

# History of Ancient Greece

## Institute for the Study of Western Civilization

### Week 17: Alcibiades







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Age of Sophocles  
496 - 406

Sophocles born 6 years before Marathon.



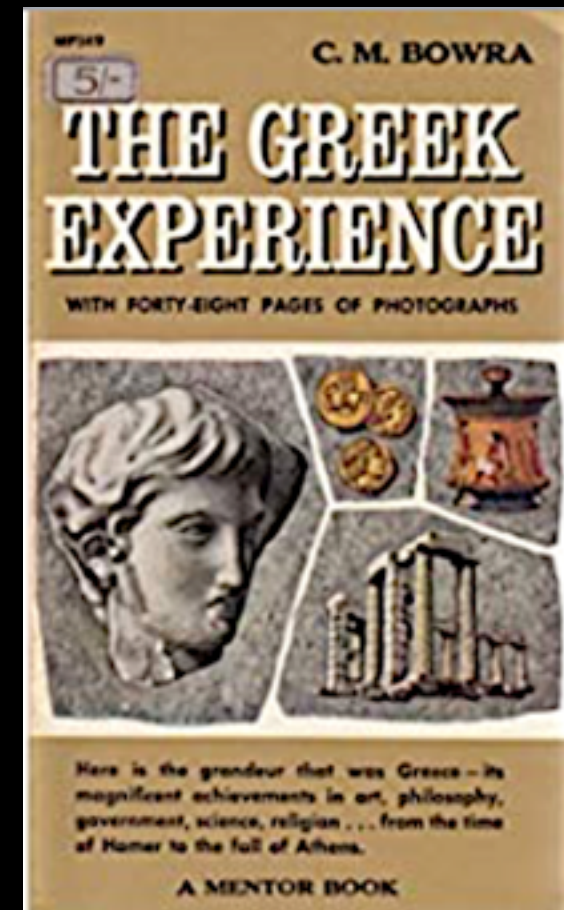
# Athens, Sophocles, Antigone, 445 BC

## Sophoclean Tragedy

"The central idea of a Sophoclean tragedy is that through suffering a man learns to be modest before the gods . . . When [the characters] are finally forced to see the truth, we know that the gods have prevailed and that men must accept their insignificance [their limited powers]." C. M. Bowra



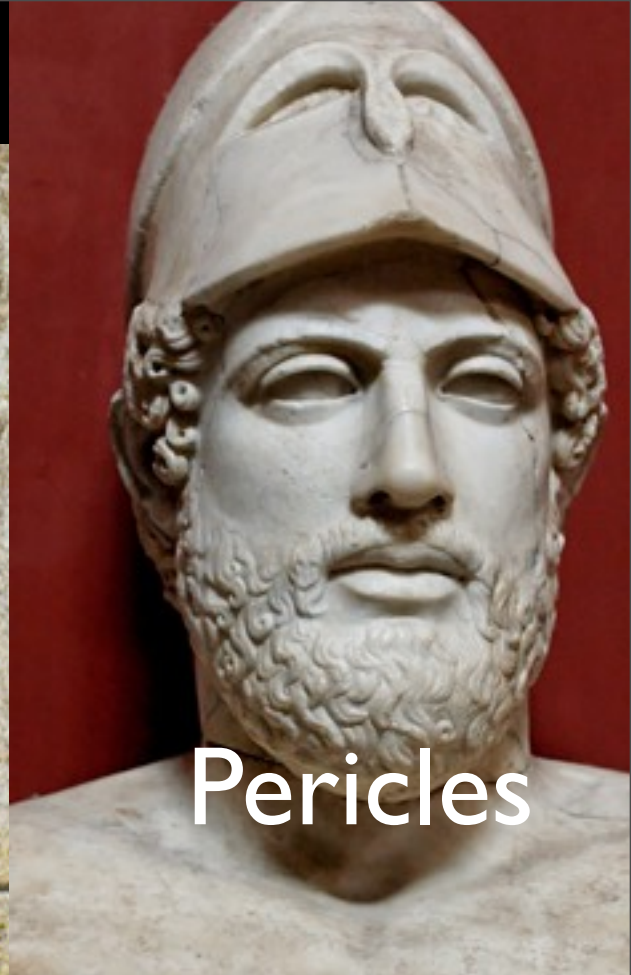
**Sir Cecil Maurice Bowra,**  
1898 – 1971  
was an English classical scholar, literary critic and academic, known for his wit. He was Warden of Wadham College, Oxford, from 1938 to 1970, and served as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford from 1951 to 1954.



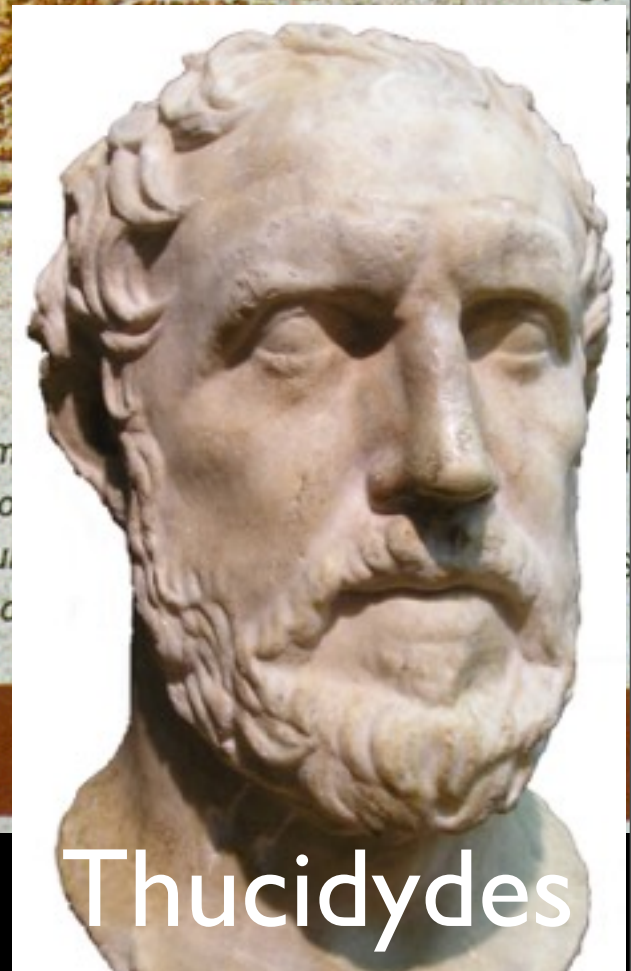
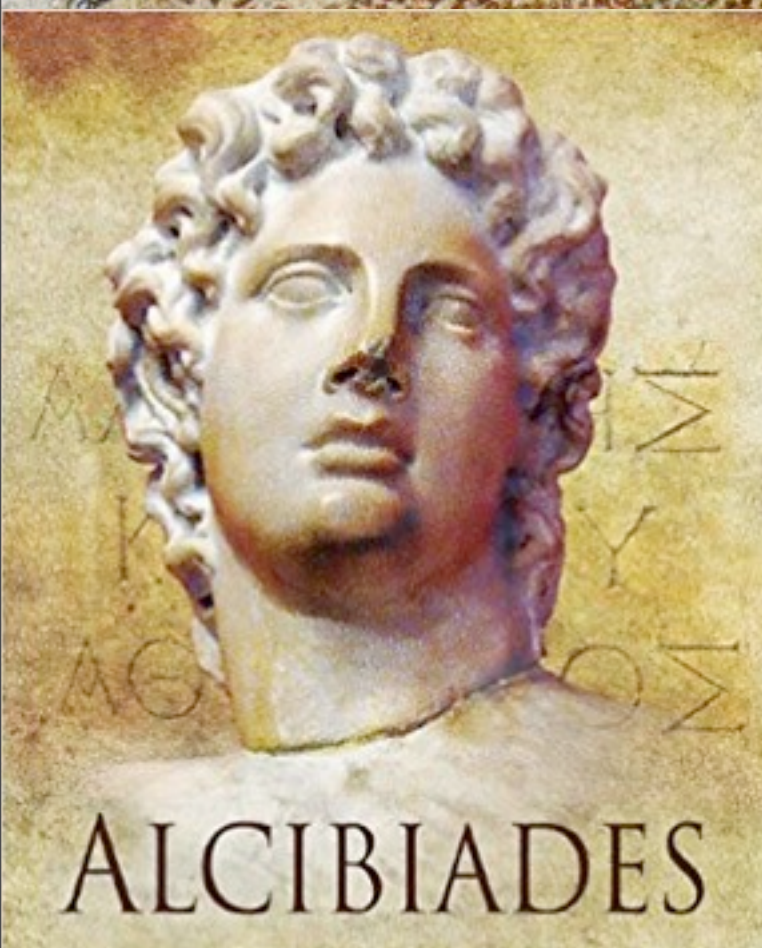




