

Fragments

ΠΟΙΗΜΑΤΑ

Solon

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Fragment 1 • Plutarch, Life of Solon

WHEN THE ATHENIANS grew weary of the extended and difficult war with Megara over the island Salamis, they passed a law that in future no one on pain of death was to propose in writing or speech that the city should lay claim to Salamis. Solon found the disgrace hard to bear and when he saw that many of the young men wanted to renew the war, but lacked the courage to do so themselves due to the law, he pretended to be insane and word was passed from his household to the city that he showed signs of madness. Secretly, Solon composed elegiac verses and after practising, reciting them from memory, he rushed into the marketplace, wearing a small felt cap. After a large crowd assembled, he climbed the herald's stone and recited the elegy that begins:

I have come in person as a herald from lovely Salamis, composing song, an adornment of words, instead of speech.

This poem was entitled Salamis and contains a hundred lines, a very fine composition.

Fragment 2 • Diogenes Laertius, Lives of the Philosophers

THE ELEGIAC VERSES which especially appealed to the Athenians were the following by Solon:

In that case may I change my country and be a Pholegandrian or Sikinite [two tiny islands in the southern Cyclades] instead of an Athenian. For this report would quickly be spread among men: "This man is an Athenian, one of the Salamisceders."

And then:

Let us go to Salamis to fight for a lovely island and dispose of bitter disgrace.

Fragment 3 • Demosthenes, On the Embassy

PLEASE TAKE AND read these elegiac verses of Solon, so that you, the jury, may know that he too hated such men as the defendant:

Our state will never perish through an act of Zeus or the blessed immortal gods. For such a strong guardian, Pallas Athena, sprung from a mighty father, guards it. Yet, it is the citizens themselves who by their foolish acts and pandering to money are willing to destroy their great city; and the mind of the people's leaders is unjust. They will suffer pain as a result of their great arrogance. For they do not know how to restrain excess or to conduct in an organised and peaceful manner the festivities of the banquet that are at hand... they grow wealthy, yielding to ignoble acts... sparing neither sacred nor private property, they steal with excessive force, one from one source, one from another, with no regard for the sacred foundations of Justice, who bears silent witness to the present and past... who in time will certainly exact retribution. This is now due to the whole city as an unavoidable wound and Athens has quickly fallen into wretched slavery, rousing civil strife and sleeping war, with the of many lovely youths. At the hands of its enemies, the beloved city is being worn down amid conspiracies favoured by the unjust. These evils are rife among the people and many poor men depart to a foreign land, sold and bound in disgraceful chains... Thus the public evil faces each man and the courtyard gates can no longer hold it back, as it leaps over the lofty barrier and finds him out, even if he seeks refuge in a hidden corner of his room. This is what my heart commands me teach the Athenians — that Lawlessness brings the city manifold ills, but Lawfulness reveals all that is recommended and fitting, and often places chains upon the unjust. Indeed, she makes the rough smooth, halting surplus, weakening insolence, preventing the

spreading flowers of ruin, while straightening out corrupt judgments, taming prideful deeds and ending acts of sedition, to the annoyance of grievous strife. Therefore, under Lawfulness all things among men are fitting and rational.

You hear, men of Athens, what Solon says about such men and about the gods that keep our city safe.

Fragment 4 · Aristotle, Constitution of Athens

...WHEN SUCH WAS the organisation of the city state and many were enslaved to the few [in c. 594 BC] , the people rose up against the prominent men. After bitter strife and prolonged opposition, they agreed to select Solon as reconciler and archon, entrusting the city to him. He composed the elegy which begins:

I know (while pain grips my heart) as I look on the ancient land of Ionia poised to fall, that...

In this poem Solon fights and disputes with each side on behalf of the other, urging them to join in bringing an end to the contention dwelling among them...

Solon was by birth and reputation one of the leading Athenians, though by property and business dealings he was only of the middle class, as is agreed on from other sources. He himself attests in these poems, where he urges the rich not to be greedy:

You who had more than your fill of many good things, compose the hard heart in your breast and restrain your ambition; for we will not comply nor will such deeds be fitting for you...

