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Poetry as Historiography: The History of *Stasis* and Political Change in the *Theognidea*

by

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Abstract

In examining the history of the Archaic period of ancient Greece, one is hard pressed to find contemporary historical and historiographical accounts as can be found in later periods. However, archaic poetry is shown to be a possible place to look for historical information of the period. Of interest to this paper, Theognis' Theognidea appears to hold critical historical information of the stasis and political change of Archaic Megara. In this, I will be examining the extent to which Theognis' Theognidea can be used as a historiography for the political change occurring in the Archaic age, specifically that of the sixth century BCE. I will carry this out by looking at the history of the time as it is presented in the Theognidea, considering and examining the change from *muthos* to *logos* as it pertains to the words of the poet and the potential history to be found in them, the ways in which Theognis' background and the history of the circumstances surrounding his writing influence his writing, and with comparing the Theognidea to other later historical accounts of that time period, to other poets as historiography pertains to their poems, and to other works of historiography.

Without long histories and accounts in the Archaic age as come about from writers in the Classical period and beyond, the history of Archaic Greece can at times be tricky to pinpoint. In the absence of a true tradition of historiography and historical inquiry, poetry becomes a place to look to for primary historical information, as these poems, sung at festivals, symposiums, or other events, and eventually written down, provide us with some form of account of this period. Such accounts are found in the words of poets such as Homer, Hesiod, Alcaeus, Pindar, and of special interest for this paper is the events presented in the *Theognidea* of the Megarian poet Theognis. Thus, this paper will seek to examine the extent to which the *Theognidea* can be used as a historiography of the political change and stasis prevalent in the Archaic period of ancient Greece, specifically in the sixth century BCE, by looking at the understandings of and change from *mythos* and *logos* as it pertains to the poets and the potential history to be found in their writings, by examining the role that poetry plays as a potential source of history, by considering the life and events surrounding Theognis and how this affects his presentation of the history, and by examining the historical information of this time as it is found in the *Theognidea*.

In many considerations of *muthos* and *logos*, thanks to writings from the likes of Heraclitus and Plato, mythos and the speech of poets has come to take on an interpretation of the more modern meaning of myth, including its connotations of legend and fable, with the transition from *muthos* to *logos* being associated with such things as “the move from symbolic to rational discourse, anthropomorphism to abstraction, and religion to philosophy.”¹ But, to gain a better sense of what mythos, and in turn *logos*, meant to the poets, thinkers, and generally the people of the archaic age, Bruce Lincoln’s analysis of such provides a helpful understanding, which I will

¹ Bruce Lincoln, “The Prehistory of Mythos and Logos” and “From Homer through Plato,” in *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 3.

be referencing here repeatedly given his many valuable insights. As Lincoln explains, from Hesiod we get an understanding of *muthos* as a term which “always denotes the rough speech of headstrong men, who are proud of their strength and bent on victory at all costs,” and, “In deeds, moreover, they make good on their commitments: their speech is raw and crude but true.”² And in Homer, Lincoln describes *muthos* as a term which, “often denotes what it normally does in Hesiod: a blunt and aggressive act of candor, uttered by powerful males in the heat of battle or agonistic assembly,” and further that, “mythos is an assertive discourse of power and authority that represents itself as something to be believed and obeyed. Nowhere in the epic does it mean ‘false story,’ ‘symbolic story,’ ‘sacred story,’ or anything of the sort.”³

As can be seen, *muthos* in the earlier archaic age, in the times of Homer and Hesiod, was not understood in the modern sense of the word “myth,” but rather as a type of speech holding much authority and truth. And as such, this places the poet, whose speech is that of mythos, in a position of speaking words of authority and truth. And Lincoln explains that in Hesiod’s discussion of how he came to his position as an inspired poet through the Muses, he presents the words of the Muses as “nothing other than mythos,” and that “the poet thus legitimates the speech of the Muses, who in turn will legitimate the speech of the poet.”⁴ Therefore, in a time in which the oral transmission of stories of the past were so important and held such weight, and when a system of writing was, in the grand scheme of things, only recently becoming implemented into Greek society, the speech of poets and their stories garnered much authority as a source of knowledge of the past. As Lincoln describes it, “Within such a context, poetry is

² Bruce Lincoln, “The Prehistory of Mythos and Logos” and “From Homer through Plato,” in *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 12.

³ Bruce Lincoln, “The Prehistory of Mythos and Logos” and “From Homer through Plato,” in *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 17-18.

⁴ Bruce Lincoln, “The Prehistory of Mythos and Logos” and “From Homer through Plato,” in *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 23.

society's chief archival medium, as well as its most authoritative discourse and prime instrument for cultural reproduction over the course of generations."⁵

However, as time moved on, and writing developed more and more within archaic Greece and going into classical Greek society, the denotations associated with *mythos* and *logos* began to take on different understandings, and in the times of Heraclitus and of Plato, *logos* can be seen to be taking on the meaning of a more authoritative speech. With both Heraclitus and Plato, we can see a favorability towards *logos*, and the speech of poets is treated with much dismay. However, as Lincoln explains, with Heraclitus, the criticism of poets and poetry does not take up a position regarding *mythos* itself, but rather he focuses on the form of speech of *logos*.⁶ With Heraclitus *logos* itself even takes on many meanings, and as Edwin L. Minar, Jr. explains there are instances when *logos* "has the sense of 'expression' or the like,"⁷ and "Sometimes, Heraclitus seems to identify it loosely with the gods and to attribute to it some of the elements of personality,"⁸ and even further that at times *logos* is "connected with 'counting' and 'rendering account.'"⁹ But as Minar explains, "Perhaps the English word which can best cover most of the meaning which the *λόγος* has Heraclitus is 'account.' The *λόγος* is first of all Heraclitus' story, his explanation, and perhaps even his book."¹⁰ And with other pre-Socratic philosophers, poets, and writers, *mythos* is either avoided or can be shown to maintain a similar understanding to that

⁵ Bruce Lincoln, "The Prehistory of Mythos and Logos" and "From Homer through Plato," in *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 25.

⁶ Bruce Lincoln, "The Prehistory of Mythos and Logos" and "From Homer through Plato," in *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 27.

⁷ Edwin L. Minar, "The Logos of Heraclitus," *Classical Philology* 34, no. 4 (1939): 326, accessed May 9, 2023 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/264096>.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Edwin L. Minar, "The Logos of Heraclitus," *Classical Philology* 34, no. 4 (1939): 336, accessed May 9, 2023 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/264096>.

¹⁰ Edwin L. Minar, "The Logos of Heraclitus," *Classical Philology* 34, no. 4 (1939): 340, accessed May 9, 2023 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/264096>.

found in Homer and Hesiod, such as with Xenophanes in which “mythos remains a term of high respect in his vocabulary, reserved for stories that are moral in their content, reverent in their attitude, and socially beneficial in their consequences.”¹¹ As Robert L. Fowler explains, in the time and writing of Herodotus’ *Histories*, while “a construct emerges in which poetry, imaginative myth, gods and unknowable history are on one side of a cognitive and chronological line; on the other side are prose, reasoning (logos), humans, empirical investigation and the verifiable facts of recent history,” Herodotus does not actually bring into this construct the word mythos itself, but rather “the stories he dismisses are stories *we* call myths.”¹² And further, while the term mythos came to take on its connotations of more modern understandings of myth after thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle, as Fowler states, “The status of *mythoi* as such was not yet called into question at the end of the sixth century.”¹³

Thus, in considering the place of Theognis within the discussion of *muthos*, in taking his time of composing his poems to be in the mid-sixth century, one finds that he falls within a time in which, while there were likely transitions going on in the understandings of *muthos* and *logos*, the understanding of mythos and the speech of poets was still closer to that of Hesiod and Homer. In considering the instances of mythos as they are found in the *Theognidea*, specifically in looking at Book 1, one finds that in the context of the elegy found at lines 429-438, Theognis’ use of mythos in the phrase “μύθοισι σαόφροσιν” (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 437) takes on a meaning close to “sensible/wise/sound speech,” placing it in line with the understanding of mythos as being associated with good and authoritative speech. Theognis, as a poet, would

¹¹ Bruce Lincoln, “The Prehistory of Mythos and Logos” and “From Homer through Plato,” in *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 27-29.

¹² Robert L. Fowler, “MYTHOS AND LOGOS,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 131 (2011): 47, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41722132>.

¹³ Robert L. Fowler, “MYTHOS AND LOGOS,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 131 (2011): 54, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41722132>.

therefore have much authority placed on his speech. And Theognis himself calls upon a similar authority as one might find with someone such as Hesiod, when he speaks on the necessity of the poet, who he recognizes as the servant and messenger of the Muses, to spread the lore of the Muses (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 769-772). Thus, in his own time, the historical instances within the *Theognidea* would have been understood to have come from some sort of truth and would have held some authority in the understanding of the time, as they come from the mythos and the lore provided to him by the Muses. And so for a reader of Theognis, in maintaining a necessary critical eye to details and taking into consideration his background as an aristocrat and the ways this shapes his presentation and understanding of the historical information in the *Theognidea*, his poem would provide an important source of information and understanding of the events surrounding sixth century Megara and not only of the political change and stasis that could be found in archaic Megara but also of possible similar circumstances in other locations of archaic Greece.