Sophocles



Pericles



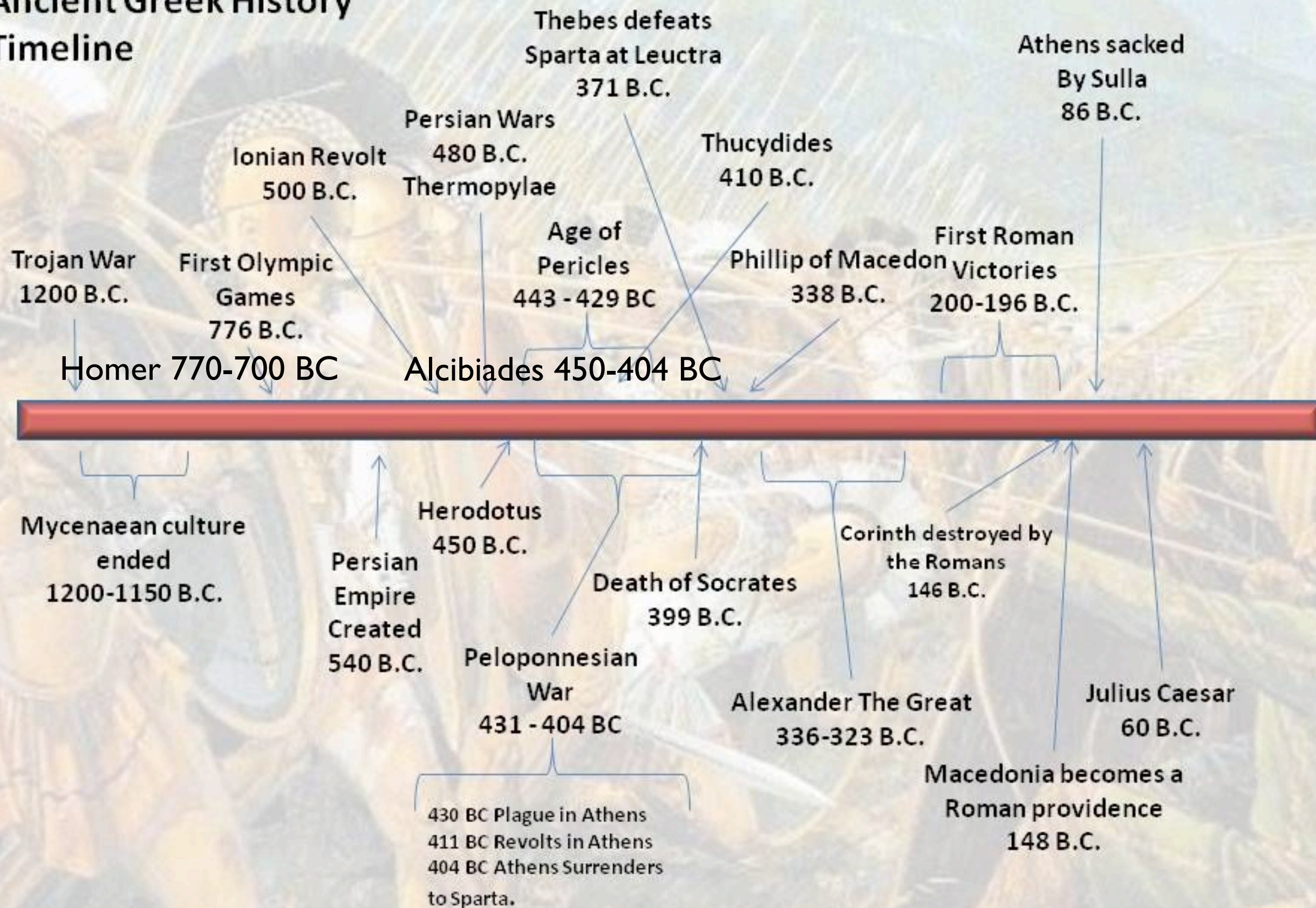
Thucydides



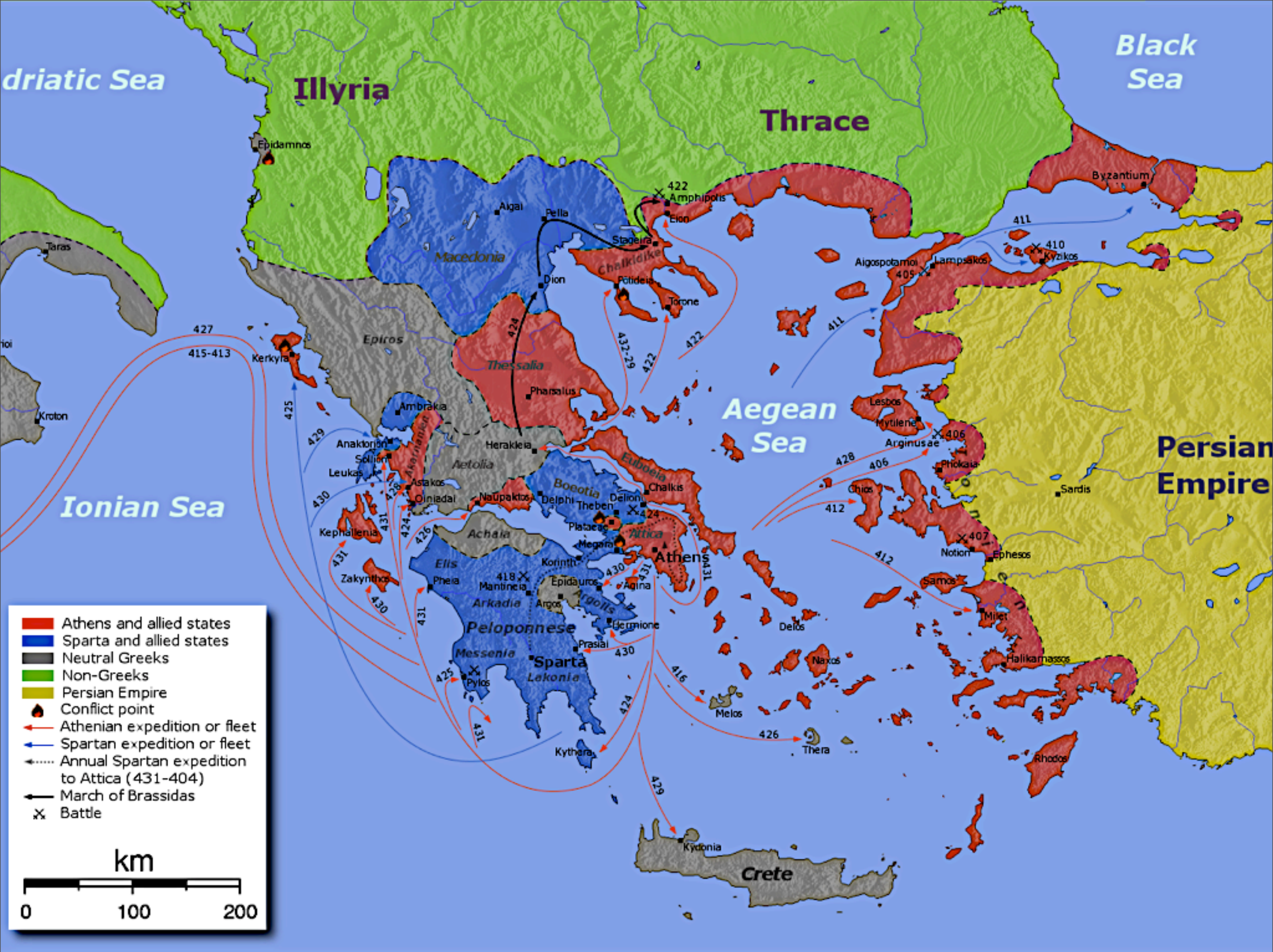
# Lycurgus.org

## Ancient Greek History

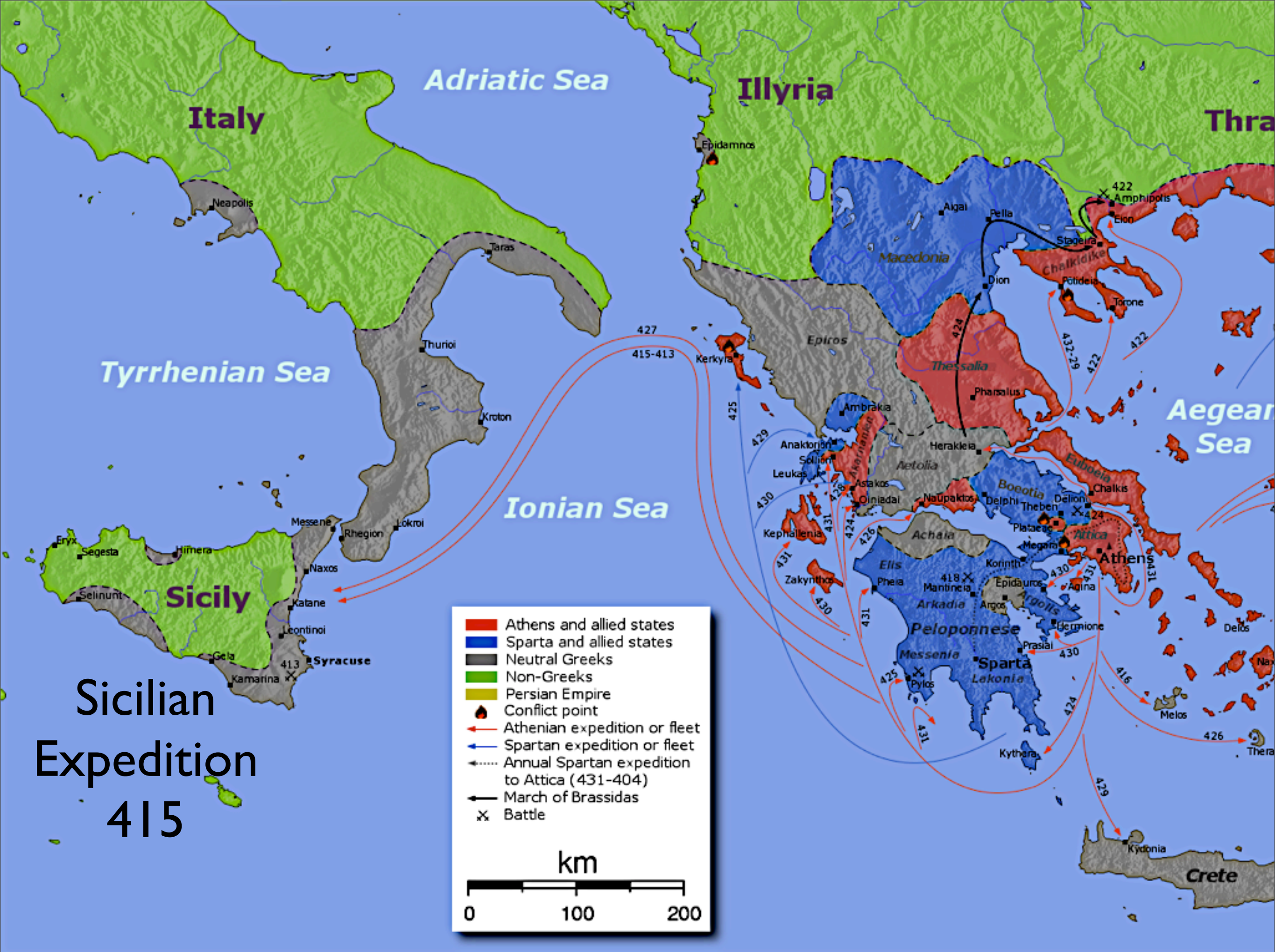
### Timeline

















# Athens, Sophocles, Antigone, 445 BC

## Sophoclean Tragedy and Alcibiades



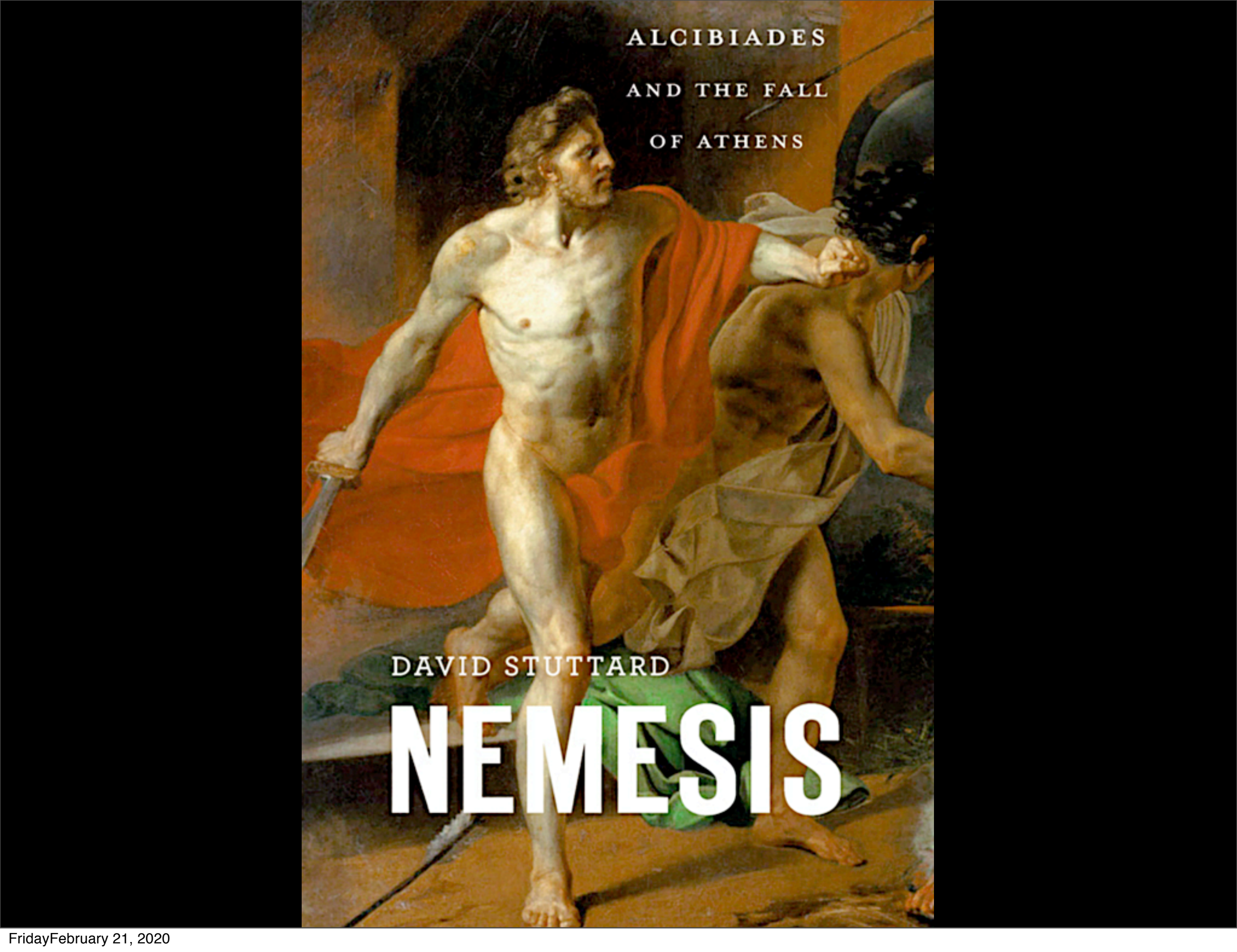


# Alcibiades 450-404 BC



1. Athenian democracy
2. Aristocracy in democracy  
aristocracy=kalokagathoi  
disdain for democracy
3. Physical beauty in Athens
4. Pederasty
5. Low value for women
6. Slavery
7. Athens and aggression/empire



The background of the book cover is a classical painting. It depicts a muscular, pale man with curly hair, identified as Alcibiades, standing and looking to his right. He is draped in a vibrant red cloak over his left shoulder and holds a sword in his right hand. Behind him, another figure is shown in a state of collapse or death, wearing a white garment. The scene is set in a dimly lit interior with architectural elements like columns and a doorway visible in the background.

