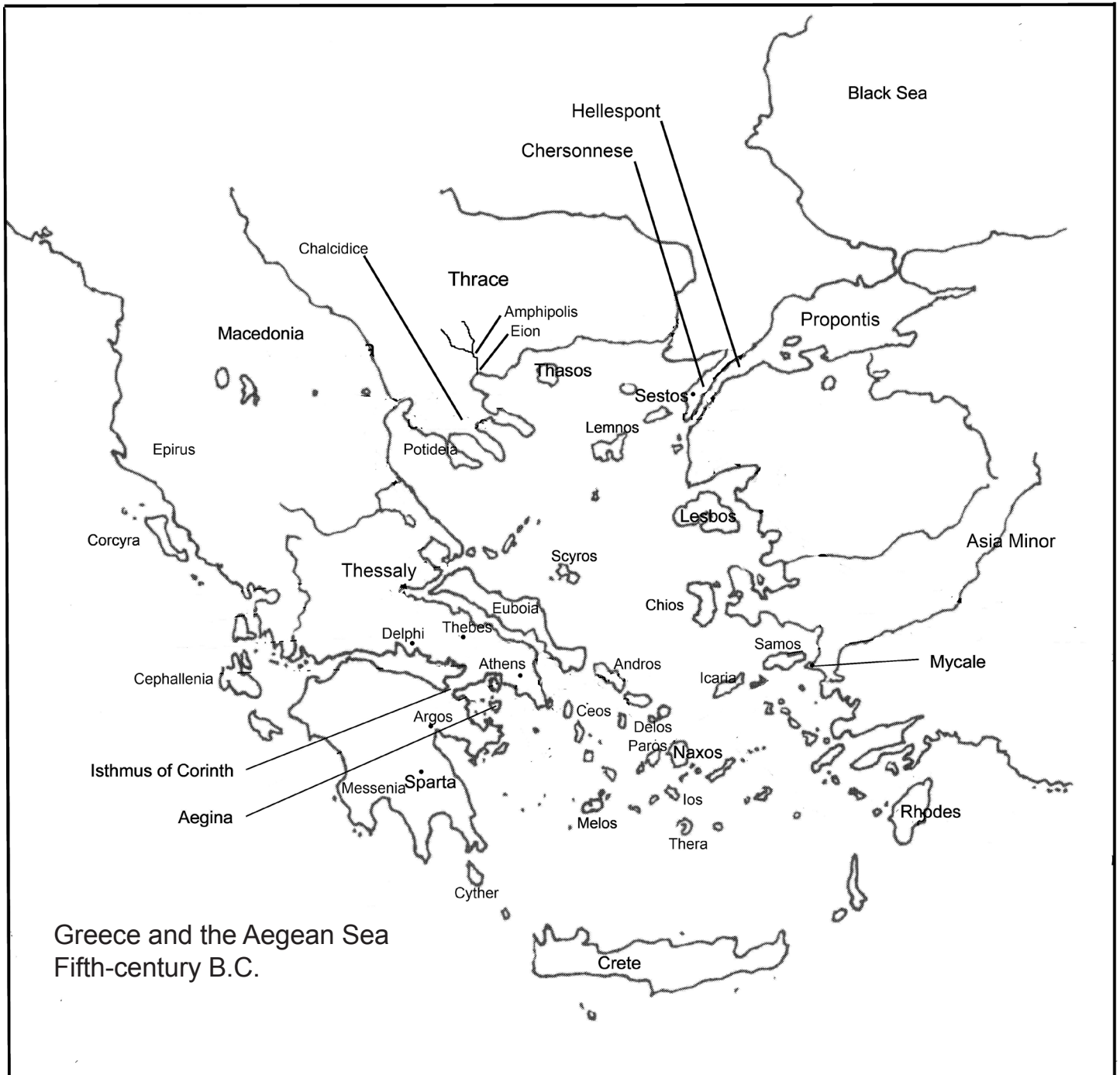
Athens captures Persian convoy to Sparta  
Athens (renews?) peace treaty with Persia

Peace of Nikias (Athens and Sparta)  
Athenian massacre of Melos  
Sicilian expedition (under Alcibiades and Nicias)

War moves to the northern Aegean

Athenian naval victory at Arginusae

**Sparta does not raze Athens**











The Tyrant-Slayers, Harmodius and Aristogeiton

Roman copy of a bronze group erected in 477 B.C.  
to replace those taken by Xerxes

Cambridge Museum of Classical Art and Archeology #86. Plaster copy.