However, unlike the epic poets Homer and Hesiod, and unlike the later histories of Herodotus and Thucydides and the philosophical works of Plato, Theognis specifically wrote in the form of gnomic poetry. Gnostic poetry consists of verses which contain meaningful sayings, containing various aphorisms or maxims held to be important by the poet and necessary to spread and pass down in whatever performance the poem may be for¹⁴. In his verses, we can see Theognis' concern with his own fame and the spread of his ideals put forth and thus the *muthos* which he purports to speak forth, as when he says, ὧδε δὲ πᾶς τις ἐρεῖ· Ἐϋνιδὸς ἐστὶν ἔπη τοῦ Μεγαρέως πάντα δὲ κατ' ἀνθρώπους ὀνομαστοῦ', "And thus every man will say: 'These are the

¹⁴ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "gnomic poetry," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, April 19, 2023. Accessed May 9, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/art/gnomic-poetry>.

lines of Theognis of Megara famous throughout all men,” (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 22-23). Thus, we see that Theognis is concerned with the spread of his gnomic verses being spread not only to his fellow Megarians but to the Greek world, and thus spread the *muthos* of his Muses, from which he derives his authority as a poet. As Maria Fragoulaki explains, “Ethical and political wisdom were transmitted and performed in such contexts over a considerable span of time from the archaic period until the Late Antiquity, accommodating both poetry and prose.”¹⁵ Therefore, Theognis’ use of gnomic poetry allows him to present his *muthos* as that of political and cultural wisdom which he views as preferable for Megara in his time and for the circumstances surrounding the creation of his verses.

Additionally, it is important to consider the fact that Theognis composed his *Theognidea* in the form of elegiac poetry. As J.M. Edmonds explains, elegiac poetry was typically chosen for composing shorter poems meant for recitation as well as inscription, calling them “Songs of the Table.”¹⁶ And further, he identifies elegiac poetry as that “of lament and exhortation.”¹⁷ Thus, elegy can be seen as a good fit for the gnomic verse of Theognis and the maxims which it contained, as he could lament the changing political landscape in Megara during his time and his view of the destruction of the natural order of things, and he could exhort Cynus and whoever was hearing or reading his verses to follow the wisdom which his *muthos* could put forth. And given this identification of elegy as being poetry for the table and thus its performance at

¹⁵ Maria Fragoulaki, “Introduction—Collective Memory in Ancient Greek Culture: Concepts, Media, and Sources.” In *Shaping Memory in Ancient Greece: Poetry, Historiography, and Epigraphy*, Supplement 11, ed. by Christy Constantakopoulou and Maria Fragoulaki (Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom: Histos, 2020), xxxvii.

¹⁶ J.M. Edmonds, “An Account of Greek Elegiac and Iambic Poetry.” In *Elegy and Iambus. Vol. 1, Elegiac Poets from Callinus to Critias*. Edited and Translated by J.M. Edmonds (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982), 1-2.

¹⁷ J.M. Edmonds, “An Account of Greek Elegiac and Iambic Poetry.” In *Elegy and Iambus. Vol. 1, Elegiac Poets from Callinus to Critias*. Edited and Translated by J.M. Edmonds (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982), 3.

symposia, as James Davidson explains, “The circulation around the sympotic group anticipates even wider circulation, not just between groups through the community, but between different communities throughout Greece: songs for export.”¹⁸ And so, through elegy Theognis can spread his gnomic maxims and his *muthos* widely throughout the Greek, both in the Archaic age and later.

In the times before the histories recorded by such major figures as Herodotus and Thucydides, a natural place to look for the discussions of the past and of possible historical recordings would be in the works of the poets of the archaic age. While not all instances of poetry are historical in nature or conduct some sort of historiographical process, there are nonetheless many whose content can provide important historical understandings of the time and circumstances surrounding the writing of poem. Though dealing with what we may consider to be the heroic age, with tales and exploits of gods included, Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* nonetheless deal with tales of the past, and thus have some sort of historical sensibility and desire to speak of the history of the peoples and places that came before the ancient Greeks. Deborah Boedeker, who provides valuable insights on the role of poetry in the recording of historical information, explains that “In the archaic and early classical Greece (eighth to mid fifth centuries BC), accounts of past human events, remembered or imagined...were doubtless passed along in ordinary speech. In addition, specialist composers and performers, using the marked language and rhythms of their craft, transmitted stories of human deeds,” and further that, “it can fairly be

¹⁸ James Davidson, “POLITICS, POETICS, AND ‘ERÔS’ IN ARCHAIC POETRY,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, Supplement, no. 119 (2013): 17, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44215175>.

said that the Trojan War, as preserved in Homeric epic, provides the ‘generative matrix’ of all Greek history.”¹⁹

Further, Boedeker explains that various archaic poets, including the likes of Archilochus, Tyrtaeus, Mimnermus, Alcaeus, Sappho, Solon, and important for our case Theognis, composed poems that deal with historical content and are concerned specifically with aspects of local history and events.²⁰ From these poets, we receive accounts of such things as political stasis, exile, colonization, the founding of various poleis, victories in games or war, and more. For instance, we can pull from the works of Solon accounts of a time of political turmoil in his recent local history, in which he was chosen as a lawgiver to help pull Athens out from this turmoil; or in the case of Alcaeus, we see the account of a political exile resulting from stasis occurring in Mytilene, thus providing for a possible shaping of a historical account and understanding of political history in Mytilene at such a point in the archaic period.²¹ In his discussion on Pindar’s *Pythian 4*, Peter Agócs explains that “*Pythian 4* both inherits from collective memory and strives to shape it...In fact, it presents us with a poet who, if not engaged in the historiographers’ interrogation of causes, has at least, as a historical thinker, something to tell us about the ways in which he and his contemporaries used and understood their collective past.”²² With the sponsorship of people such as aristocrats to compose such poems and with their performance at events such as symposia, the local histories contained within these poems were then able to be

¹⁹ Deborah Boedeker, “Early Greek Poetry as/and History,” In *The Oxford History of Historical Writing: Volume 1: Beginnings to AD 600*, ed. by Andrew Feldherr and Grant Hardy (Oxford University Press, 2011), 123-124.

²⁰ Deborah Boedeker, “Early Greek Poetry as/and History,” In *The Oxford History of Historical Writing: Volume 1: Beginnings to AD 600*, ed. by Andrew Feldherr and Grant Hardy (Oxford University Press, 2011), 127.

²¹ Deborah Boedeker, “Early Greek Poetry as/and History,” In *The Oxford History of Historical Writing: Volume 1: Beginnings to AD 600*, ed. by Andrew Feldherr and Grant Hardy (Oxford University Press, 2011), 128.

²² Peter Agócs, “Pindar’s *Pythian 4*: Interpreting History in Song,” In *Shaping Memory in Ancient Greece: Poetry, Historiography, and Epigraphy*, Supplement 11, ed. by Christy Constantakopoulou and Maria Fragoulaki (Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom: Histos, 2020), 137.

established and thus circulated to others and to allow for them an understanding of their collective past as well.

Poetry can also be seen to have had influence on the historians themselves, at least with the earlier historians Herodotus and Thucydides. As Boedeker notes, while Herodotus and Thucydides can be seen to be critical when making explicit references to poets and poetry, they are nonetheless affected by and influenced by the works of poetry and of historical poetry in its different forms, “at times incorporating material drawn from them, paying homage by recalling distinctive linguistic or thematic turns, or using analogous means (and even meanings) in constructing the narrative,” and further noting that “Perhaps the most straightforward relationship between poets and historians is the use of poetic narrative as a historical source.”²³ With both historians, of course, there is influence in the construction of narrative by the epics such as Homer’s *Iliad*. In the case of Herodotus, we see also influence from non-epic poets in the similarity of stories and narratives: the character of Solon and Solon’s own portrayal of himself in his own poetry, the account of Croesus and its similarity to Bacchylides’ presentation of Croesus, and the account of the battle at Salamis and its influence and similarity to the same event in Aeschylus’ *Persai*²⁴; or in Herodotus’ own mention of the Mytilenean archaic poet Alcaeus’ shield in his discussion of the struggle between Athens and Lesbos for the site of Sigeum, in which Boedeker explains, “Here we see a transformation of poetic context and intent:

²³ Deborah Boedeker, “Early Greek Poetry as/and History,” In *The Oxford History of Historical Writing: Volume 1: Beginnings to AD 600*, ed. by Andrew Feldherr and Grant Hardy (Oxford University Press, 2011), 136-137.

²⁴ Deborah Boedeker, “Early Greek Poetry as/and History,” In *The Oxford History of Historical Writing: Volume 1: Beginnings to AD 600*, ed. by Andrew Feldherr and Grant Hardy (Oxford University Press, 2011), 137-138.

what probably began as an ironic snippet for a circle of insiders becomes an historical datum for a later and more general audience.”²⁵

From this it is clear that history and historical events as they were presented in poetry are of great significance even to the historians who helped to develop and shape the study of history and practice of historiography, even if they did show themselves to be critical of certain aspects of poetic speech and poems themselves. And if poetry and its influences, and specifically historical and historically aligned poetry, pervaded the writings of the historians themselves, who could be critical of poetry at certain points, it surely had a significant impact on the general population’s understanding of their past and the historical events surrounding their homeland. As Joseph Skinner states, “it is now widely acknowledged that elegiac poetry could also be used to commemorate historical events...it is their importance as a repository of ideas and information that is most pertinent in this context,” and further, “the exchange of such ideas and information was actually constitutive of both collective memory and identity.”²⁶

In the case of Theognis, then, we are provided with an important account of the stasis occurring in the sixth century in Megara, sometime after the tyranny of Theagenes. As evidenced by Thomas J. Figueira, similar sentiments and descriptions can be found between the account of the stasis in sixth century Megara in the *Theognidea* and the accounts of the same in Aristotle, in his *Politics*, in the *Constitution of the Megarians*, and in the *Greek Questions* of Plutarch. Such similarities are shown in the rise of demagogues, the seizing of property, the exile of political opponents, and more, as well as all demonstrating a sort of hostility towards the democracy said

²⁵ Deborah Boedeker, “Early Greek Poetry as/and History,” In *The Oxford History of Historical Writing: Volume 1: Beginnings to AD 600*, ed. by Andrew Feldherr and Grant Hardy (Oxford University Press, 2011), 127-128.