ALCIBIADES  
AND THE FALL  
OF ATHENS

DAVID STUTTARD

# NEMESIS



IN THE EARLY HOURS of an autumn night in 404 BC, in the Persian compound at Melissa on the high Anatolian plain of central Asia Minor, Alcibiades awoke to the acrid stench of smoke. At first he may have thought that he was still plunged in a nightmare, for recently strange images had plagued his sleep. Just days before, he dreamt he had been lying paralyzed and frozen, wrapped in the clothes of his mistress, the beautiful Timandra, while, weeping, she rubbed rouge into his cheeks. Now, though, as he crossed the room and flung open the door, the wall of heat which met him from the blazing brushwood stacked around the threshold showed clearly that this was no dream. What happened next reads like the stuff of fiction. Yet, though Greek and Roman sources differ slightly in their details, they agree on the core facts.



Hurriedly Alcibiades returned to where Timandra was still lying naked in a muss of tousled sheets, and urgently awoke her. Efficiently he dragged the mattress from the bed and heaved it heavily to where the fire was fiercest, while Timandra piled thick blankets all around to staunch the flames. Then he took stock. For now, the fire was curbed but the danger was not over. If he were not aware already of the peril he was in, snippets of reports that he had heard in the past weeks had alerted Alcibiades to real and present plots against his life, and now his weapons had gone missing.



With no real knowledge of who was waiting in the darkness, Alcibiades needed to think fast. In the past he had survived because he did the unexpected—not only in the field of politics, but in battle, too. At Selymbria on the Propontis (the Sea of Marmara), when he found himself outnumbered, facing bristling ranks of enemy foot-soldiers, had he not bluffed his way to victory simply through his dazzling belief in his invincibility? Surely, with his luck, he could achieve the same here now. So, wrapping a cloak around his left arm as a shield, he snatched the dagger which a friend had lent him just the night before. Then, with a last look at Timandra, he turned towards the door before, screaming his war-cry, he leapt over the still-smouldering bedding, and ran wildly out into the night. Plutarch tells how his enemies turned tail and fled, too terrified to engage with this berserker. But then the archers drew and fired; the spearmen launched their javelins; and Alcibiades fell dying on the darkened earth.



Alcibiades' dramatic—almost filmic—death was a fitting end to an entirely unconventional life, a life that fascinated his contemporaries and captivated later generations. Enviably well-connected, strikingly handsome, immensely rich, intensely charismatic, and, like the Homeric hero Achilles, motivated by the ambition “always to be best and to surpass all others,” in his lifetime Alcibiades attracted not just passionate admirers but bitter enemies jealous of his easy charm and his political success, suspicious of where his energies might lead him.

And in a society driven by a moral code that advocated helping friends while harming enemies by every means imaginable, this would prove very dangerous indeed. Throughout his life, the rumor mill of his native Athens and the wider world ground out tales of his duplicity and decadence that mired him in controversy and threatened to destroy him.

Meanwhile Alcibiades himself, adept at self-promotion, countered them with testimonies of his patriotic probity, until it was impossible for anyone to know with any certainty where the truth really lay. For later generations the problem was compounded by the bias of what evidence survived, so that the sources that we have today must be approached with caution

*Nemesis: Alcibiades and the Fall of Athens*, David Stuttard, Harvard









In Greek society the elite were called (primarily, one suspects, by themselves) the **kalokagathoi**, those who are both beautiful (*kaloi*) and noble (*agathoi*), and much of the education of a young male aristocrat was aimed at developing both of these attributes.





Nobility was encouraged through exposure not only to inspiring literature (specifically the epic poems of **Homer**, which boys were expected to copy out and learn by heart) but to the right kind of music, which was believed to embody and have the potential to arouse noble sentiment.





Physical beauty, the beauty of the human form, was honed through rigorous exercise, specifically running and wrestling. And in each of these disciplines, if we can believe our sources, Alcibiades asserted his individuality from a young age, while at the same time revealing a disturbing tendency towards bitterness or violence if he did not win or get his own way.



## EDITH HALL ON THE GREEK MIRACLE

Between 800 and 300 BC, people who spoke Greek made a rapid series of intellectual discoveries that propelled the Mediterranean world to a new level of civilization.

Ten characteristics that distinguish Ancient Greece

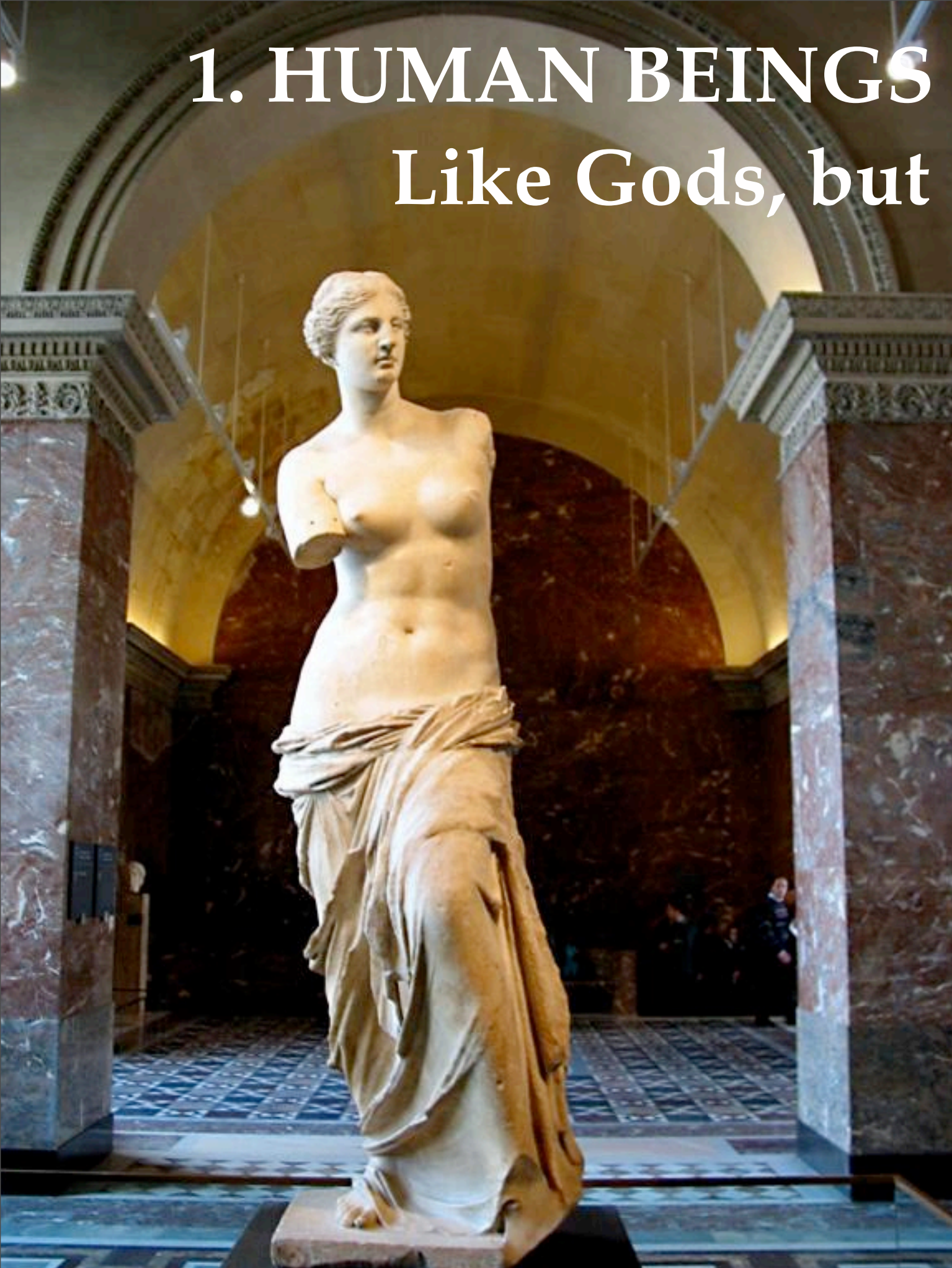
1. Seagoing (like frogs around the pond), swimmers and divers
2. Suspicious of authority (creation of democracy)
3. Individualistic (freedom)
4. Enquiring minds (science)
5. Openness to other culture (travel)
6. Articulate (special nature of Greek language) language, articulate

The Greeks themselves believed that they were incomparable at talking. They often said that it was this that made them superior to all “barbarians,” a word that originally meant “people who don’t speak Greek but speak unintelligibly.”  
Odysseus the best talker of them all rhetoric & poetry.

7. Sense of humor. wit
8. Competitive, passion for excellence (Olympics)
9. Value of beauty Adonis Venus, best athlete should also be the most beautiful.
- 10 Pursuit of pleasure, joy, fun.