And in short he always lays the blame for the conflict upon the wealthy citizens. This is why he says at the beginning of the

elegy that he fears their “arrogance”, implying this was the cause of the hostility.

Fragment 5 • Plutarch, Life of Solon

YET, SOLON HIMSELF says that at first he undertook public life reluctantly and in fear of one side’s love of money and the other side’s arrogance.

Fragment 6 • Aristotle, Constitution of Athens

YET, SOLON OPPOSED both sides and while he could have sided with whichever one he wished and become tyrant, he opted for the enmity of both by saving his homeland and legislating for the best. Everyone agrees that he acted in this way and he himself in his poetry has referred to his acts, as follows:

I have bestowed the masses as much privilege as is required, neither taking away from their honour nor adding to it. As for those that had power and were envied for their prosperity, I saw to it that they too should suffer no humiliation. I remained standing with a mighty shield protecting both sides, allowing neither an undeserved victory.

...And again showing how the citizens should be treated:

And in this way the citizens would best follow their leaders, provided that they are neither given too much liberty nor subjected to too much moderation. For excess breeds audacity, whenever great wealthy comes to persons that are not of sound mind.

Fragment 7 • Plutarch, Life of Solon

... AND WISHING to be completely free of these difficulties and escape from the displeasure and calumny of the citizens

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in matters of great importance it is hard to please everyone, as Solon himself said — he gave the ownership of a vessel as an excuse for travel and set sail, after requesting from the Athenians a ten-year absence abroad.

Fragment 8 • Diodorus Siculus, World History

SOLON IS BELIEVED to have foretold the Athenians of the coming tyranny (of Pisistratus) in these elegiac verses:

From a cloud comes the tumult of snow and hail, thunder from sudden lightning, from powerful men a state's destruction and through ignorance the masses fall enslaved to the tyrant. If a man is raised too high, it is hard to restrain him; thus, one should consider everything...

And afterwards, when Pisistratus was tyrant, Solon said:

If you have suffered grief due to your impious acts, do not lay the blame on the gods. You yourselves gave the power to these men by permitting a bodyguard, resulting in your wretched slavery. Every one of you follows the fox's tracks, each being empty-headed. You follow the words of a cunning man, blind to what he actually does.

Fragment 9 • Diogenes Laertius, Lives of the Philosophers

STORMING INTO THE assembly, armed with spear and shield, Solon warned the members of Pisistratus' plans... And the council, comprised of Pisistratus' supporters, countered that he was insane, which he responded to with these verses:

A short time will show the citizens how insane I am, as the truth is openly revealed.

Fragment 10 • Plutarch, Life of Solon

THE SEA IS troubled by winds, though if none moves it, the waters are the calmest of all things.

Fragment 11 • Stobaeus, Anthology

SOLON SAYS:

O Pierian Muses, shining daughters of Memory and mighty Zeus, listen to my prayer. Give me prosperity from the blessed gods and a first-class reputation always from all men; grant that in these circumstances I be kind to my friends and bitter to my foes, viewed with respect by the former and with fear by the latter. I wish to earn money, but am unwilling to attain it unjustly, for then retribution will surely find me. When the gods give true wealth to a man, it remains secure from the lowest foundation to the top, whilst wealth accrued via violence comes in disorder, a loath attendant guided by ignoble actions, and ruin is quick to follow. Ruin has a little beginning, like that of fire, minor at first though grievous in the end, for our violent deeds never live long.

Zeus watches all outcomes and suddenly, just as the clouds are quickly spread by a spring wind stirring up the bottom of the swelling and never-empty sea, ravages the lovely fields over wheat-bearing land, reaches the gods' high seat of Olympus and once more brings a clear sky to view. The powerful sun shines in beauty over the fertile land and no longer can even a single cloud be glimpsed. Thus is the vengeance of Zeus. Unlike a mortal man, who is quick to anger. Anyone with a sinful heart never escapes Zeus' notice and in the end he is confidently revealed. Yet, one man pays

the penalty at once, while another later and if they manage to escape the penalty and the pursuing vengeance of the gods does not overtake them, it always comes at another time. The innocent pay the penalty either their children or later descendants. And therefore, we mortals, regardless of our fortune, believe that our lives are faring well, until we suffer some calamity and we are left in tears. But, until then we take keen delight in unfilled hopes. Whoever is oppressed by grave sickness believes that he will be healthy. Another of low estate thinks that it is in fact high and that he is pleasing to look upon, although his form lacks beauty.