²⁶ Joseph Skinner “Writing Culture: Historiography, Hybridity, and the Shaping of Collective Memory,” In *Shaping Memory in Ancient Greece: Poetry, Historiography, and Epigraphy*, Supplement 11, ed. by Christy Constantakopoulou and Maria Fragoulaki (Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom: Histos, 2020), 213.

to have been established in Megara at this time.²⁷ Importantly, then, Figueira notes regarding the *Constitution of the Megarians* and the influence of Theognis on this writing, and in turn on the accounts provided by Aristotle and Plutarch, that “the Constitution of the Megarians shows how oligarchic ideology at Megara, as represented by the preoccupations of Theognis, could help to shape polemical writing about a specific situation.”²⁸ Therefore, though not explicitly named by either Aristotle or Plutarch as a source, Theognis, or at least his sensibilities and their entering into the oligarchic and aristocratic framework of Megara’s history, seems to hold some sort of historical authority in the portrayal of the history of Megara as Aristotle and Plutarch understood it and wrote of it. As discussed by Figueira, there is not much shared with the accounts in the *Theognidea* and with the *Megarika* of the Megareis, a grouping of local Megarian historians -- identified as Praxion, Dieuchidas, Hereas, and Heragoras -- and this variance is even evident with the history as it is presented in Plutarch.²⁹ And yet, such similarities with Theognis as discussed previously are found even so far as Plutarch. And with Aristotle as a source for Plutarch³⁰, and with scanty number of other resources for the period that have come down to us, Theognis thus seems to be a natural source for some of the historical information and sensibilities that can be found in Aristotle and thus Plutarch. And so, in our case, when examined with a close eye to the ways in which Theognis’ background and biases shape his presentation, the *Theognidea* shows to be a valuable source of historical information of the stasis and political change in sixth century Megara, or at least of an aristocratic and oligarchic frame of historical

²⁷ Thomas J. Figueira, “Theognidea and Megarian Society,” In *Theognis of Megara: Poetry and the Polis*. Edited by T. Figueira and G. Nagy (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985), 130-132.

²⁸ Thomas J. Figueira, “Theognidea and Megarian Society,” In *Theognis of Megara: Poetry and the Polis*. Edited by T. Figueira and G. Nagy (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985), 132.

²⁹ Thomas J. Figueira, “Theognidea and Megarian Society,” In *Theognis of Megara: Poetry and the Polis*. Edited by T. Figueira and G. Nagy (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985), 115 and 120-124.

³⁰ Thomas J. Figueira, “Theognidea and Megarian Society,” In *Theognis of Megara: Poetry and the Polis*. Edited by T. Figueira and G. Nagy (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985), 120.

information and the understandings that can thus come of the general history when examined with a lens of critical examination of what such aristocratic representations could truly be pointing to. Once again looking to Figueira, he states that “The analysis of Theognis has always been inextricably bound with the reconstruction of Megarian history, so that it is not surprising that historical observation and textual exegesis have consistently been applied together in analyses of the *Theognidea*.”³¹

To understand the history of the political change and stasis of sixth century Megara as it is presented in Theognis, it is helpful to examine the history of and surrounding events of Megara as it has come down to us aside from Theognis himself. Such analysis can be carried out by looking at Aristotle’s and Plutarch’s accounts of such history as they occur in each one’s respective works as well as at other supplemental scholarship on the history of archaic Megara and especially in the sixth century. Of interest to this paper and the concern with the *Theognidea* of Theognis, an important spot in Megara’s history with which to begin is by considering the tyranny of Theagenes. This period of Megarian history finds itself within the larger period that many reference as an age of tyrants, in which we can see the rise of different tyrants to power in various *poleis* across the Greek world and at different points throughout the Archaic period. From T. Hudson Williams, using sources such as Aristotle and Pausanias, we have a valuable and concise account of the reign of Theagenes as tyrant of Megara. From this we learn that Theagenes rose to power by the tactic common to tyrants of the time of championing the poor and attacking the aristocratic landlords and their lands, killing their cattle in the process, that he furnished a bodyguard from among the citizens in order to establish his tyranny, and that during

³¹ Thomas J. Figueira, “Theognidea and Megarian Society,” In *Theognis of Megara: Poetry and the Polis*. Edited by T. Figueira and G. Nagy (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985), 112.

his time as tyrant he helped to “adorn the city with works of public utility,”; additionally, we learn that his reign as tyrant was in all likelihood for only a brief time, perhaps as Hudson Williams suggests five or six years.³² In the *Politics* of Aristotle, we see this practice of Theagenes spelled out when he states, ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν ἀρχαίων, ὅτε γένοιτο ὁ αὐτὸς δημαγωγὸς καὶ στρατηγός, εἰς τυραννίδα μετέβαλλον: σχεδὸν γὰρ οἱ πλεῖστοι τῶν ἀρχαίων τυράννων ἐκ δημαγωγῶν γεγόνασιν, “And in old times, whenever the same man became both leader of the people and general, they used to change the constitution to a tyranny; for almost the largest number of the tyrants of early days have risen from being leaders of the people,” (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1305a8-9). However, as Greg Anderson explains, it is likely that in enacting this practice, the tyrants were carrying out more of a continuation of previous rule under aristocrats and oligarchs in which there was a constant seeking of placing oneself above not only the general population but of one’s own rivals from their own ranks. Thus, a tyrant in this age was one “who had decisively prevailed over all competitors, usually by overmatching in self-promotion, by excelling them in the capacity to attract allies, and/or by defeating them in hostile confrontations,” and thus “to become a *turannos* was to claim the role of first among equals.”³³ With Theagenes then, as with many other tyrants, though the establishment of his tyranny likely provided for a “transition to a more civic-minded style of politics,” it grew from within the previously established aristocratic and oligarchic conventions and culture present in Megara at his time. From Plutarch, we then see that the Megarians themselves cast Theagenes out from his role as tyrant, and for a short amount of time were ruled by what Plutarch saw as a moderate government (Plutarch, *Greek Questions*, 18c-d).

³² T. Hudson Williams, “Theognis and His Poems,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 23 (1903): 3, <https://doi.org/10.2307/623754>.

³³ Greg Anderson, “Before Turannoi Were Tyrants: Rethinking a Chapter of Early Greek History,” *Classical Antiquity* 24, no. 2 (2005): 202, <https://doi.org/10.1525/ca.2005.24.2.173>.

After this period of moderate government, however, Plutarch paints the scene of a democracy taken over by demagoguery and in which the government had become corrupted, committing attacks against the wealthy, and resulting in the implementing of the *palintokia* into law, in which payments of interest paid to moneylenders were demanded to be returned to those who were lent the money (Plutarch, *Greek Questions*, 18c-d). Plutarch even describes the democracy as perpetrating sacrilege in addition to this demanded return of interest payments (Plutarch, *Greek Questions*, 59e-f). Aristotle also speaks on the seizing of the property of the wealthy in Megara when he states, *ὅτε μὲν γάρ, ἵνα χαρίζωνται, ἀδικοῦντες τοὺς γνωρίμους συνιστᾶσιν, ἢ τὰς οὐσίας [5] ἀναδάστους ποιοῦντες ἢ τὰς προσόδους ταῖς λειτουργίαις, ὅτε δὲ διαβάλλοντες, ἵν' ἔχωσι δημεύειν τὰ κτήματα τῶν πλουσίων*, “Sometimes they make the notables combine by wronging them in order to curry favour, causing either their estates to be divided up or their revenues by imposing public services, and sometimes by so slandering them that they may have the property of the wealthy to confiscate,” (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1305a4-8). However, more likely this form of government was more akin to that of an oligarchy in which the oligarchs sought to gain advantages over rival oligarchs by different reforms such as that of expanding the citizenry or the confiscation and reappropriation of the property and goods of other wealthy elites.³⁴ In calling this a democracy, it was clearly not understood in the sense of what one would expect when looking to classical Athens, even if the reference to it was by wealthier and influential men who may hold their own views and critiques of democracy. However, for the purposes of this paper and ease of discussion, I will continue more with the vocabulary used by Aristotle and Plutarch with the reference of this regime as what could be seen as something of a corrupted democracy. From this, one sees the form of a *polis* beset by stasis and by political

³⁴ Stewart Irvin Oost, “The Megara of Theagenes and Theognis,” *Classical Philology* 68, no. 3 (1973): 193-194, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/267749>.

change, with the wealthy aristocrats and the poor and their leading demagogues taking opposing sides in the strife, resulting from changing power between rule largely by the aristocrats to that of a democracy corrupted by demagoguery, all of which followed the change from tyranny under Theagenes. Stewart Irvin Oost tells us that in this “immoderate” democracy, the main economic beneficiaries were found in the middle class, while the poor and lowest class showed to be the primary political beneficiaries, though they may have also benefited from the palintokia.³⁵

Hudson Williams explains that due to the exclusivity of influence within the aristocratically run government, the poorer and the richer of the middle class brought about revolution and the establishment of the previously discussed democracy, and resulting from the subsequent attacks on the rich in this stasis, “the nobles and the richer middle class were now drawn together by community of interests...marriages between members of the old nobility and the middle-class became frequent, and distinctions of birth tended to disappear altogether.”³⁶ And in discussing the wars fought by Megara in the sixth century and how this can have shaped the institutional changes occurring in Megara at that time, Figueira importantly identifies that “Stress generated by warfare against external enemies could have intensified *stasis* ‘conflict between social groups’ in sixth century Megara.”³⁷ And with a *polis* being plagued by stasis, it is only natural that one find the exiling of political enemies by the ruling party. This is explained by Aristotle when stating that οἱ γὰρ δημαγωγοί, ἵνα χρήματα ἔχωσι δημεύειν, ἐξέβαλον πολλοὺς τῶν γνωρίμων, ἕως πολλοὺς ἐποίησαν τοὺς φεύγοντας, “the people’s leaders in order to have

³⁵ Stewart Irvin Oost, “The Megara of Theagenes and Theognis,” *Classical Philology* 68, no. 3 (1973): 193, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/267749>.

³⁶ T. Hudson Williams, “Theognis and His Poems,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 23 (1903): 11, <https://doi.org/10.2307/623754>.