# 1. HUMAN BEINGS ARE SPECIAL. Like Gods, but not Gods.

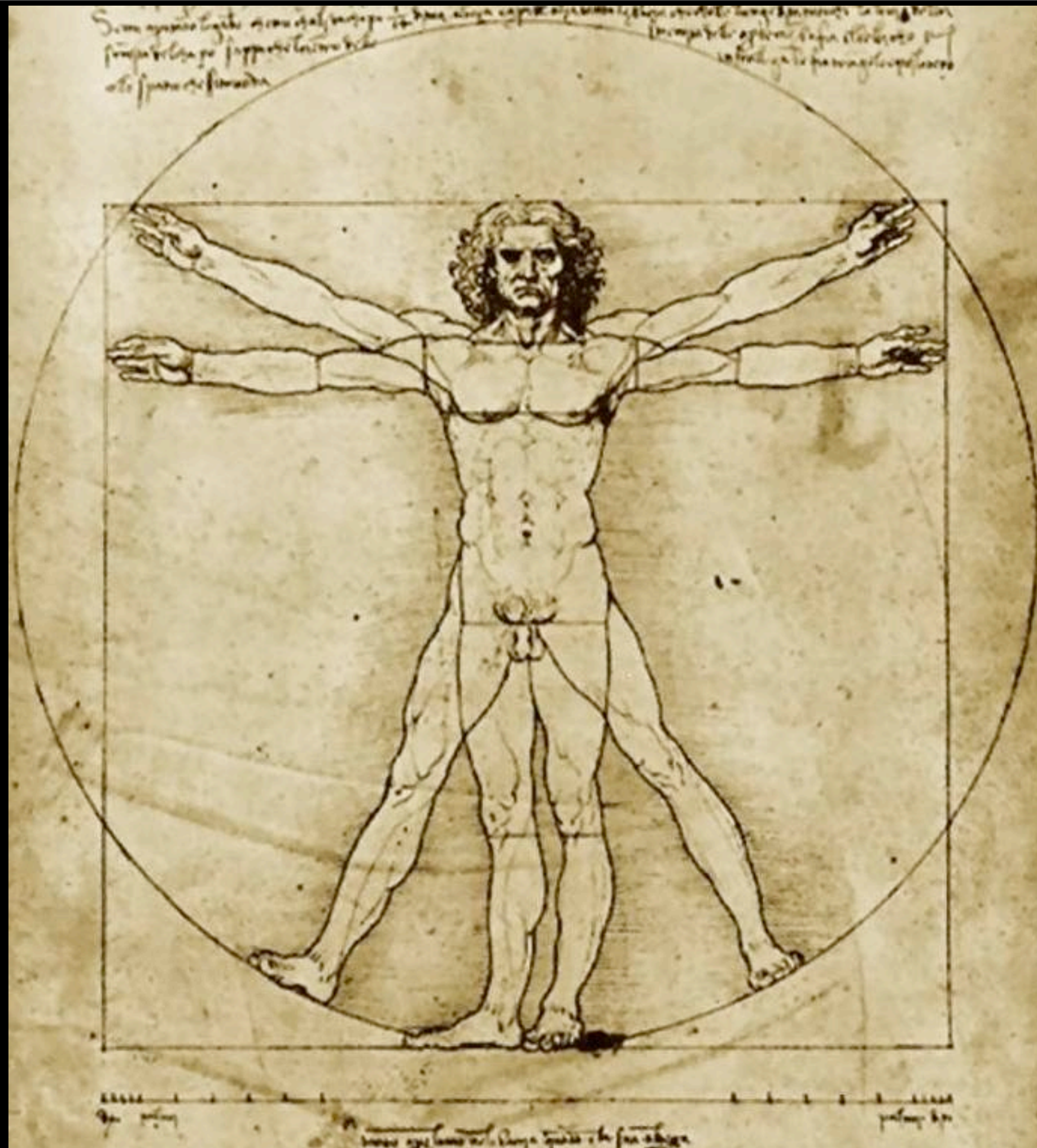




## 2. HUMAN BEINGS ARE BEAUTIFUL.





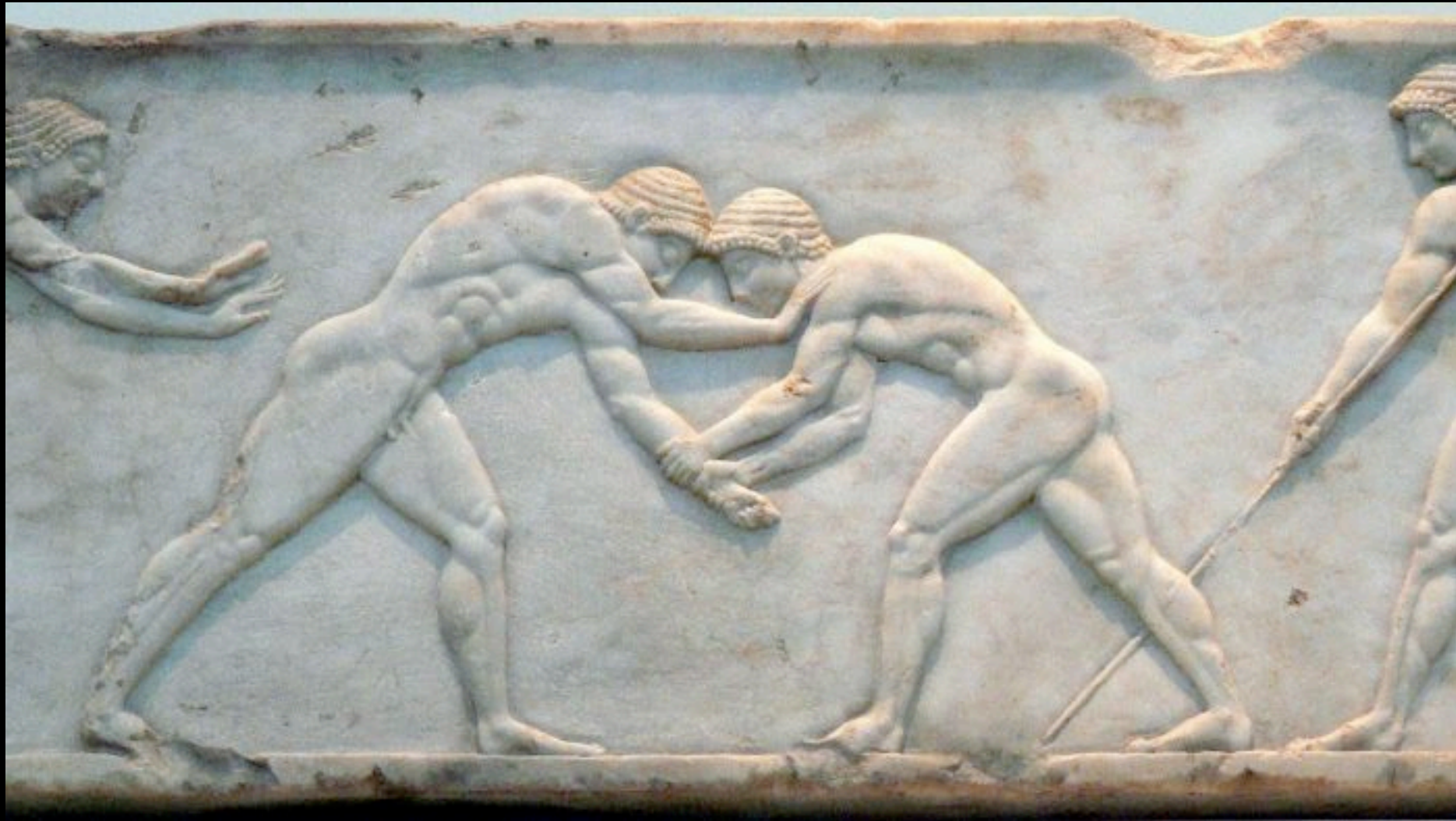






Much of a young aristocrat's time was spent at gymnasia, or fitness schools. Here, oiled and naked, young men sparred, toning flesh and honing muscle, striving to sculpt their bodies into mirror-images of those idealized statues of their gods which presided over much of civic life. Here, too, they talked, discussing everything from gossip to philosophy, avidly absorbing the latest theories of fellow members, scholars, and intellectuals.





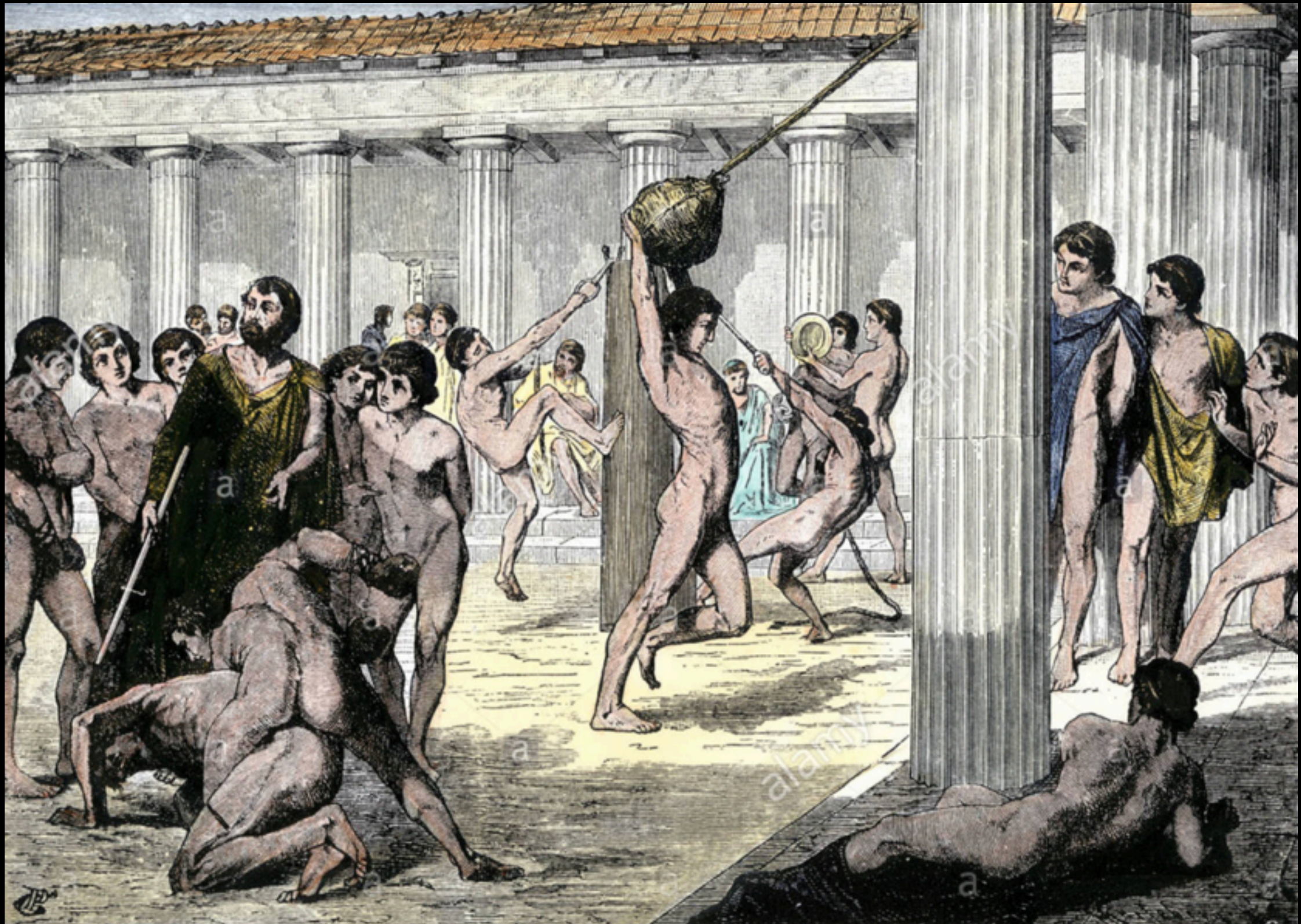
For Alcibiades, though, even as a boy, winning was everything, and once, when it seemed he must be thrown, he sank his teeth so hard into his opponent's arm that he almost bit right through it. Blood spurted; Alcibiades broke free; and when the other boy accused him of fighting like a woman, Alcibiades retorted: "Me? No! I fight like a lion."







# Athens, too much attention to the body?











His beautiful body

As a young man, training with his social equals, Alcibiades put in valuable hours at the palaestra, hours which had a pleasing effect on his physique. For, as Alcibiades grew, so did his physical beauty. Soon he was recognized as the handsomest youth in Athens, and it was a reputation he was jealous to uphold.



# Pederasty



Precocious, dangerous, his beauty blossoming, from an early age Alcibiades both basked in the power of his charisma and knew how to manipulate it. For patrician young Athenians, part of their path to maturity involved taking older male lovers. Men between the ages of eighteen and thirty (at which time they usually married) would court boys of around twelve and older in the hope of forming a lasting relationship.

David Stuttard. *Nemesis*

The problems for democracy  
when mixing politics and sex



This was not only sexual, although physical intercourse played a part in it. Rather, the older partner, the erastes, was expected to educate the younger, his eromenos, integrating him into society, introducing him to his friendship groups, and generally preparing him for adult civic life.









# Citizen and soldier

432 BC, age 18

It was against this background, in this heightened atmosphere, that Alcibiades' childhood officially came to an end. Some time in 434 Alcibiades was presented once more to the deme (neighborhood), Scambonidae.





# Citizen and soldier 432 BC, age 18

His parentage was again proclaimed and a solemn vote was cast to enroll him as a voting member of the deme.

A short time later, after a meeting of the City Council at which the deme's decision was confirmed, Alcibiades and his coevals gathered on the Acropolis at the sanctuary of the mythological princess Aglaurus, where in the presence of the priestess, Theano, and dressed in full armour, they were enrolled as ephebes. Key to this ceremony was the oath, which each was required to swear, never to dishonor his armor or abandon a comrade in battle, always to defend the rights of gods and men.