If someone has no money and is constrained by poverty, he thinks that he will surely gain wealth. We all have different pursuits. One travels over the fish-filled sea in ships, hoping to bring home profit. While tossed by the cruel winds, he has no thought for life. Another man favours the curved plough, cleaving the thickly-wooded land, toiling away for a year. Another who has learned the works of Pallas Athena and Hephaestus, the god of many crafts, draws in his livelihood; another, favouring the gifts of the Olympian Muses and the lovely art of poetry, makes his living. Another has been named a seer by Apollo who works from afar and, if the gods guide him, he views a distant calamity coming upon us; though, of course, neither divination nor sacrifice will ward off what must be. Other men, employed in the work of Paeon, gifted in drugs, are physicians — yet for them too there is no guarantee. Often anguish comes from a slight pain and no one can provide relief with soothing medicine, while another, in the throes of a terrible and grave disease, is quick to return to health with the touch of his hands. Fate brings good and bad to mortals and the gifts of the gods are unavoidable. In all events, there is risk and no one knows, when something starts how it will turn out. He that tries to act rightly falls blindly into great and harsh disaster, while the one that acts badly

the gods give success in all things and an escape from his folly. Yet, of wealth no limit is revealed to men, since those of us who now have the greatest livelihood still show twice as much zeal for more. Can anything satisfy all? In all truth, the immortals give men profit, but from it there is hidden ruin, which now one, now another receives, whenever Zeus exacts his punishment on them.

Fragment 12 • Stobaeus, Anthology

SOLON SAYS:

No mortal man is blessed, but all that the sun looks down upon are in a poor state.

Fragment 13 • Plutarch, Life of Solon

THAT HE CLASSIFIED himself among the poor instead of the rich is clear from the following quotation:

Many base men are wealthy and many good men are poor. Yet, we will not take their wealth for our virtue, since virtue is always safe, while wealth belongs now to one, now to another.

Fragment 14 • Clement of Alexandria, Miscellanies

SOLON HAS WRITTEN these very wise words about God:

The hidden spirit of wisdom, which alone holds the key to all things, is the most difficult to learn.

Fragment 15 • Clement of Alexandria, Miscellanies

BUT HESIOD IN his writings agrees with what has been said... it is reasonable then that Solon of Athens, following Hesiod, says in his elegies:

The mind of the immortals is altogether concealed from men.

Fragment 16 • Pseudo-Plato, Lovers

WHAT ELSE IS philosophising than this statement of Solon:

As I grow old, I am always learning many things.

Fragment 17 • Plutarch, Life of Solon

SOLON SAILED FROM Egypt to Cyprus and received an exceptionally warm welcome from Philocyprus, one of the local kings, who had a small city... Solon persuaded him to move that city to the lovely plain that lay below and to make it more appealing and vast and so he took personal charge of the change... Solon mentions this in elegiac verses addressed to Philocyprus:

Now may you and your descendants live in this city and rule over Soloi [Aepeia] for a long time; and may Cypris of the violet crown send me unharmed from your celebrated island on a quick vessel. May she bestow favour and glory on this state and a safe return to my homeland.

Fragment 18 • Diogenes Laertius, Lives of the Philosophers

BUT IF EVEN now you will still listen to me, deny what Mimnermus said — and do not be offended if my thoughts are better than yours — and changing it, Ligyastades, sing as follows: ‘May my destined death come at eighty.’

Fragment 19 • Plutarch, Comparison of Solon and Publicola

FURTHERMORE, FROM WHAT Solon said on the span of life, in opposition to Mimnermus,

May death not come to me without tears, but when I die may I
leave my friends with sorrow and weeping,

Thus he makes Publicola a happy man.