³⁷ Thomas J. Figueira, “Theognidea and Megarian Society,” In *Theognis of Megara: Poetry and the Polis*. Edited by T. Figueira and G. Nagy (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985), 146.

money to distribute to the people went on expelling many of the notables, until they made the exiles a large body,” (Aristotle, *Politics* 1304b35-40).

From this, then, we learn from Aristotle that the exiles eventually returned and put down the democracy, establishing what may be described as an oligarchic rule in which only those who from the exiles who had fought against the democracy were eligible for participation in this new government (Aristotle, *Politics* 1300a15-20 and 1304b35-40). As explained by Oost, it is likely that this new regime was in some way moderate, in that “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.”³⁸ Thus from these sources, we get a picture of sixth century Megara as being beset by much stasis, in which the two sides carrying out this civil strife were composed of, on the one side, the wealthy, and in large part aristocratic, citizens and, on the other, the poorer and at times the middle class citizens, those making up the *demos*, who had been disillusioned by the exclusivity of power when under the rule of the aristocrats and oligarchs. As Moshe Berent notes, “The struggle between the ‘classes’, that is between the rich and the poor, or between the oligarchs and the *demos*, was a main source of *stasis*.”³⁹ And further, with Aristotle’s discussion of *stasis* and constitutional change being placed within Book V of his *Politics*, it is clear that *stasis* was carried out in order to assert control over the constitution and that through this those in each class could gain their “profit and honor,” which are the main objects of each class who was a part of this *stasis*, with the most obvious constitutional change coming in determining how many or few people would have access to the citizen rights of the *polis* and thus make up the

³⁸ Stewart Irvin Oost, “The Megara of Theagenes and Theognis,” *Classical Philology* 68, no. 3 (1973): 195, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/267749>.

³⁹ Moshe Berent, “‘STASIS’, OR THE GREEK INVENTION OF POLITICS,” *History of Political Thought* 19, no. 3 (1998): 346, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26217488>.

citizen body.⁴⁰ In the case of Megara, then, the access was shown to be extended rather than restricted to those who were among the poorest in Megara and who were kept from the profit and honor of knowing citizenship by the wealthy aristocrats of the *polis*. All of this, then, provides a valuable framework for examining the history of the political change and stasis in sixth century Megara as it is portrayed in the *Theognidea*.

However, in taking the accounts of Aristotle and Plutarch as historical authorities, it is necessary to consider their sources for the historical information they record. Regarding Plutarch, one of his sources is held to be the *Constitution of the Megarians*, commonly attributed to Aristotle, as “The Constitution of the Megarians is known primarily through the use of it made by Plutarch in the Greek Questions.”⁴¹ With regard to the local Megarian historians and the Megarika, as W.R. Halliday explains, “it is true that Plutarch shows acquaintance with the Megarian historians Dieuchidas (Müller, F.H.G., iv, p. 388), quoted in *Lycurgus*, 2, and Hereas (Müller, F.H.G., iv, p. 426), quoted in *Theseus*, 20, and *Solon*, 10, 32. A Megarian Praxitiles is also cited in *Q. Conuii.*, v, 31.”⁴² But as Figueira explains, while Plutarch does show to quote some of the Megarian historians “it is still unnecessary to hold that the Megarika contained a historical narrative of the sixth and fifth centuries...No one quotes anything specifically from the Megareis that could remotely be called constitutional or political history.”⁴³ Thus, from what we can see from Plutarch, while he had acquaintance with and use of the local histories of the Megarians, such histories did not seem to have much influence on his writing of Megarian

⁴⁰ Moshe Berent, “‘STASIS’, OR THE GREEK INVENTION OF POLITICS,” *History of Political Thought* 19, no. 3 (1998): 341, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26217488>.

⁴¹ Thomas J. Figueira, “Theognidea and Megarian Society,” In *Theognis of Megara: Poetry and the Polis*. Edited by T. Figueira and G. Nagy (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985), 113-114.

⁴² Plutarch, *Greek Questions*, Translated and Commentary by W.R. Halliday (United States of America: Arno Press, 1975), 92

⁴³ Thomas J. Figueira, “Theognidea and Megarian Society,” In *Theognis of Megara: Poetry and the Polis*. Edited by T. Figueira and G. Nagy (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985), 120.

history, as “The Megareis were primarily concerned with antiquities of their city, that is, Megara’s earliest history and the creation of its institutions.”⁴⁴ Thus, the main source, as discussed earlier, would be from the *Constitution of the Megarians* attributed to Aristotle.

Therefore, it is necessary to investigate what sources Aristotle would have used in putting together his *Constitution of the Megarians* and his *Politics*. One source that comes forth is the Atthidographers. Figueira explains that “The Atthidographers, local historians of Attica (often standing anonymously behind later accounts), provide information about the conflicts of Megara with Athens over Salamis and the Hiera Orgas, a border area of Eleusis sacred to the goddess Demeter which adjoined Megara and was supposedly encroached upon by the Megarians,” and that “They also inform us about the involvement of Solon and Peisistratos in the vindication of Athenian claims in border disputes with Megara.”⁴⁵ As such, it is important to note the bias that such an account possesses, given it is written by those who were at a time the opposition to Megara, and Halliday explains, “The evidence for Megarian history is extremely fragmentary and, in so far as it is derived from Athenian, biased and precarious.”⁴⁶ Nonetheless, such historical information provides an important piece of a framework with which Aristotle was able to build off of to present the history of this time period of Megarian history. And regarding Aristotle’s use of different sources, Richard McKeon explains that Aristotle’s “use of historical materials from the historians and mythographers conforms more nearly to our standards, for he will question the historicity of statements and will use myths only as evidence of what men once thought, or when the myth has long or widely been repeated, as evidence of common belief or

⁴⁴ Thomas J. Figueira, “Theognidea and Megarian Society,” In *Theognis of Megara: Poetry and the Polis*. Edited by T. Figueira and G. Nagy (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985), 119.

⁴⁵ Thomas J. Figueira, “Theognidea and Megarian Society,” In *Theognis of Megara: Poetry and the Polis*. Edited by T. Figueira and G. Nagy (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985), 113.

⁴⁶ Plutarch, *Greek Questions*, Translated and Commentary by W.R. Halliday (United States of America: Arno Press, 1975), 96

experience of mankind.”⁴⁷ But importantly for the purpose of this paper, Aristotle shows his familiarity with the verses of the *Theognidea* in his quoting of Theognis in his *Eudemian Ethics* at 1243A⁴⁸, thus pointing to Theognis as another likely source for Aristotle in presenting this portion of Megarian history.

In considering Theognis as a source for Aristotle, and in turn for Plutarch, it would be helpful to examine a political issue shared between all three sources. One such instance is found in the recording of an immoderate democracy occurring within the stasis of sixth century Megara. In the *Theognidea*, we see this presented in many instances all throughout the verses, such as when Theognis states, Κύρνε, κύει πόλις ἤδε, δέδοικα δὲ μὴ τέκη ἄνδρα εὐθουτῆρα κακῆς ὕβριος ἡμετέρης. ἄστοι μὲν γὰρ ἔθ’ οἶδε σαόφρονες, ἡγεμόνες δὲ τετράφαται πολλὴν ἐς κακότητα πεσεῖν, “Cyrnus, this city is impregnated, and I am afraid that the city may bear a man who is a corrector of our evil pride. For these townspeople are still sound of mind, but the leaders are changed into much wrongdoing,” (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 39-42). Thus in looking back to Aristotle’s work, we receive an account of an immoderate democracy in Megara at this time in the *Politics* when he describes the contempt which the rich feel within a democracy due to what he describes as τῆς ἀταξίας καὶ ἀναρχίας, “the disorder and anarchy that prevails,” and then cites the Megarian democracy saying, καὶ ἡ Μεγαρέων δι’ ἀταξίαν καὶ ἀναρχίαν ἡττηθέντων, “and that of the Megarians was destroyed when they had been defeated owing to disorder and anarchy,” (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1302b28-32). And thus looking back to Plutarch’s *Greek Questions*, we see this portrayal of the immoderate Megarian democracy when he answers the question about the “wagon-rollers” in Megara in Question 59, as he describes the surrounding

⁴⁷ Richard McKeon, “Plato and Aristotle as Historians: A Study of Method in the History of Ideas,” *Ethics* 51, no. 1 (1940): 94, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2989211>.

⁴⁸ Andrew R. Burn, “Theognis and the Decline of Megara.” In *The Lyric Age of Greece* (United States of America: Minerva Press, 1968), 260.

circumstances as being ἐπὶ τῆς ἀκολάστου δημοκρατίας, ἣ καὶ τὴν παλιντοκίαν ἐποίησε καὶ τὴν ἱεροσυλίαν, “In the time of the unbridled democracy which perpetrated sacrilege as well as the enforced return of interest,” (Plutarch, *Greek Questions*, 59e-f). Such a similarity, among others that can be found in examining each of the three texts, points to the likely use of the historical information provided in the *Theognidea* by Aristotle for parts of his *Politics* and discussions of sixth century Megara, as well as his purported *Constitution of the Megarians* through its use as a source for Plutarch’s *Greek Questions*, as evidenced by a similarity such as discussed.

In addition to considering the sources for Aristotle and Plutarch, it is also important to examine how each one frames their responses and each one’s style or genre influences their reading of the history which they discuss. With Aristotle, we see that he frames his response in the *Politics* by describing, “the role that politics and the political community must play in bringing about the virtuous life in the citizenry,” and in doing so he “provides analysis of the kinds of political community that existed in his time and how these cities fall short of the ideal community of virtuous citizens.”⁴⁹ In this framing, then, Aristotle is able to provide himself the opportunity to interpret and present historical information related to these different political communities. With Plutarch in his *Greek Questions*, we see his framing as an investigation into different questions regarding various aspects of Greek life and the various *poleis* throughout the Greek world. As Frank Cole Babbitt explains, “In the *Greek Questions*, as in the *Roman Questions*, Plutarch endeavors to give the reason or explanation of fifty-nine matters concerned with Greek life. The vast majority of them are customs or names and, as the explanations are usually historical, they often go back to very early times.”⁵⁰ As can be seen with each of the

⁴⁹ Edward Clayton, “Aristotle: *Politics*,” In *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Accessed May 9, 2023. <https://iep.utm.edu/aristotle-politics/>.