David Stuttard, *Nemesis*





# Alcibiades meets Socrates









# Socrates - His Main Ideas I

---

- Our interior life – our “psyche” or “soul” – is the most important part of life
  - Our psyche is “healthy” when it seeks goodness, truth, justice, and self-knowledge
  - A soul in search of wealth, fame, and power becomes weak, sickly, ignorant
-





Western Civilization and the interior life  
of the human being dramatically increased in  
importance when joined by Judeo-Christian ideas  
in the generation of Augustine (Confessions)



# Socrates - His Main Ideas I

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# WHY WAS HE IMPORTANT?

- He presented a new way of thinking and believing (1)
  - Helped people find the truth about their beliefs (3)
  - Helped people examine what they thought to be true (3)
  - Taught the great philosopher, Plato (3,4)
- One of the first people to defy the government and Greek religion (4)

SOCRATES  
QUESTIONS  
ANCIENT  
GREEK  
RELIGION



## Religion      Hesiod: *The Theogony*

most thoroughly anthropomorphic mythology ever.

whole pantheon = human behavior / often poor behavior.

1. no system
  2. begins at no fixed time / point / origin.
  3. roots stretch back into unchronicled past.
  4. no principle prophet or lawgiver (like Moses).
  5. no sacred books.
  6. no central organized priestly hierarchy (local.many. EX: Delphi).
  7. no revealed cosmology (many conflicting).
  8. no national religious practices (localized / many ancient mystery)
  9. no orthodoxy. just stories, many gods, be careful you dont make them mad at you.
  10. no scheme of redemption.( in general afterlife is bad / drab / dull)
  11. no divine model for human behavior.( Imitatio Christo).
- religion in decline by time of Plato and Aristotle.

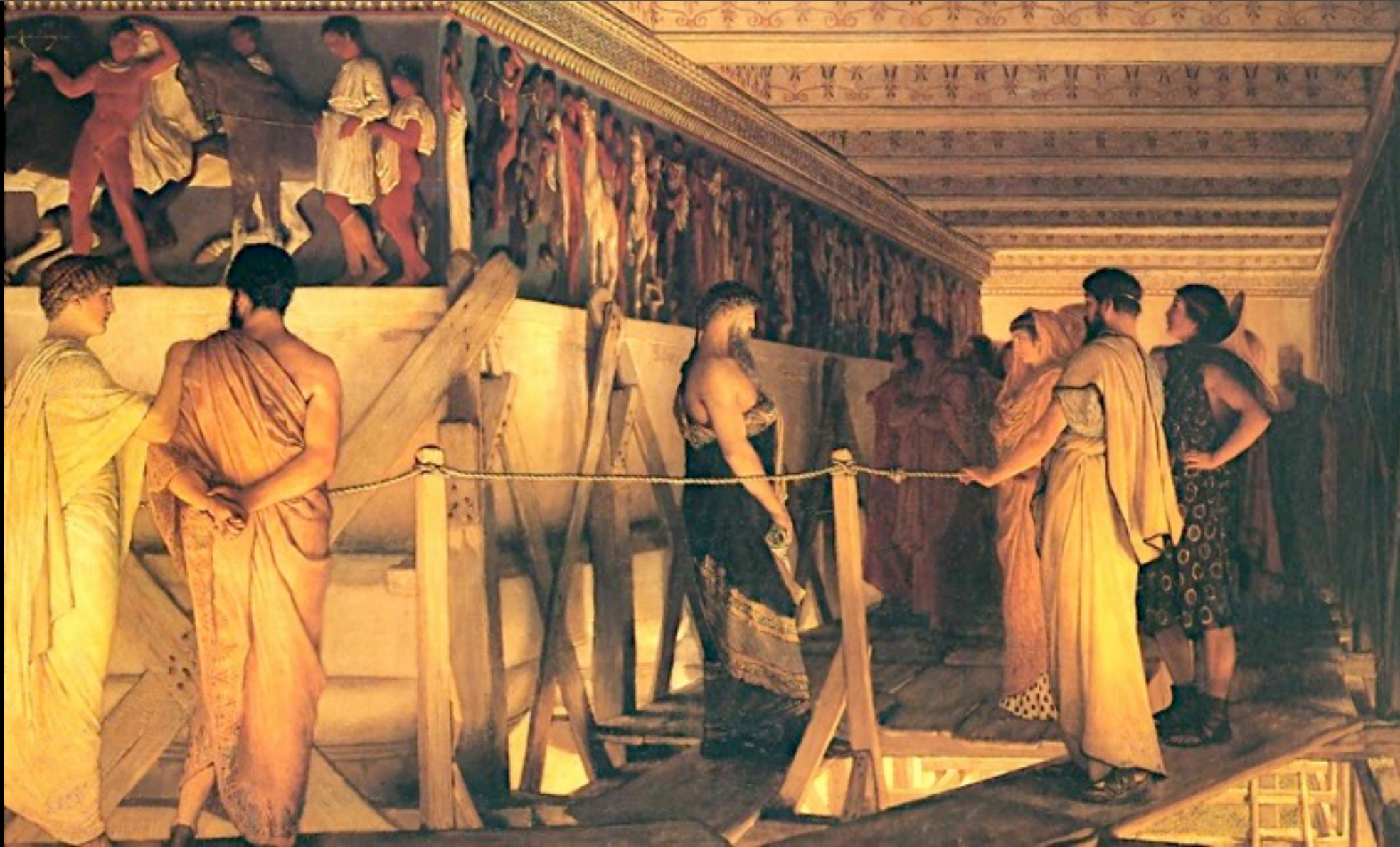




# Religion in 5th C Athens

Although the intelligentsia of Athens were more than prepared to question the nature and even the existence of the gods in private, the vast bulk of citizens remained religiously conservative and superstitious. Even Pericles took great care to be seen to pray before he made a public speech. Since any public act that seemed to cross the bounds of what was acceptable to the gods—indeed anything that could be deemed in the slightest way heretical—might be construed as threatening the well-being of the state, it was well to avoid any doubt.

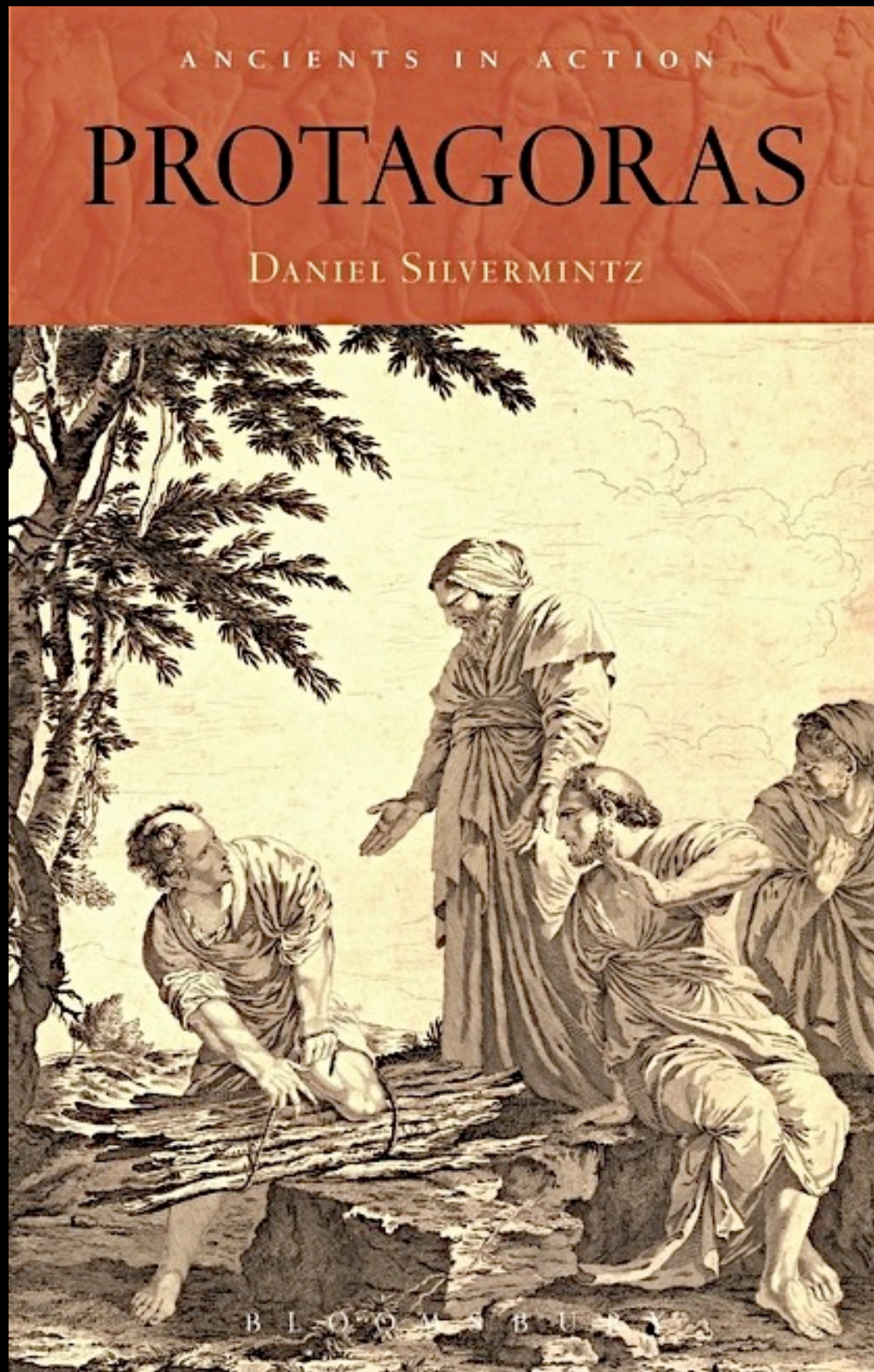




## Impiety, Phidias and the Parthenon

There was an unwritten orthodoxy that no living person might be represented on a building or statue dedicated to the gods. So when it was suggested that one of the figures sculpted on Athene's shield bore an uncanny likeness to Phidias himself, while another (slightly hidden) looked like Pericles, there erupted an almighty scandal. Especially as Pericles was a member of the cursed Alcmaeonids. Quite how it all played out is uncertain. Some say that Phidias was forced into exile. Whatever the fallout, it was a lesson to anyone—not least an adolescent boy—that the People took breaches of religious propriety very seriously, and anyone suspected of profanity might expect the harshest treatment. It was a lesson, too, that in politics any weapon might be used to bring down the enemy.





Protagoras:  
“I can’t tell whether or not the gods exist or what they might be like,” Protagoras once wrote, “since the question is thorny and human life is short.” Rather, “man is the measure of all things, of those which are, that they are, and of those which are not, that they are not.” To him, then, morality was subjective. Mankind was incapable of grasping absolute or universal truths.



# PROTAGORAS ONE OF CLOSEST FRIENDS OF PERICLES

## The Major Players

- Protagoras
- Born about 490 B.C. in Thrace
- Met Pericles; later appointed by him to write laws for the Athenian colony of Thurii in 444 B.C.

Died 420





# The Delicate Balance

## The Major Players

- Protagoras
- Born about 490 B.C. in Thrace
- Met Pericles; later appointed by him to write laws for the Athenian colony of Thurii in 444 B.C.

