



ATHENS GREEK RELIGION SEMINAR



THE ATHENS GREEK RELIGION SEMINAR, Tuesday, October 22, 2024

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Suppliants, Law and Religion: The Traditions about Cylon's Attempt at Tyranny

ABSTRACT

One of the most well-known stories about early Athens is the tradition about Cylon's attempt at tyranny. Herodotus (5.70-72) is the first to allude to the story. Thucydides (1.126.2- 127.3) gives a longer account when explaining the demand of the Spartan ambassadors to the Athenians in 432 BCE to "drive out the pollution." The trial of those who killed the Cylonians is mentioned in the Aristotelian *Constitution of the Athenians* (1), an account which Heraclides Lembos appears to reproduce. Plutarch has a version of the events in his life of *Solon* (12.1-4), and Diogenes Laertius (1.110-111) has an account of the incident in his life of Epimenides. There is also a brief mention in the *Description of Greece* of Pausanias (7.25.3), who also mentions a statue of Cylon on the Acropolis (1.28.1). Several sources date the incident in the late seventh century BCE.

The story of the Cylonians has been discussed by several scholars, but there has not yet been a careful and systematic analysis of the different versions of the story. Many of the discussions tend to view the different accounts in isolation from the rest of the source in which they are found or to combine arbitrarily elements from different sources. There have also been several misunderstandings of the practice of supplication, which is a key part of the traditions. This is important for identifying the nature of the offense committed by those responsible for the death of the Cylonians.

This talk will examine each of the accounts of Cylon's attempt to set up a tyranny and the killing of his supporters in chronological order. The nature of the sources does not allow for a definitive reconstruction of the actual events. What is possible however is to place the story in the general context of Athenian beliefs about tyranny, the protection of suppliants, the right of defendants to a trial, respect for sanctuaries of the gods, and the accountability of public officials. By analysing the story in this perspective, one can start to understand why the story was repeated and considered to be important for those who recounted the tale and for their audiences.

**The seminar takes place Tuesday, October 22, 2024, 17.00 (Athens)
with live presence at the Swedish Institute and online via Zoom.**

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