Athena Promachos.

Roman copy of Greek original, 1st century B.C. or A.D.,  
Found at Herculaneum

Cambridge Museum of Classical Art and Archeology #422. Plaster copy.

## Lecture 4: Religious Trials and Religious Persecutions in Athens Fifth Century B.C.

### Late 460s B.C. (date uncertain):

Aeschylus, as a young man, revealed secrets of the Eleusinian Mysteries in a drama.  
The crowd tried to stone him; he took refuge in a temple of Dionysus.  
He may have been tried before the Council of the Areopagus.

(Note parallels to trial of Phrynichus, playwright, prior to Persian Wars.  
His play "The Sack of Miletus" aroused the passions of the crowd.  
The play was banned. Emotionalism was the issue.)

### 430s: A series of trials were aimed at the friends of the general/leader Perikles.

See *Plutarch "Life of Perikles" 32.*

Phidias (artist of the Parthenon) was tried for temple robbery,  
for stealing gold from the monumental sculpture of Athena,  
or for putting his image (and that of Perikles) on Athena's shield?  
Was this a trial run for charges against Perikles? Phidias fled into exile.

Aspasia, consort/wife of Perikles, tried for impiety  
Did she defile the temples by her disreputable presence? Or was this an attack on Perikles?  
She was accused by the comic poet Hermippus.

Anaxagoras, scientist/philosopher, tried for impiety.  
He was the first philosopher tried for his investigations.  
He claimed the sun was a hot stone in the sky.  
Prosecuted by Thucydides son of Melesias (date before 443?) or by Cleon (date ca.432?)  
Perikles urged him to leave.

### 415: The "Mutilation of the Hermes": sculptures were defaced all over town.

Rumors abounded of young men mocking the Eleusinian Mysteries.  
Alcibiades implicated recalled from command in Sicily; fled into exile.

A wave of prosecutions likely followed.

### 415 – or 431 (date uncertain):

Diagoras of Miletus, was charged with impiety (*asebeia*).  
A notorious atheist in later writers.  
Was he tried for atheism, or for speaking out against the massacre at Melos (in 418)?

### 415: Trial of Protagoras of Abdera, philosopher/sophist, was tried for impiety.

His book, "On the Gods," was burned in public.  
Claimed skepticism on the existence of the gods.

### 399: The Trial and Execution of Socrates.

Per Plato, he was tried for investigating matters in heaven and earth,  
and in not believing in the city's gods.  
Per Xenophon, the trial was political; Socrates was a teacher of the Thirty Tyrants.



## Lecture 4: Philosophical and Scientific Doctrines in Aristophanes' *Clouds*

1. The gods (e.g., Zeus) are reduced to material phenomena: Chaos, Air, Respiration, Clouds.
2. Vortex (Dinos) and not Zeus as source of motion. (From early Greek philosophy)
3. Cosmology of charcoal covered by a damper (the sky). (From Hesiod and the early Milesians)
4. Air as mind: Socrates mingles his thoughts with air to gain knowledge.  
(Anaxagoras held the doctrine of *nous* (mind) as everywhere. This idea was corrupted by Diogenes of Apollonia into *nous* as air, a materialistic view.)
5. Rhetorical Sophistry allows changing definitions and terms. (See Antiphon's *Tetralogy*.)  
Gnat's farts and thunder equated with oratory. (Archelaos: sound as a clash [*plexus*] of air.)
6. Moral thought: the internal *daimon* (a proto-conscience) as clouds.  
(Compare the daimon in Plato's *Apology*.)
7. The Clouds have shifting appearances—as sophistic concepts shift in appearance.
8. Humours: the medical doctrine of fluids. (See Aristotle, *Parts of Animals* 668b4)
9. Specific investigations: Rain as from clouds; Thunder as from clashing clouds; Lightning as a natural process. (The theory of rarification is taken from Anaximenes.)
10. The rise of perverted logic in sophistry:  
Bad Logic (the new thinking) demolishes Right Logic (traditional thinking) by showing the illogic of his conclusions.