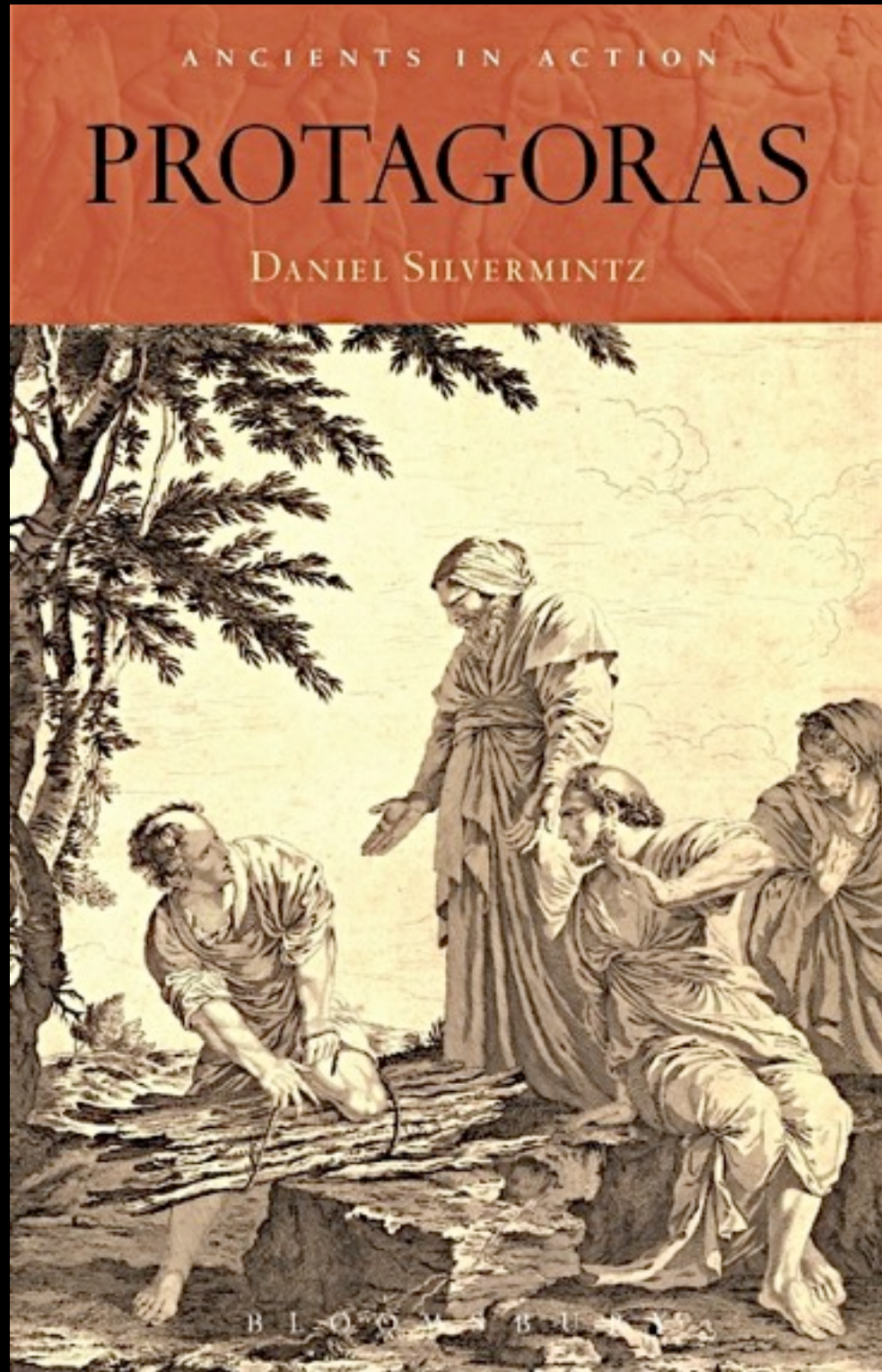


Even Pericles took great care to be seen to pray before he made a public speech



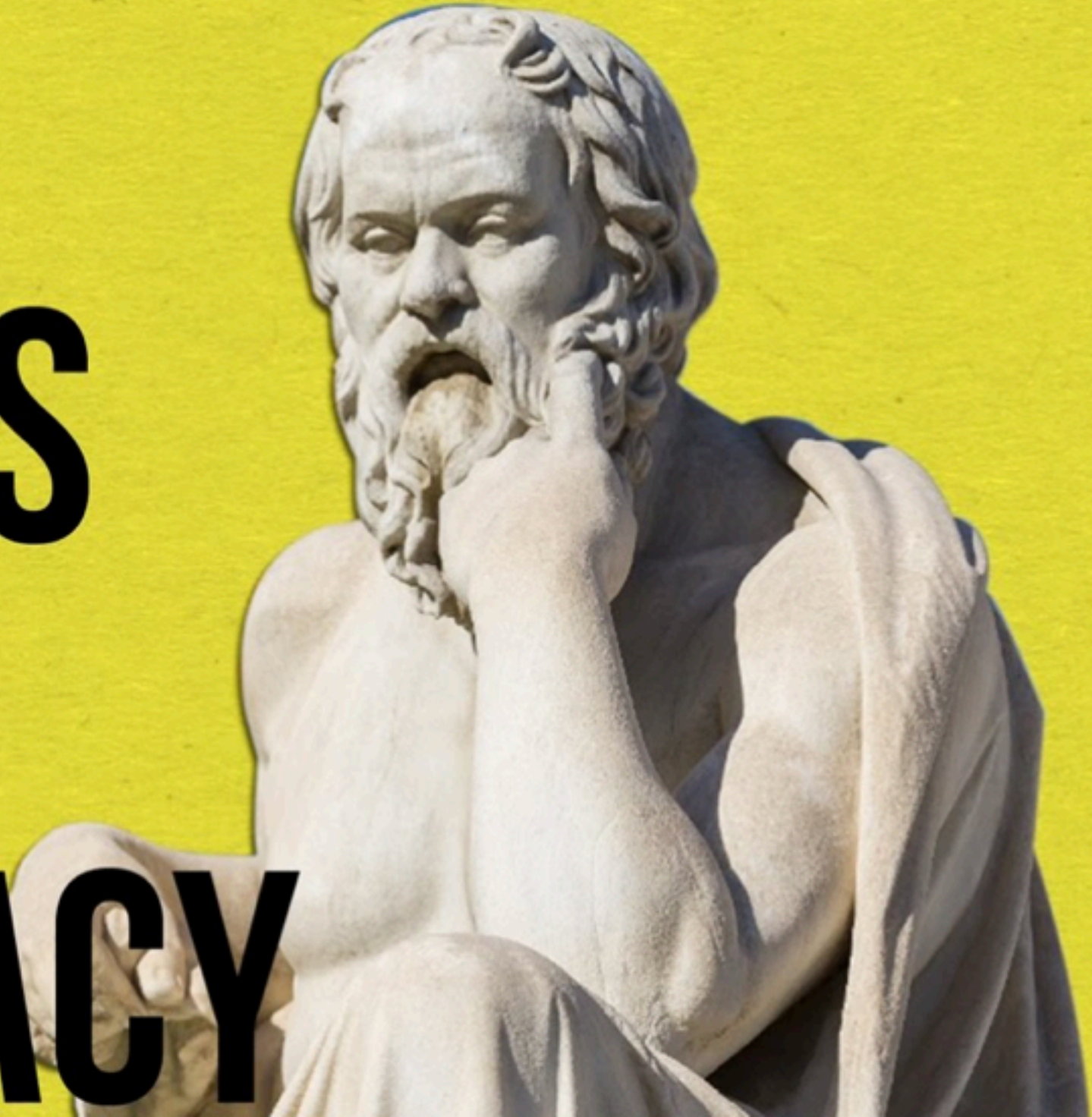
# Religious Orthodoxy

But it was Pericles' rationalism, and the rationalism of his friends, which provided his political enemies with the easiest of targets. A soothsayer called Diopeithes was put forward to propose a decree, opening up to **prosecution anyone who questioned the existence of the gods or who taught scientific astronomy.** The bill was passed. Anaxagoras was forced into exile. And Protagoras, too. Many of his books were seized by an angry crowd and burned in the Agora.





# WHY SOCRATES HATED DEMOCRACY



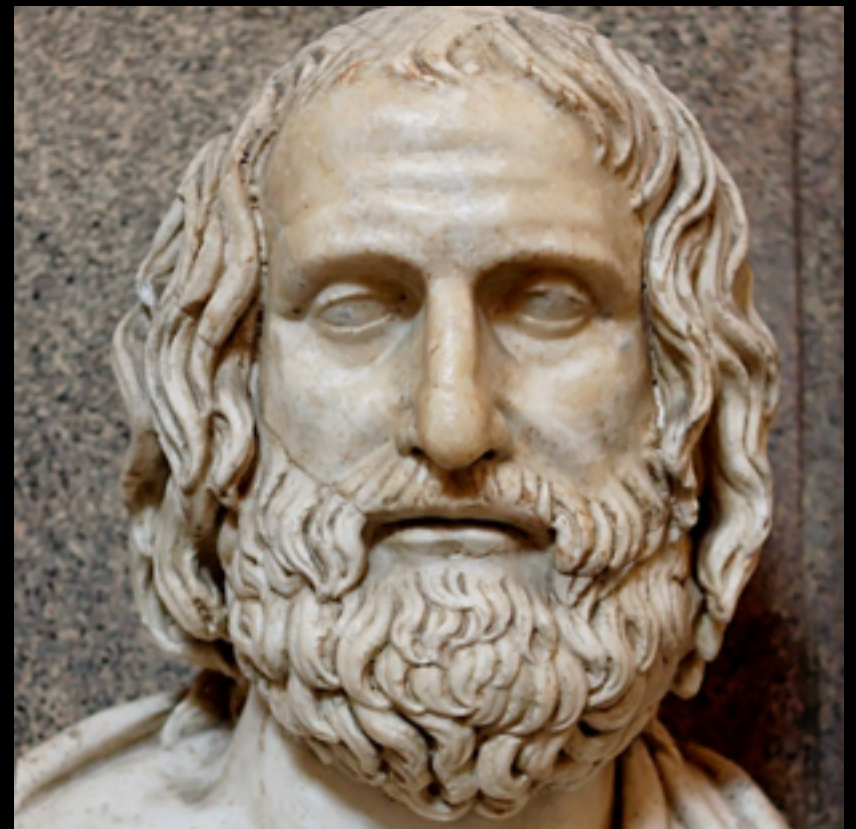


# PHILOSOPHY





430 BC  
Pericles  
Protagoras  
Alcibiades  
Socrates





# 430 Socrates saves the life of Alcibiades at Battle of Potidea



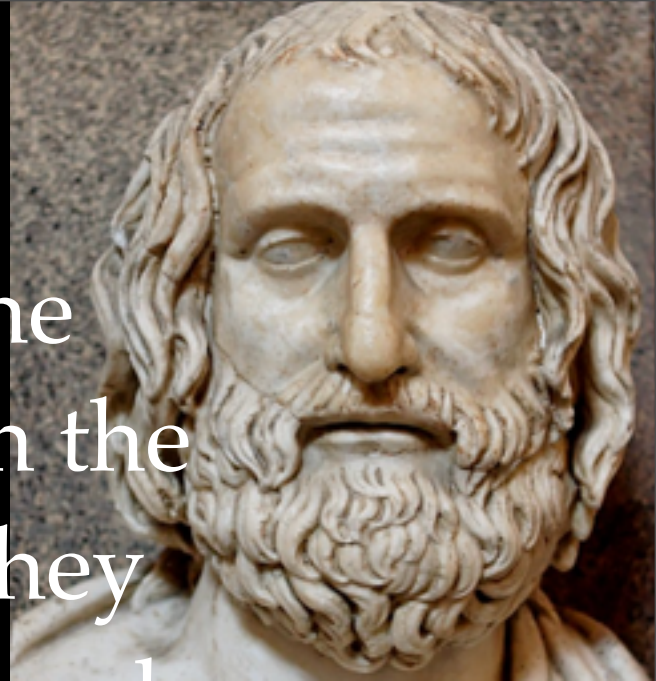
*Antonio Canova invento* *Luigi Scuderi delin.* *Tommaso Pirelli incisit.*  
*Socrate che salva il giovine Alcibiade nella battaglia di Potidea*



# Young Hero



When the battle was over and the Athenians proved victorious, when the generals were discussing whom they should honor with the coveted award for bravery, the philosopher refused it, **insisting instead that it should go to Alcibiades.** And so in a ceremony held before the gathered troops, wounded but triumphant, his beauty not only undiminished but burnished by his brush with death, the son of Cleinias claimed his prize—a suit of armor and a victor's wreath.