⁵⁰ Plutarch, “*Quaestiones Graecae*,” In *Moralia*. Translated by Frank Cole Babbitt (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1936), 174.

authors' works, their framing necessitates some sort of historical investigation within their larger overall investigations.

As explained before, it is also important to consider how Aristotle's and Plutarch's styles and genres influence their reading of the history which they are dealing with in their investigations. Beginning with Aristotle, his role as a philosopher, and thus a political philosopher, therefore affects his reading and presentation of history as his philosophical ideals shape how he would interpret such events as the democracy at Megara. As Lucio Bertelli explains, "if it is true that Aristotle's political philosophy depends on his historical knowledge... the reciprocal is true, i.e. that 'the historiographer Aristotle remembers himself to be something other than a historian.'"⁵¹ But, this does not necessarily mean that Aristotle is unable to write with an eye to historical writing, for as discussed earlier Aristotle engages in the questioning of the historicity of his sources, and as Bertelli explains, Aristotle's presentation of historical information "satisfies von Fritz's conditions of historical writing: (1) Collection and criticism of sources...(2) Chronological ordering...(3) Causal connections...(4) the 'evolutionary forces' in action."⁵² With Plutarch, a similarity can be found when considering his role as a philosopher as well and as a moralist, as it is likely that his work is taken by similar effects of style and genre as Aristotle, especially given that his *Greek Questions* fall within his larger work, *Moralia*. But, given that Plutarch was also a historian, his style is thus explicitly interested in the presentation

⁵¹ Lucio Bertelli, "Aristotle and History," In *Between Thucydides and Polybius: The Golden Age of Greek Historiography*, Hellenic Studies Series 64 (Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2014), 295-296.

⁵² Lucio Bertelli, "Aristotle and History," In *Between Thucydides and Polybius: The Golden Age of Greek Historiography*, Hellenic Studies Series 64 (Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2014), 297.

of historical writing, and as discussed earlier, many of the questions “are customs or names and, as the explanations are usually historical, they often go back to very early times.”⁵³

All this historical information, then, provides a valuable framework for examining the history of the political change and stasis in sixth century Megara as it is portrayed in the *Theognidea*. In looking at the history as it is presented by Theognis, it is first necessary to examine Theognis’ background and life, as this will certainly affect the way his bias shows in his interpretation of the events which he discusses and will affect how we understand the historical information. Though there is not much written of his life, neither by himself nor by others, there is still enough to paint a partial picture and from which important information can be gleaned which will affect his portrayal of the history of his subject matter. Firstly, in terms of place, and importantly for this paper, Theognis names himself as the poet of the *Theognidea* and identifies himself as being from Megara, saying, Θεόγνιδός ἐστιν ἔπη τοῦ Μεγαρέως, “These are the lines of Theognis of Megara,” (22-23). Though there was some speculation in ancient times over which Megara it is exactly that he refers to, as Hudson Williams notes, “The poems contain such clear references to the Nisaeon Megara on the Isthmus of Corinth that most modern scholars agree in regarding Theognis as a native of that town.”⁵⁴ This, then, will allow later in discussing Theognis’ presentation of the history for comparison to that of the history that has come down to us from other sources such as Aristotle and Plutarch. In terms of the date at which the *Theognidea* was being composed and referencing, I will follow in line with T.W. Allen in taking it likely sometime in the mid-sixth century after the introduction of democracy in Megara, in the previously discussed democratic constitution led by demagogues, as he states that “Suidas gives

⁵³ Plutarch, “Quaestiones Graecae,” In *Moralia*. Translated by Frank Cole Babbitt (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1936), 174.

⁵⁴ T. Hudson Williams, “Theognis and His Poems,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 23 (1903): 2. <https://doi.org/10.2307/623754>.

Theognis' date as ol. 58, i.e. 548 B.C.," and that "The dates given by the Alexandrians to literary persons...appear substantially accurate."⁵⁵

We can learn from Theognis that he was a part of the aristocratic noble class which previously ruled over Megara, given his many references to the *agathoi*, "noble or good," and the *kakoi*, "base or bad," and other similar terms, clearly exhibiting his consideration of himself among the *agathoi*, such as in lines 43-60 when Theognis says such phrases as Οὐδεμίαν πόλιν, Κύρν', ἀγαθοὶ πόλιν ὄλεσαν ἄνδρες, "Never yet, Cyrnus, have good men destroyed a city," or ἀλλ' ὅταν ὑβρίζειν τοῖσι κακοῖσιν ἄδη, "but whenever it is pleasing to the bad men to commit outrages," (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 43-44). His status as an aristocrat and an owner of land and property is further shown when he complains of having had his possessions taken from him and in his bemoaning of the poverty which has come over him as a result (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 345-352). And given his status as an aristocrat, he would surely hold the same sentiments of fear of tyrants who would come to do such things as taking away his possessions, and he himself exhibits this distaste for tyrants when he speaks of his fear of a tyrant arising in the current stasis and political upheaval (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 43-52), or when he states οὐκ εἴμ', οὐδ' ἐπ' ἐμοῦ κεκλαύσεται οὐδ' ἐπὶ τύμβῳ οἰμωχθεὶς ὑπὸ γῆν εἴσι τύραννος ἀνὴρ, "I will not go, nor will the despotic man have been lamented by me nor does he go being lamented by me towards his grave under the earth," (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 1203-1204). We also learn that Theognis himself was sent into exile during this time of stasis, as evidenced by a passage in which he states, Οὐδεὶς τοὺ φεύγοντι φίλος καὶ πιστὸς ἑταῖρος: τῆς δὲ φυγῆς ἔστιν τοῦτ' ἀνηρότερον, "Surely no one is a friend or trusted comrade to the one who is in exile; and this is more grievous than the exile," (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 209-210) or when he explains, πόλιν δ' εὐτείχεα Θήβην οἰκῶ πατρώας

⁵⁵ T. W. Allen, "Theognis," *The Classical Review* 19, no. 8 (1905): 391. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/696164>.

γῆς ἀπερυκόμενος, “ but I live in the well-walled Theban city, being kept away from the land of my father,” (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 1209-1210). Joseph Roisman succinctly portrays the image of the exile as it pertains to Theognis’ account as one who has been deprived of those things which differentiated him and solidified his status as an aristocratic noble, who experiences a “sharp decline in status” and could even be mistaken as a slave at passing glance, and who rouses suspicion among others given that he has been changed by his exile and is different upon arrival back to his city, and thus untrustworthy.⁵⁶ In addition to these characteristics of Theognis, we learn that he is displeasing to his fellow-townsmen (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 367-370), that his own friends betrayed him (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 575-576), that he seeks vengeance upon those who wronged him and thus his political opponents in this stasis (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 341-350), and that, as discussed earlier, he saw his position as a poet as being a messenger of the Muses with the necessity to spread the knowledge bestowed upon him by the Muses (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 769-772 and 1055-1058).

Considering these aspects of Theognis’ life, one can easily see that, while not invalidating the historical information being presented in the *Theognidea*, it rather colors the way that the history is presented in an aristocratic or oligarchic frame of mind, such as can be seen in the accounts provided by Aristotle and Plutarch, whose works themselves are considered with high regard on the subject despite their aristocratic frame of mind. As Todd Compton describes, “we seem to find in the corpus a typical poetic situation: dissatisfaction with leaders, including poetic attacks, followed by the exile of the poet. There is tension between the poet and his native city,” and further, in quoting West, “When we survey the whole evidence of the Cynus poems,

⁵⁶ Joseph Roisman, “THE IMAGE OF THE POLITICAL EXILE IN ARCHAIC GREECE,” *Ancient Society* 15/17 (1984): 25-27, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44080232>.

Theognis takes on the colours of an Alcaeus: aristocratic witness of a democratic revolution, betrayed conspirator, and embittered exile.”⁵⁷ All of these characteristics will shape his view and presentation of those on the opposing side from himself of the civil strife which he reports on, and thus the institutions and the history discussed in the *Theognidea*. However, this first-person perspective provided by Theognis also contributes positively to the historical record of the sixth century stasis and political change occurring in Megara. As A.R. Burn asserts, regarding the historical evidence provided in by the *Theognidea*, “It is firsthand evidence, all the better for being a man who heartily disapproves, that to many poor men, descendants of shepherds and crofters, the new age brought material betterment.”⁵⁸ So, in giving his own first person perspective, even with whatever biases he may hold, Theognis nonetheless provides a historical record of such events having occurred. And with his record he is also able to give an idea of what historical aristocratic notions might have been towards these changing circumstances in the political stage of sixth century Megara. Importantly, he provides this record in an absence of histories of this period written at the time when Theognis was creating his verses and of the absence such records by local historians following him.

Ernest L. Highbarger sums up well the role of Theognis and his *Theognidea* as a source of history for the political change and stasis characteristic of the archaic age of ancient Greece, and for the purpose of this paper specifically of sixth century. He states, “Theognis and Solon are the only poets that reflect the period of the early tyrants: Theognis in antiquity ranked with Hesiod and Phocylides as a writer of gnomic verses: and finally, Theognis is an important source

⁵⁷ Todd L. Compton, “Theognis: Faceless Exile,” In *Victim of the Muses: Poet as Scapegoat, Warrior and Hero in Greco-Roman and Indo-European Myth and History*, Hellenic Studies Series 11 (Washington, D.C.: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2006), 206 and 210.