Fragment 20 · Plato, Timaeus

NOW SOLON WAS related to us and a close friend of
Dropides, my great-grandfather, as he himself refers to many
times in his verses.

Fragment 21 · Plato, Charmides

FOR YOUR ANCESTRAL house (Charmides and Critias), the
house of Critias son of Dropides, has been praised by
Anacreon, Solon and many other poets, coming down to us in
tradition as one that is distinguished for beauty, virtue and
whatever is deemed happiness.

Fragment 22 · Proclus on Plato, Timaeus

SOLON'S FAMILY HISTORY and his kinship with Plato is as
follows: Solon and Dropides were the sons of Execestides, and
the son of Dropides was Critias, mentioned by Solon in his
verse:

Please tell yellow-haired Critias to listen to his father; for he
will be following a guide of unmistakable judgment.

Fragment 23 · Plato, Lysis

OR DOES EACH group love these things, without these things
loving them? — thus giving the lie to the poet who said:

Blessed is he who has beloved boys, horses of uncloven hoof,
hunting dogs and a friend in distant parts.

Fragment 24 · Stobaeus, Anthology

LIKEWISE WEALTHY IS he who has silver and gold, fields of wheat-bearing land, horses and mules, and he who has only this, comfort for his stomach, sides and feet, and when it is time, the season for a boy and for a wife, with a youthful vigour fitting his needs. This is wealth for mortals, since no man enters Hades with his numerous possessions nor can he pay a price to escape death or bleak diseases or the approach of old age.

Fragment 25 · Plutarch, Dialogue on Love

YOU DID WELL, he said, to mention Solon, and we ought to use him as an index of the erotic man:

until one falls in love with a boy in the beautiful flower of youth, desiring his thighs and sweet mouth.

Hence I think Solon composed those lines while still young and “full of abundant seed,” as Plato terms it, but the following when he was old:

Yet, now the works of Aphrodite, Dionysus and the Muses are dear to me. They bring men good cheer, as though after the storm and anxiety of loving boys he placed his life in the calm stillness of marriage and philosophy.

Fragment 26 · Philo, On the Creation of the World

SOLON, THE ATHENIAN lawgiver, described the ages of life in the following verses:

A boy, though still an immature child, in seven years grows a fence of teeth and loses them for the first time. When the god completes another seven years, he betrays the signs of puberty. In the third group of seven years his body still grows, his chin becomes hairy and the skin changes its tone. In the fourth period, everyone is far the best in strength, whereby

men display their manliness. In the fifth it is time for a man to look for marriage and a line of sons to follow him. In the sixth a man's mind is trained for everything and he is no longer commits so many acts of folly. In the seventh and eighth, a total of fourteen years, he is far the best in thought and speech. In the ninth he still has ability, but his speech and wisdom show less excellence. If a man completes each stage after stage and attains the tenth, he will not receive death's allotment too soon.

Fragment 27 • Plutarch, Life of Solon

FIRSTLY, SOLON HE journeyed to Egypt and, as he himself says, spent time

at the mouth of the Nile, close to the shore of Canopus

Fragment 28 • Diogenianus, Proverbs

"OBEY RULERS, HOWEVER right or wrong." From the elegies of Solon, hortatory.

Fragment 29 • John the Deacon on Hermogenes

ARION OF METHYMNA introduced the first tragic drama, as Solon tells us in his elegies:

Fragment 30 • Pseudo-Plato, On Justice

BUT, SOCRATES, SOLON'S ancient proverb is well said, that Poets tell many lies.

Fragment 31 • Plutarch, Life of Solon

AND SOME SAY that Solon tried to put his laws into epic verse and publish them, giving the beginning as:

Firstly, let us pray to Zeus the king, son of Cronus, to grant these laws success and fame.