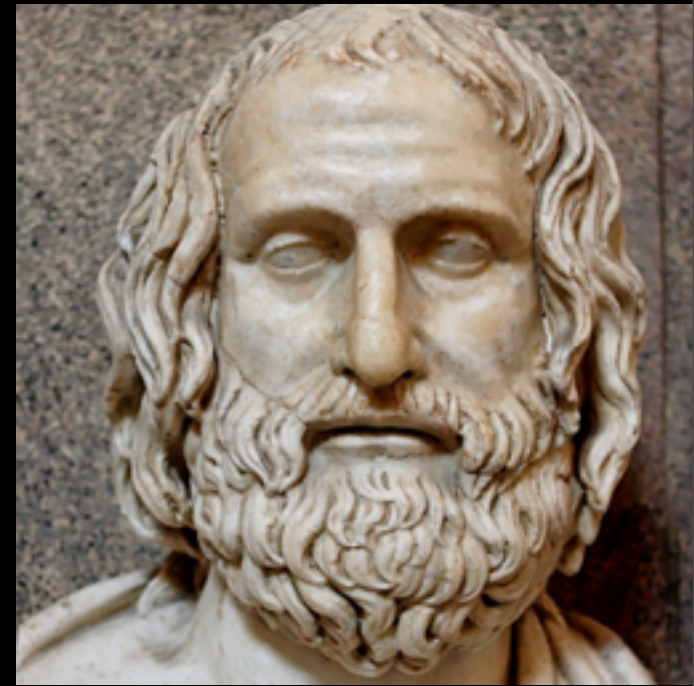




# Young Hero



. Already, only twenty years of age, he had equalled in glory his grandfather, Cleinias II, who had won his aristeia, his award for bravery, almost fifty years before against the Persians at Artemisium.



**It was a tremendous accolade, which, in Athens' militaristic society, bestowed on Alcibiades the coveted aura of heroism.**



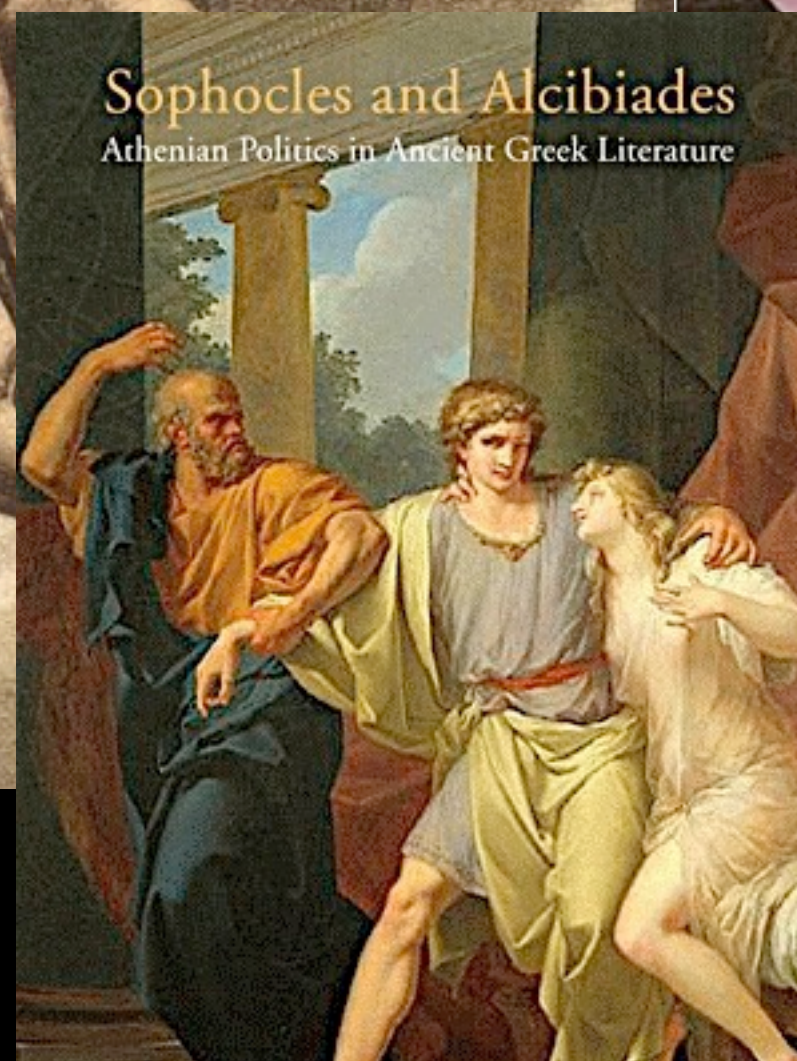
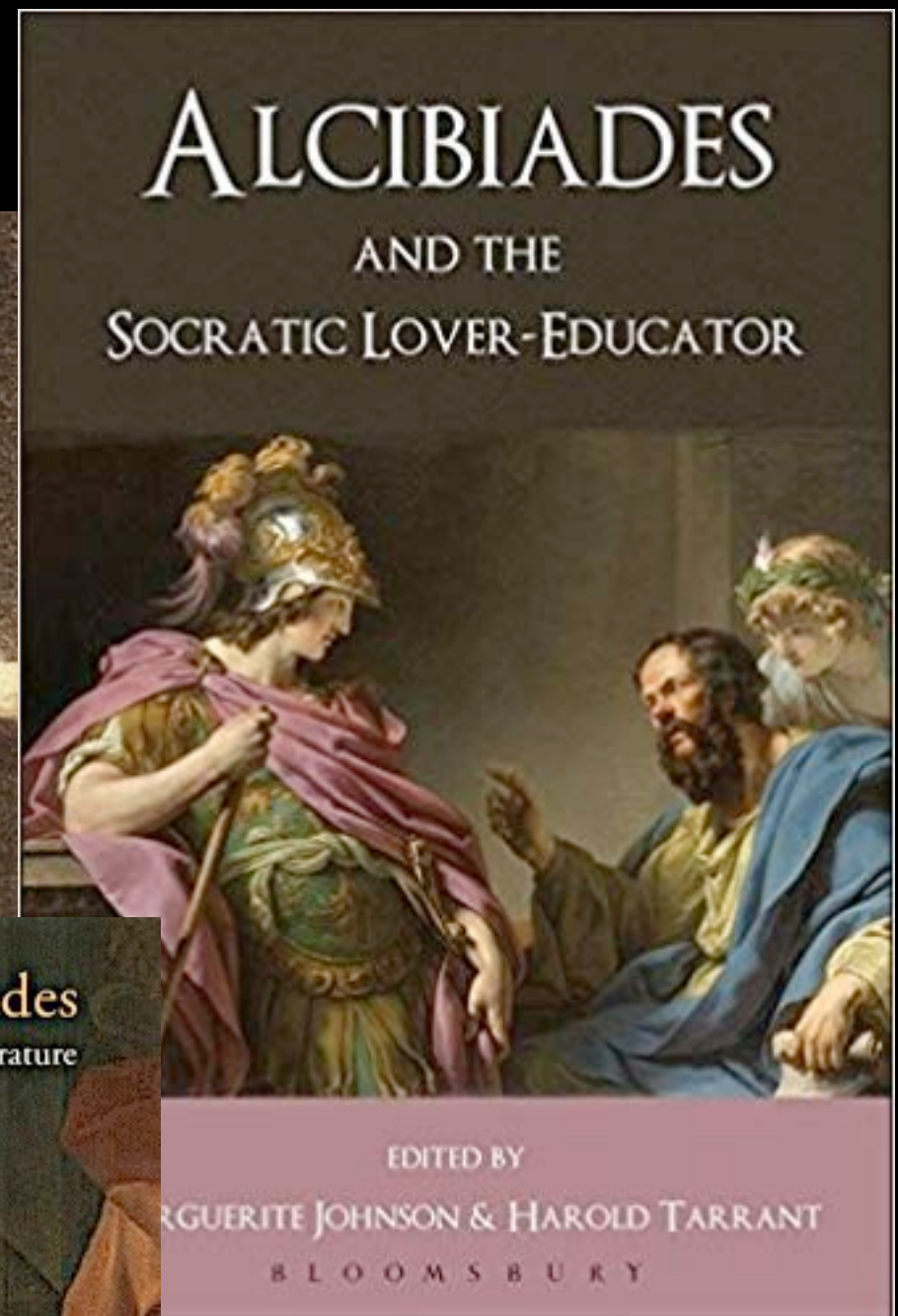
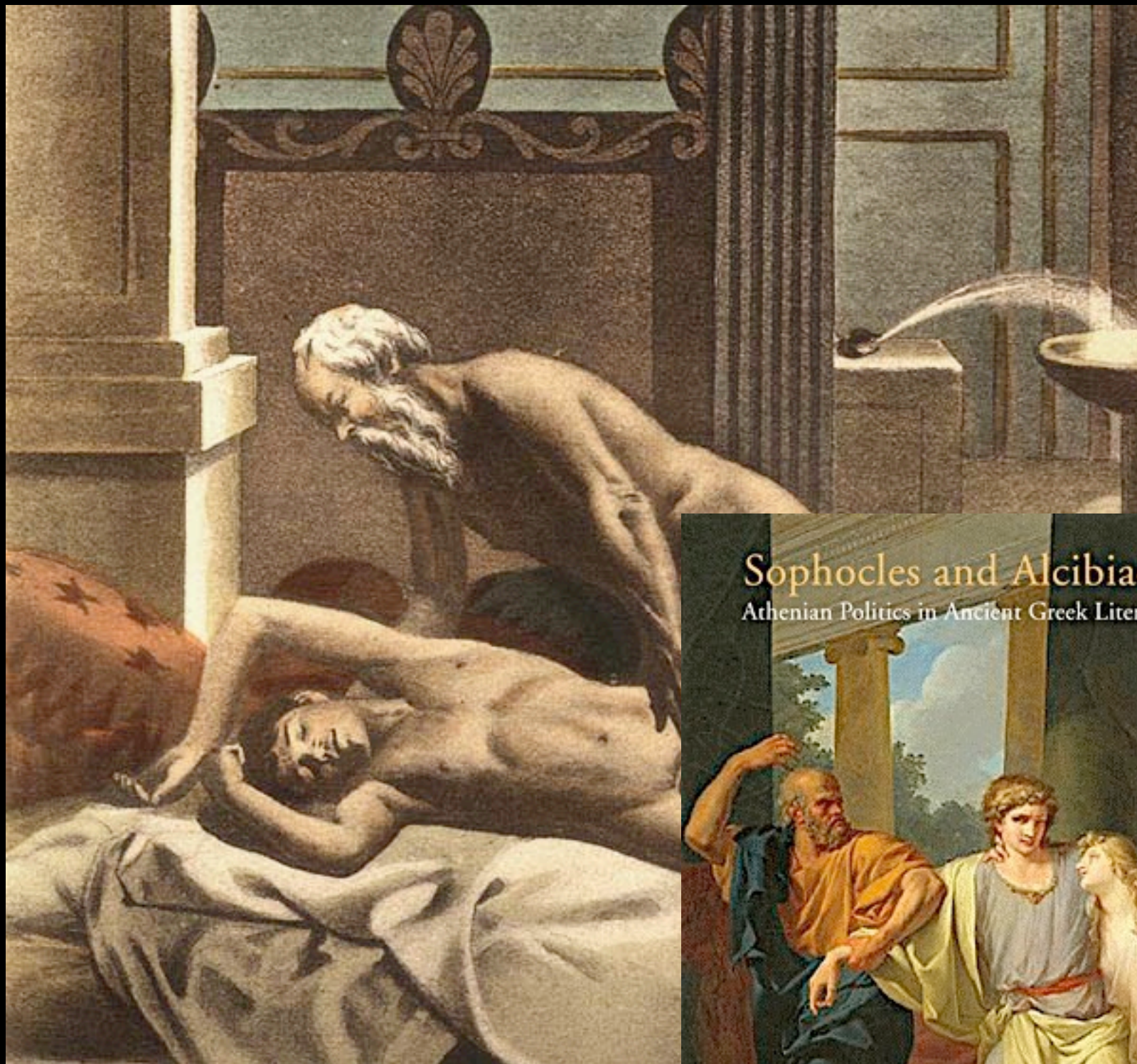
# Alcibiades and Socrates



The brilliant  
philosophical world  
meets sexual politics

Socrates claimed that he could see beneath the surface into Alcibiades' true nature. And, what he saw, he feared. For here, he believed, was a young man who had the capability for either tremendous good or untold destruction. Alcibiades' future, he predicted, would be influenced by his choice of friends, and many of those who now were hanging on his every word, sniggering at his jokes, and bolstering his orphan ego were plainly doing so for purely selfish reasons.