⁵⁸ Andrew R. Burn, “Theognis and the Decline of Megara.” In *The Lyric Age of Greece* (United States of America: Minerva Press, 1968), 249.

for various aspects of the history and civilization of ancient Megarians.”⁵⁹ And as Figueira explains, “The corpus reflects history obliquely, developing in its own ideological terms and preserving vestiges of previous social situations.”⁶⁰ Given the previous considerations—regarding the role that mythos played in the time of Theognis still, the role of the poetry as an archival and historiographical medium in the Archaic period, the history of sixth century Megara as we understand it from other sources such as Aristotle and Plutarch, and the life and background and the way these characteristics shape the presentation of history by Theognis—one finds that an incredibly rich bank of historical information regarding political change and stasis in sixth century Megara is found in the *Theognidea* in lines 39-60, along with other verses with valuable historical information scattered all throughout the *Theognidea*.

Theognis presents first the image of a city beset by civil strife, detailing the *polis* as having leaders who have changed and begun down a road of much wrongdoing, and who through their corruption of the *demos* have set the *polis* on track for an end to tranquility, and in this the possibility for the rise of a tyrant and the slaughter that comes with this discord (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 39-52). As Highbarger explains, “In verses 39-52, Theognis alludes to the social and economic conditions of his own time and interprets these conditions as pointing to the probability of the rise of some tyrant who, with the encouragement of the rabble, will destroy the state.”⁶¹ Several instances of lines, even in such a short section of the entire *Theognidea*, shine considerable light on the situation which Theognis is experiencing within this period of stasis. For instance, Theognis begins by declaring to Cyrnus that κύει πόλις ἤδε, δέδοικα δὲ μὴ τέκη

⁵⁹ Ernest L. Highbarger, “A New Approach to the Theognis Question,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 58 (1927): 171, <https://doi.org/10.2307/282910>.

⁶⁰ Thomas J. Figueira, “Theognidea and Megarian Society,” In *Theognis of Megara: Poetry and the Polis*. Edited by T. Figueira and G. Nagy (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985), 112.

⁶¹ Ernest L. Highbarger, “A New Approach to the Theognis Question,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 58 (1927): 193, <https://doi.org/10.2307/282910>.

ἄνδρα εὐθουντῆρα κακῆς ὕβριος ἡμετέρης, “this city is impregnated, and I fear that she may bear a corrector of our evil pride,” (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 39-40) supported by his view that while the citizens are still sound of mind, ἡγεμόνες δὲ τετράφεται πολλὴν ἐς κακότητα πεσεῖν, “the leaders are changed into much wrongdoing,” (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 41-42). In this account, Theognis provides a picture of towards the very beginning of the *Theognidea* of a Megara which has come to be beset by factionalism in which the previous aristocratic leaders of the polis have lost power to the leaders who now appeal to the others of the citizenry and whose actions, which are seen by aristocrats as wrongdoing, may lead to the propelling of one to the forefront who will take action against the aristocratic faction.

Theognis goes further, explaining that ὅταν ὑβρίζειν τοῖσι κακοῖσιν ἄδη δῆμόν τε φθείρωσι δίκας τ’ ἀδίκοισι διδῶσιν οικείων κερδέων εἵνεκα καὶ κράτεος, ἔλπεο μὴ δηρὸν κείνην πόλιν ἀτρεμεῖσθαι, “whenever it is pleasing to the bad men to be arrogant and ruin the demos and give just rulings to the unjust for the sake of private gain and power, do not expect that city to remain unshaken for long,” (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 44-47). And Theognis continues by describing the resulting circumstances from such actions by those in power, saying, ἐκ τῶν γὰρ στάσιές τε καὶ ἔμφυλοι φόνοι ἀνδρῶν μούναρχοί θ’, “For from these civil strife and murders among kinsmen and tyrants come about,” (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 51-52). And so, Theognis reinforces this idea of civil strife, providing an account of the practice of demagoguery by those with influence over the demos, and directly referring to *staseis* as an outcome of these actions. Additionally, we receive an account of the aristocratic fear of the rise of tyrants within a city beset by strife, and thus an idea that such was a frequent occurrence in this time, giving more credence to identification of this time and the previous time within the Archaic period as the age of tyrants. And with such Theognis provides the Archaic aristocratic sentiment towards tyrants,

in that he sees tyrants as those who take advantage of the factionalism resulting from *stasis* within the polis. And in line with Anderson's argument as presented earlier, Theognis substantiates the notion that the tyrant of the Archaic age emerges from within the established political norms of the time, being "the last man standing in an ongoing political contest waged within the polis, not the opportunistic insurgent who challenges the "state" from without."⁶² Theognis shows the view that it is through the corruption of the non-aristocratic citizens that those wealthy and powerful men leading this democracy through demagoguery that much trouble will come to the polis and will cause for the rise of a tyrant from among these demagogues. And further, though Theognis presents these outcomes as fears which he holds coming from political strife and change, he nonetheless provides an account of the results of *stasis* within a polis in at least this stage of the Archaic period.

And we can find such information substantiated in later accounts by Aristotle and Plutarch. For instance, with Plutarch in his Greek Questions we see an identification of the demagoguery occurring in this period of Megarian history, saying εἶτα πολλὴν κατὰ Πλάτωνα καὶ ἄκρατον αὐτοῖς ἐλευθερίαν τῶν δημαγωγῶν οἰνοχοούντων, "Then when the demagogues, in Plato's words, proffered abundant cups full of the unmixed wine of freedom," (Plutarch, *Greek Questions*, 18c-d). From Plutarch we also see the strife and unrest when he describes the ruling regime of this time as ἀκολάστου δημοκρατίας, "unbridled democracy," and when he talks of the ἀταξίαν τῆς πολιτείας, "anarchy of the state," (Plutarch, *Greek Questions*, 59e-f). And from Aristotle we receive an account of the rise of tyrants, substantiating the fears and thus the account of Theognis, saying ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν ἀρχαίων, ὅτε γένοιτο ὁ αὐτὸς δημαγωγὸς καὶ στρατηγός,

⁶² Greg Anderson, "Before Turannoi Were Tyrants: Rethinking a Chapter of Early Greek History," *Classical Antiquity* 24, no. 2 (2005): 208. <https://doi.org/10.1525/ca.2005.24.2.173>.

εἰς τυραννίδα μετέβαλλον: σχεδὸν γὰρ οἱ πλεῖστοι τῶν ἀρχαίων τυράννων ἐκ δημαγωγῶν γεγόνασιν, “And in old times whenever the same man became both leader of the people and general, they used to change the constitution to a tyranny; for almost the largest number of the tyrants of early days have risen from being leaders of the people,” (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1305a7-10). Thus, in considering the civil strife in sixth century Megara by looking at the accounts provided through Theognis, Aristotle, and Plutarch, we see that Theognis provides a fuller picture of what exactly the *stasis* during this period entailed.

Following this account and reinforcing Theognis’ view of the circumstances, as Hudson Williams explains, “In elegy 53-60 Theognis deals with the changes in the political situation, and informs us that sovereign power had been taken away from the ‘good’... This is a reference to the introduction of democracy at Megara.”⁶³ As Theognis explains, we see that at this time, the poorest of the Megarians, οἱ πρόσθ’ οὔτε δίκας ἤδεσαν οὔτε νόμους, ἀλλ’ ἀμφὶ πλευραῖσι δορὰς αἰγῶν κατέτριβον, ἔξω δ’ ὥστ’ ἔλαφοι τῆσδ’ ἐνεμοντο πόλεος, “who before knew neither judgements nor laws, but were wearing out the skins of goats around their sides, and as deer were pasturing outside this city,” (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 53-56) had come to rule the city and to enjoy the citizen rights bestowed upon them by what constitutional change came with the institution of this democracy in Megara, and as such were now the “good or noble” while those who were previously such were now *deiloi*, “cowardly, miserable, or wretched” (53-60). So, in these lines, Theognis provides an explicit example of the expansion of the citizen body that came with this political change to democracy from the previous aristocratic rule which was much more restrictive regarding who qualified as a citizen and thus could enjoy the political rights that came

⁶³ T. Hudson Williams, “Theognis and His Poems,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 23 (1903): 3. <https://doi.org/10.2307/623754>.

with citizenry. Further, Theognis provides an account of the democracy as being immoderate when discussing the expanded citizen body, explaining, ἀλλήλους δ' ἀπατῶσιν ἐπ' ἀλλήλοισι γελῶντες, οὔτε κακῶν γνώμας εἶδοτες οὔτ' ἀγαθῶν (59-60), “and they deceive each other while smiling at one another, knowing the marks neither of the bad nor of the good,” (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 59-60). So, the *Theognidea* presents this new democracy as being rife with deception and immoderacy, without regard for the party or class affiliations of those they deceive.

In this portrayal we can see that Theognis, through his status as an aristocrat, sees the upending of the rule by an aristocracy, made up of those who he sees as truly noble and good, and the implementation of a democracy, in which the poorest Megarians gained citizen rights and they along with the leaders who have corrupted them for the sake of private gain and for power have come into power, those who make up the ranks of the *kakoi*. As Oost argues, “In Theognis’ eyes this is a subversion of the natural order of the universe (43-60).”⁶⁴ And such an account is reflected, as discussed previously, in the accounts of Aristotle and Plutarch, in which an immoderate democracy had come to rule over Megara. Aristotle substantiates this account of the Megarian democracy when he describes the destruction of the democracy as δι’ ἀταξίαν καὶ ἀναρχίαν ἡττηθέντων, “owing to disorder and anarchy,” (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1302b31-32). Plutarch also provides substantiating evidence, just as with substantiating Theognis’ account of the *stasis*, both when referring to ἀκολάστου δημοκρατίας, ἢ καὶ τὴν παλιντοκίαν ἐποίησε καὶ τὴν ἱεροσυλίαν, “the unbridled democracy which perpetrated sacrilege as well as the enforced

⁶⁴ Stewart Irvin Oost, “The Megara of Theagenes and Theognis,” *Classical Philology* 68, no. 3 (1973): 192, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/267749>.

return of interest,” and when he talks of ἀταξίαν τῆς πολιτείας, “the anarchy of the state,” (Plutarch, *Greek Questions*, 59e-f).