Fragment 32 · Plutarch, Life of Solon

AFTER RECEIVING PRESSURE from his friends to become tyrant, Solon was never shaken from his resolve, but he is said to have told his friends that although tyranny was a lofty position, it was impossible to leave it. And writing in his poetry to Phocus, he says:

If I spared my homeland and refused to seize tyranny and brute force, bringing a blemish and disgrace to my reputation, I am not ashamed. Since I believe that in this way I shall exceed everyone.

It is quite clear from this statement that Solon had a high reputation, even before giving his legislation... And concerning the derision that many have heaped upon him for shunning tyranny, he has written:

“Solon is by nature a man of superficial mind and a fool. When Zeus offered him good things, he rejected them. He had cast a net around his quarry, but stood dazed and failed to draw it tight, lacking both courage and sense. If I had seized power, attained great wealth and become tyrant of Athens for only a single day, I would be willing to be flayed into a wineskin afterwards and to have my line wiped out.”

This is what he construed many of the common people to have said about him.

Fragment 33 · Aristotle, Constitution of Athens

AND ONCE MORE in another place Solon speaks of those that wanted a redistribution of the land:

And others came for plunder, with hopes of wealth, each one thinking that he would find great prosperity and that I, for all my soft speech, would reveal a harsh disposition. They had foolish thoughts then and now they are angry and they all look suspiciously at me as if I were their foe, which they should not. With the aid of the gods I have accomplished what I said I would, while shunning other fruitless measures. It gives me no pleasure to perpetrate tyrannical violence or to share the state's rich land equally between the lower and upper classes.

And again he discusses the cancellation of debts on those that were slaves before and were set free:

Before achieving what of the goals for which I brought the people together did I end? In time's verdict I will have as my best witness the mighty mother of the Olympian gods, dark Earth, whose boundary markers fixed in numerous places I removed; in chains before, yet now she is free. And I brought back to Athens, a homeland founded by gods, many who had been sold, one legally another not, and those that had fled under war's constraint, no longer speaking the Attic tongue, as wanderers far and wide sometimes do. And those that suffered dishonourable slavery here, trembling before the acts of their masters, I gave liberty. These acts I performed by the use of my power, combining both force and justice, while persevering to the end as had been promised. I wrote laws for the lower and upper citizens alike, providing a simple legal process for each citizen. If another had taken up the task as I did, a greedy man accustomed to bad counsel, he would not have restrained the people. For if I had been willing to do what then was pleasing to their opponents and in turn whatever the people planned for them, Athens would have had not a single man. For that reason, I set up a defence on every side, circling around like a wolf among a pack of dogs.

And once more, rebuking both sides for their complaints, Solon said:

If I must chastise the people openly, their eyes would never have seen in their dreams what they have now attained... And those that are greater and stronger would praise me, regarding me as their friend.

For if someone else, Solon says, had obtained this office:

he would not have restrained the people nor would he have stopped until he had stirred up the milk and removed the cream. Yet, I stood alone between them, like a boundary marker.

Fragment 34 · Athenaeus, Scholars at Dinner

SOLON CLAIMS IN his iambic poetry that gourois is a type of cake:

They are drinking and some are eating cakes, others bread, and others gouroi mixed with lentils. There is lacking no pastry that the dark earth brings forth among people, but everything is available in great quantity.

Fragment 35 · Pollux, Vocabulary

THEY CALL MORTAR *igdis*, like Solon in his iambs:

Some hurry for a mortar, others for silphium and others for vinegar.

Fragment 36 · Phrynichus, Attic Words and Phrases

EVEN TO THIS day, many rightly call the pomegranate seed *kokkon*. In fact, Solon does so in his poetry:

One hurries for pomegranate seeds, another sesame.

Fragment 37 • Photius, Lexicon

THE WORD 'ΡΟῶς (sumach), a seasoning, occurs in Solon.

Fragment 38 • Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics

WE SHOULD NOT follow those that recommend a man have thoughts suitable to a man. Some say this maxim belongs to Theognis, others to Solon.

Fragment 39 • Choricus, Declamations

FOR THE EARTH knows how to produce for its inhabitants all that the seasons provide, stretching down on its back, as in Solon's words:

a rich nurse of children