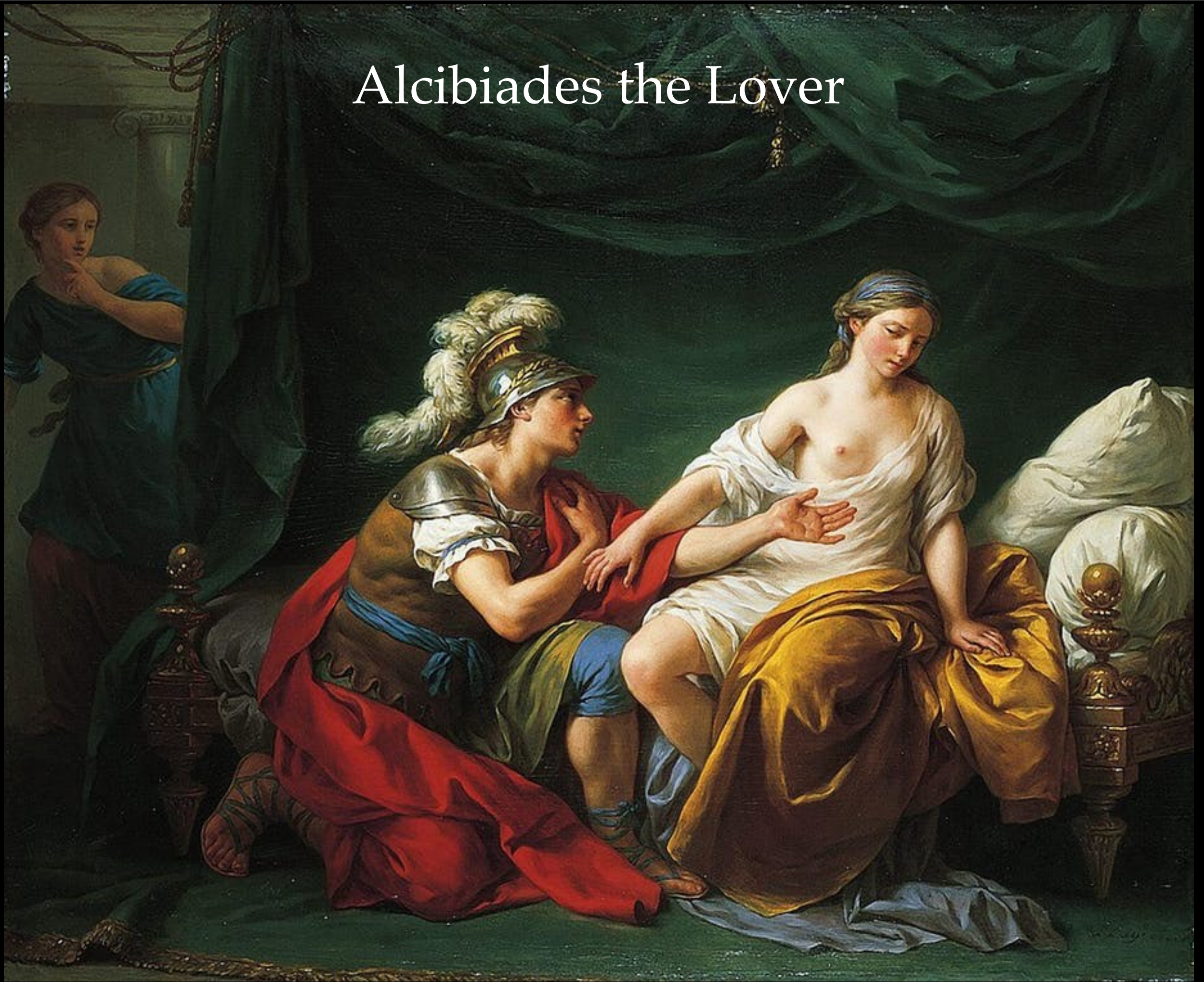


# Plato's Story

What happened when these two unlikely tent-mates were together was a matter of some speculation. According to Plato, Alcibiades had already tried in vain to seduce the philosopher in Athens, contriving situations whereby Socrates would be obliged to spend the night with him. Once, when he did keep Socrates with him, the older man rebuffed his blatant propositioning and repeated attempts at arousal, and, although the two did sleep on the same couch, they did so as if they were brothers—or father and son. By the time they were on campaign, Alcibiades had no doubt long realized that (in that department at least) Socrates was a lost cause (all according to Plato). David Stuttard. *Nemesis*



# Alcibiades the Lover





# Socrates tries to call Alcibiades away from his mistress





# ARISTOPHANES MAKES FUN OF ALCIBIADES

## ARISTOPHANES --- THE CLOUDS



A LibriVox recording

READ BY EXPATRIATE



# Chronology

446 BC Athenian war in Boeotia a failure (Alcibiades' father killed

## **The Great Peloponnesian War**

446 BC Sparta invades Attica, lays waste farms towns

**435 B.C.E.**

Civil war at Epidamnus

**432 B.C.E.**

Sparta declares war on Athens

**431 B.C.E.**

Peloponnesian invasion of Athens

**421 B.C.E.**

Peace of Nicias **Alcibiades**

**415–413 B.C.E.**

Athenian invasion of Sicily **Alcibiades**

**405 B.C.E.**

Battle of Aegospotami

**404 B.C.E.**

Athens surrenders **death of Alcibiades**





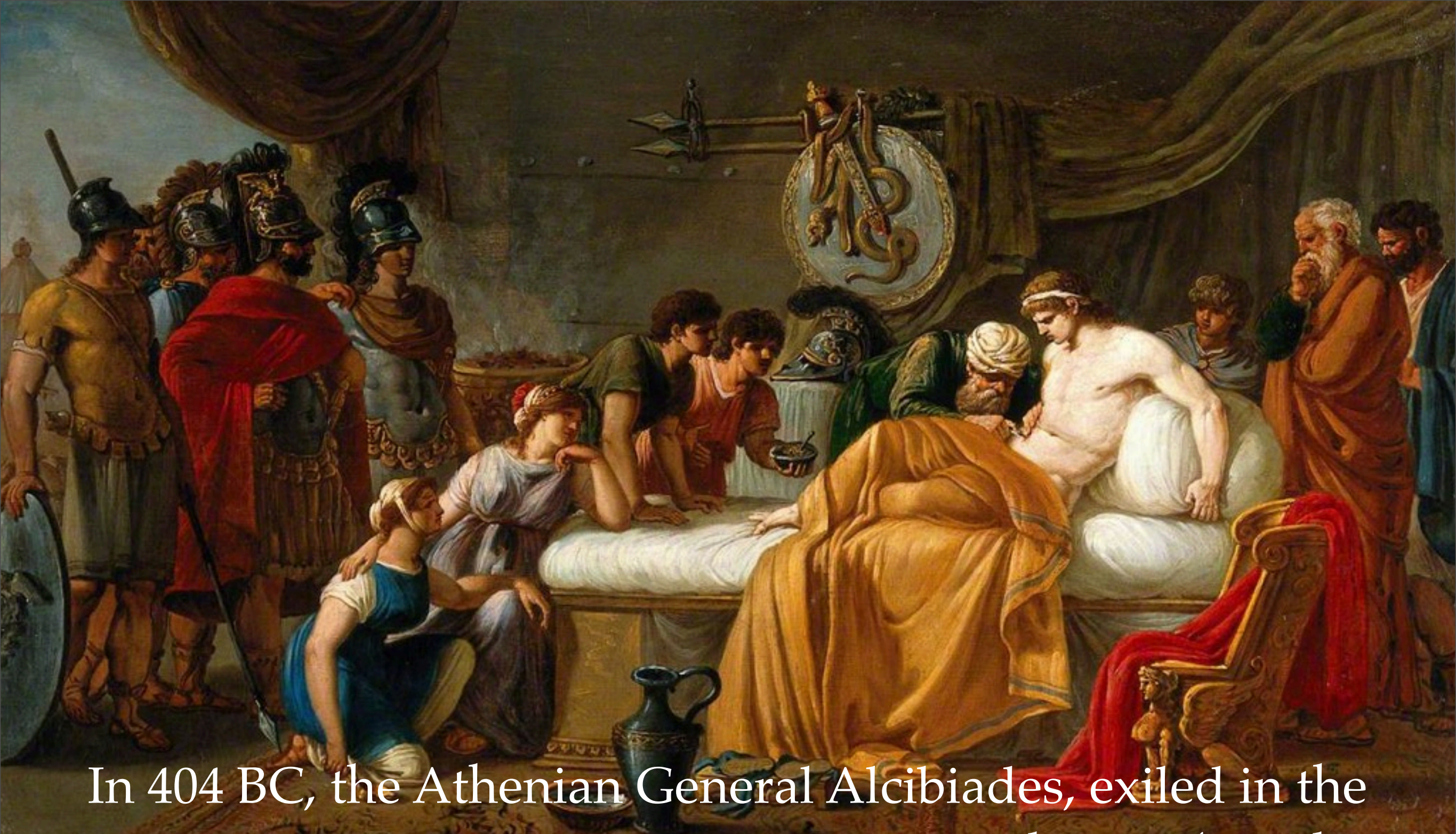


# The Death of Alcibiades

## 404 BC







In 404 BC, the Athenian General Alcibiades, exiled in the Persian Empire province of Hellespontine Phrygia (Northern Turkey), was assassinated by Persian soldiers, who may have been following the orders of Pharnabazus II, at the instigation of Sparta's Lysander.



# An End to Democracy

**In the 330s BC, Athens was conquered by the Macedonians.**

**Athens kept its democracy but it had very limited powers.**

Philip King of Macedon and son Alexander  
conquer Athens 338 BC







Why did Athenian democracy fail?

1. 338 BC conquered by larger state.
2. Class conflict (old families, Pericles, Alcibiades)
3. Slavery
4. Sexual politics (pederasty, jealousy)
5. Aristotle: lack of "Philia"
6. philosophers didn't believe in it.
7. War. aggression. empire.
8. Direct democracy doesn't work for large state.



# Aristotle on Democracy: Philia

Philia= "friendship," family unity, ethnic unity,

Democracy only possible when you have philia

The state must be unified by common culture

common values like a family

A multi-ethnic culture like Athens

(classes, slaves, foreigners)

will fail as democracy.

**It produces chaos, the enemy of democracy**

**democracy needs cultural unity, peace.**

Tyrants encourage ethnic strife, class warfare, racial warfare

ethnic strife is the friend of Tyranny.

Democracy thrives within cultural unity (tradition, practice)

Abstract theories of democracy (Fr. Rev.) fail.







# History of Ancient Greece

## Institute for the Study of Western Civilization

### Week 17: Alcibiades