Regarding this account and the personal bias that is apparent from Theognis, as previously stated, Burn puts the importance of this record of historical information in view succinctly when he states that, “It is first-hand evidence, all the better for being the evidence of a man who heartily disapproves, that to many poor men, descendants of shepherds and crofters, the new age had brought material betterment.”⁶⁵ We can gather what the sentiments of those aristocratic men, whose families for generations had a grasp on political power in Megara, were at a time in which those who they always sought to keep from any form of standing or influence in the *polis* and who they saw as lesser came to benefit from and know the advantages of citizenship in the Archaic *polis*. And most important, we are provided with an explicit contemporary reference to the fact such people came to receive citizen rights and were able to experience the political influence that came with such rights.

In line with this understanding of Theognis’ portrayal of this aspect of the history of stasis and political change in sixth-century Megara, other verses show to be helpful in expanding on this historical information regarding the change to democracy and the expanding of the citizen body. Such verses are found when he explains, τοιάδε καὶ Μάγνητας ἀπόλεσεν ἔργα καὶ ὕβρις οἷα τὰ νῦν ἱερὴν τήνδε πόλιν κατέχει, “Such deeds and pride destroyed the Magnesians, of which sort now possess this sacred city, ” (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 603-604) when he describes the leaders of the city as being worthless, saying πολλάκι δὴ πόλις ἦδε δί’ ἡγεμόνων κακότητα ὥσπερ κεκλιμένη ναῦς παρὰ γῆν ἔδραμεν, “Often indeed on account of the baseness of her

⁶⁵ Andrew R. Burn, “Theognis and the Decline of Megara,” In *The Lyric Age of Greece* (United States of America: Minerva Press, 1968), 249.

leaders this city, just as a ship having wandered from the right course, runs near the shore,” (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 855-856) and finally, with his restating of the reversal of his view of natural order by saying, Κύρν’, οἱ πρόσθ’ ἀγαθοὶ νῦν αὖ κακοί, οἱ δὲ κακοὶ πρὶν νῦν ἀγαθοί, “Cyrnus, those who before were good now in turn are bad, and those who before were bad now are good,” (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 1109-1110). In each of these verses, Theognis furthers his portrayal of this new regime in power as being full of leaders who have corrupted the city and as having been taken by such pride as destroyed cities in the past. And he further develops his view that those who knew not the luxuries of political life and influence in Megara have come to reverse this circumstance by replacing the once ruling class of wealthy and powerful aristocratic families.

Another important source of information for this historical framing of the political change and *stasis* in Megara at the time comes in his analogy of a ship caught in a storm, in which Theognis states that κυβερνήτην μὲν ἔπαυσαν ἐσθλόν, ὅτις φυλακὴν εἶχεν ἐπισταμένως, χρήματα δ’ ἀρπάζουσι βίη: κόσμος δ’ ἀπόλωλεν, δασμὸς δ’ οὐκέτ’ ἴσος γίνεται ἐς τὸ μέσον: φορτηγοὶ δ’ ἄρχουσι, κακοὶ δ’ ἀγαθῶν καθύπερθεν: δειμαίνω μὴ πως ναῦν κατὰ κῶμα πῆ, “they hindered the good steersman, who was bearing them skillfully, and they seize the property by force; and order has been destroyed, and equal distribution no longer comes about to the public; and the merchants rule, and the bad are above the noble; I am afraid lest the wave swallows the ship in any way,” (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 675-680). Gregory Nagy draws upon this, explaining, “The poet’s image of a ship beset by a seastorm (§6) incorporates the overt features of social strife in a city: aside from such strictly nautical themes as the mutiny on board (673) and the deposing of the kubernetes ‘pilot’ (675f.), there are such generally civic themes as the seizing of khremata ‘possessions’ by bie ‘force’ (677), the destruction of kosmos ‘order’ (ibid), and the cessation of

an equitable distribution es to meson ‘in the collective interest’ (678).”⁶⁶ Through these verses, Theognis thus provides an important picture of what stasis in Archaic Megara, and on the larger scale Archaic Greece, held for those whose factions proved to be either victorious or defeated. As a member of the aristocratic faction in the stasis of Megara, Theognis sees firsthand and presents us then with a firsthand account of the aristocratic loss of power in Megara in the middle of the sixth century and the spreading of citizenship rights and thus influence those who may not have previously enjoyed such things.

Apart from this line of historical information to be pulled from the *Theognidea*, we also receive from Theognis an understanding of another type of a shift that accompanied the political change, which took the form of the intermarriage between those of aristocratic households with those outside of this class of Megarians. Through the use of an analogy to the breeding of rams, asses, and horses, and the desire to keep such animals as thoroughbred as can be, Theognis points to the falling apart of such a practice for the Megarians when it comes to marriage, stating, καὶ ἐκ κακοῦ ἐσθλὸς ἔγημεν καὶ κακὸς ἐξ ἀγαθοῦ: πλοῦτος ἔμειξε γένος. οὕτω μὴ θαύμαζε γένος, Πολυπαῖδη, ἀστῶν μαυροῦσθαι, “and the good man married from the bad and the bad from the good; wealth mixes stock. So do not marvel, son of Polypaus, that the stock of the townsmen is made obscure,” (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 188-192). As Figueira states, “we find in the corpus an emphasis on the maintenance of genetic purity by the elite and an abhorrence of intermarriage between social groups (vv.183-192).”⁶⁷ Though Theognis shows his biases clearly here, with his disdain for the idea of marriage between aristocratic families and someone of any lower born class, it nonetheless adds to the history of this time that with the expansion of the

⁶⁶ Gregory Nagy, “THEOGNIS OF MEGARA: THE POET AS SEER, PILOT, AND REVENANT,” *Arethusa* 15, no. 1/2 (1982): 113, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26308106>.

⁶⁷ Thomas J. Figueira, “Theognidea and Megarian Society,” In *Theognis of Megara: Poetry and the Polis*. Edited by T. Figueira and G. Nagy (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985), 128.

citizen body and with the change to a democratic rule under demagogue leaders there came intermarriage between the once noble ruling families and those who were now seeing their influence and capabilities in the Megarian *polis* expand.

The *Theognidea*, as discussed earlier in talking of the life of Theognis, provides an important picture of the life of the political exile in Archaic Megara and Greece. As we see, Theognis explains himself that he lives in πόλιν δ' εὐτείχεια Θήβην οἰκῶ πατρώας γῆς ἀπερुकόμενος, “but I live in the well-walled Theban city being kept away from the land of my father,” (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 1209-1210) identifying the fact that he was exiled from Megara and in going with the general history of the time was likely done so as a political exile. As Roisman explains, “The political exiles of the Archaic age, mostly of aristocratic origin, were perceived to suffer ἀτιμία and κακά because they were deprived of their possessions and were outside the social and political environment where they were used to virtues and might,” as these exiles were subject to “the absence of things which defined an ἀγαθός.”⁶⁸ Theognis shows this when he states, οὐδεὶς τοι φεύγοντι φίλος καὶ πιστὸς ἑταῖρος· τῆς δὲ φυγῆς ἔστιν τοῦτ' ἀνηρότερον, “Surely no one is a friend or trusted comrade to the one who is in exile; and this is more grievous than the exile,” (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 209-210) We receive corroboration of this account of the exile from Alcaeus, for as Roisman explains, “mentions the toils and troubles of the exile (frs. 129,130 Lobel-Page), his wretched existence (frs. 130,148,364 L-P), and especially the contrast between life in banishment and life in the native *polis*,” and further that “He lives the life of a peasant, a man among wolves (?), poor and isolated (fr. 130 L-P).”⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Joseph Roisman, “THE IMAGE OF THE POLITICAL EXILE IN ARCHAIC GREECE,” *Ancient Society* 15/17 (1984): 25, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44080232>.

⁶⁹ Joseph Roisman, “THE IMAGE OF THE POLITICAL EXILE IN ARCHAIC GREECE,” *Ancient Society* 15/17 (1984): 24, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44080232>.

And throughout the *Theognidea*, we also see Theognis complain about the penury and loss, or seizure, of property that he has experienced because of this exile. For instance, Theognis refers to the men οἱ τὰ μὰ χρήματ' ἔχουσι βίη σπλήσαντες, “who have my possessions having seized them by force,” (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 346-347) and explaining that he has not received vengeance against such men. From this account we see that in this democracy the political opponents to those in Theognis’ class were seizing the property of these aristocrats by force and that such seizures were not punished by the current regime, but rather that it was the political norm at the time. In another instance, Theognis late in the first book of the *Theognidea* explains, καὶ μοι κραδίην ἐπάταξε μέλαιναν ὅτι μοι εὐανθεῖς ἄλλοι ἔχουσιν ἀγρούς, “and it struck my heart black that others have my blooming fields,” (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 1199-1202) providing further evidence of the seizure and redistribution of the property of aristocrats during this time of the democracy, and more generally the time of stasis and political change, in sixth century Megara. Thus, Theognis substantiates later accounts of Archaic Megara such as those of Aristotle and Plutarch, giving weight to the idea of the seizure of the property of political opponents and the implementation of such programs as the *palintokia* discussed by Plutarch. With Aristotle, we are provided an account of the destruction of the democracy in Megara by the returning aristocratic political exiles, explaining that οἱ γὰρ δημαγωγοί, ἵνα χρήματα ἔχωσι δημεύειν, ἐξέβαλον πολλοὺς τῶν γνωρίμων, ἕως πολλοὺς ἐποίησαν τοὺς φεύγοντας, “the people's leaders in order to have money to distribute to the people went on expelling many of the notables, until they made the exiles a large body” (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1304b36-38). And Plutarch examines this seizure of property directly when he investigates his question regarding the *palintokia*, in which he explains, καὶ παριόντες εἰς τὰς οἰκίας αὐτῶν οἱ πένητες ἠξίουσαν ἐστιᾶσθαι καὶ δειπνεῖν πολυτελῶς· εἰ δὲ μὴ τυγχάνοιεν, πρὸς βίαν καὶ μεθ' ὕβρεως ἐχρῶντο πᾶσι. τέλος δὲ

δόγμα θέμενοι, τοὺς τόκους ἀνεπράττοντο παρὰ τῶν δανειστῶν οὓς δεδωκότες ἐτύγγανον, παλιντοκίαν τὸ γινόμενον προσαγορεύσαντες, “the poor went to their houses and demanded to be feasted and to sup sumptuously. But if they met with refusal, they treated them all with violence and insult. At length they set up a law by which they took again from those who had lent money, the interest which they had already paid, calling the process palintokia.” (Plutarch, *Greek Questions*, 59e-f) With Theognis’ accounts of the property seizures, in conjunction with those provided by Aristotle and Plutarch, again there is an important contemporary recording of such an event occurring with more detail and personal experience involved in the presentation of this point of historical information.

The picture of the political exile is shown by Theognis to be one of a type of poverty unknown by the aristocrats who were born in great wealth, in which they come to lose this wealth based on who they supported in a *stasis* which plagued their city. Throughout, Theognis presents the political exile as one who was untrustworthy, such as when Theognis says, μήποτε φεύγοντ’ ἄνδρ’ ἐπὶ ἐλπίδι, Κύρνε, φιλήσης· οὐτὶ γὰρ οἴκαδε βὰς γίνεται αὐτὸς ἔτι, “Never feel affection for the man in exile, Cynus, upon hope; for going home he himself becomes yet another man,” (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 333-334). As we see from Roisman, this image of the untrustworthiness of the exile is substantiated by the fact that “Plutarch (Solon 24.2) reports that Solon granted Athenian citizenship only to persons who had been exiled for life or those who came with their families to practice their crafts,” as “only those who had left their states of necessity or with a special goal in mind, could be trusted.”⁷⁰ Further, Theognis shows the extents to which this poverty and loss of property resulting from exile could affect the view of one who

⁷⁰ Joseph Roisman, “THE IMAGE OF THE POLITICAL EXILE IN ARCHAIC GREECE,” *Ancient Society* 15/17 (1984): 27, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44080232>.

was exiled not only by those of the aristocratic class but of even those in the lower of classes in ancient Greece. Theognis provides an account in which he is taunted by one Argyris, who is implied to be a slave, due to the conditions he is experiencing on account of his exile, going on to explain to her, ἡμῖν δ' ἄλλα μὲν ἐστί, γύναι, κακὰ πόλλ' ἐπεὶ ἐκ γῆς φεύγομεν, ἀργαλέη δ' οὐκ ἔπι δουλοσύνη, “but there are many evils for us, madam, since we were exiled, but not grievous slavery,” (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 1213-1214). In his chastisement of Argyris, Theognis thus shows that the exile at this time, given the condition of his life resulting from exile, could come to be mistaken as a slave, something which Theognis is quick to correct Argyris on and ensure that he is not mistaken as such. As Roisman explains, “the fact that an exile could be mistaken for a slave is illuminating. It shows the transformation in the exile’s status once he left his polis, as well as his painful discovery that in the eyes of the beholder there might be little difference between an exile and slave.”⁷¹ And once again, Alcaeus is able to corroborate this transformation of the exile with his identification, as identified above, of the exile as living “the life of a peasant...poor and isolated.”⁷² Thus, from Theognis, in his presentation of the historical information regarding exile, we are provided with an important account of what exile entailed and what it meant to be a political exile in sixth century Megara and generally in Archaic Greece. And just as with the poetry of Alcaeus, it is a contemporary account which fills out the understanding of the history of the time based on the identifications of the practice of exile during this period by such sources as Aristotle and Plutarch.

From Theognis, some other important points of history regarding this time in Megarian history are brought forth. One such example is in his mentioning of the Medes, at one point

⁷¹ Joseph Roisman, “THE IMAGE OF THE POLITICAL EXILE IN ARCHAIC GREECE,” *Ancient Society* 15/17 (1984): 26, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44080232>.

⁷² Joseph Roisman, “THE IMAGE OF THE POLITICAL EXILE IN ARCHAIC GREECE,” *Ancient Society* 15/17 (1984): 24, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44080232>.

encouraging drink and conversation, μηδὲν τὸν Μήδων δειδιότες πόλεμον (762-764), “fearing not at all the war of the Medes,” (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 762-764) and at another point calling on Apollo to στρατὸν ὑβριστὴν Μήδων ἀπέρυκε τῆσδε πόλεως, “keep away from this city the violent host of Medes,” (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 775-776) In line with the dating of the *Theognidea* to the mid-sixth century, Theognis thus provides an account of growing concern over the rise of the Medes in the east as they began to conquer and expand ever closer to the Greeks, during the time of Cyrus. As Highbarger explains, given the example in Herodotus of Solon and his warnings to Croesus, as well as the prominence of other examples of warnings of the rise of the Persians by Greek sages of the sixth century, it is likely “that Theognis of Megara became conspicuous about this time because of the warning he was giving his own city of its possible fate if the Persians continued their attacks upon the Ionians.”⁷³ And, in considering Herodotus and his histories, while Herodotus provides much more in the way of detail and information about the rise of the Persians and their spread throughout a lot of Asia and into Asia Minor, Theognis nonetheless provides an account of contemporary sentiments of many Greeks towards the Persians in the sixth century, as the Persians began to encroach on the Greek world.

Another such example comes with Theognis’ presentation of war and defeat encountered by the Megarians at this time when he asks, πῶς ὑμῖν τέτληκεν ὑπ’ ἀύλητῆρος ἀείδειν θυμός, γῆς δ’ οὗρος φαίνεται ἐξ ἀγορῆς ἥτε τρέφει καρποῖσιν ἐν εἰλαπίναις ῥοφέοντας ἀνθεῦντάς τε κόμας πορφυρέοις στεφάνοις, “how has the soul endured to you to sing to the sound of the flute-player, but the boundary of the land is seen from the agora which maintains with fruits in the feasts those supping greedily up and which makes your hair blossom with dark crowns?” (Theognis,

⁷³ E. L. Highbarger, “Theognis and the Persian Wars.” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 68 (1937): 95 <https://doi.org/10.2307/283255>.

Theognidea, 825-828). And further he calls on them saying, πένθει δ' εὐώδη χῶρον ἄπολλύμενον “and lament the sweet-smelling land which is being destroyed,” (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 830). In this account, we can see that war has come to the doorstep of Megara and that the *polis* has suffered defeat, falling in line with the previously discussed history of Megara being beset by war in the sixth century.⁷⁴ Substantiating evidence of the warring and defeat being suffered by Megara in the sixth century comes down from the Attidographers, who were the local historians in Athens. From them, as Figueira explains, we receive “information about the conflicts of Megara with Athens over Salamis and the Hiera Orgas,” as well as “about the involvement of Solon and Peisistratos in the vindication of Athenian claims in border disputes with Megara.”⁷⁵ And while these accounts hold biases of their own given they cover conflict between Athens and Megara written by historians from Attica, we understand when looking at it with the *Theognidea* that there was certainly much turmoil occurring for the Megarians regarding land disputes. And so, with the warring and disputes, the *Theognidea* provides an understanding of the strain that this added on the Megarians already suffering from the internal stasis and political change.

From all these different discussions and accounts brought forth in the verses of the *Theognidea*, Theognis presents us with a historical picture of sixth century Megara as one beset by political strife, in which there is power struggle ongoing between the aristocratic nobles who previously ruled Megara and the democratic revolutionaries of the expanded citizen body who took control of the government and have begun to be led by demagogues. And though Theognis' biases and background certainly shape the way he understands the events that occurred and the

⁷⁴ Thomas J. Figueira, “Theognidea and Megarian Society,” In *Theognis of Megara: Poetry and the Polis*. Edited by T. Figueira and G. Nagy (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985), 146.

⁷⁵ Thomas J. Figueira, “Theognidea and Megarian Society,” In *Theognis of Megara: Poetry and the Polis*. Edited by T. Figueira and G. Nagy (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985), 113.

ways in which he presents them in his verses, the *Theognidea* nonetheless remains an important source for historical information on this political change in sixth-century Megara as he still provides an actual contemporary account of the events. And further this account provides perhaps a fuller picture of this political change when compared to Aristotle's and Plutarch's accounts of the same subject matter, as the historical information he is presenting is not focused on a specific question or functioning as an example in a larger discussion of politics and political philosophy, but rather presents the accounts as contemporary experiences of the poet himself. And this contemporaneity causes the *Theognidea* to stand out even more as it provides these first-hand accounts for a time in which there is a large blank spot regarding first-hand evidence for the history of Megara.

But, in investigating the *Theognidea* as a source of historical information for the political change and stasis of sixth century Megara, it is necessary to examine the textual issues that come with the *Theognidea*. These issues come in the form of the question of authorship, for as Highbarger explains, "The main contention is that in the present *Theognidea* we have not the original poems of Theognis himself but some form of collection," and, "that the original text has been extensively interpolated and rearranged."⁷⁶ And further, this issue seems to be reinforced by the appearance of various passages in the *Theognidea* which have been attributed by in other instances to poets such as Tyrtaeus, Mimnermus, and Solon.⁷⁷ Regarding the charge of the *Theognidea* as being a collection, T.W. Allen provides valuable insight and refutation, explaining that given such things as "His train of thought, his relations, the relations between writers in his century, his pride, vanity, eccentricity, all these personal and incalculable

⁷⁶ Ernest L. Highbarger, "A New Approach to the Theognis Question," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 58 (1927): 170, <https://doi.org/10.2307/282910>.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

factors,”⁷⁸ the *Theognidea* does not fit the hypothesis of being an anthology. And further he shows, “Anthologies and compilations are not conditioned by individual genius or idiosyncrasy. They are subject to laws of demand and supply, which are obvious and permanent,” but rather with the *Theognidea*, “we deal with an individual, a sixth century literary man, an artist.”⁷⁹ And Burn provides further justification for taking much of what is in the *Theognidea* as genuine, explaining that “much of the poetry that is genuine beyond all reasonable doubt is also highly personal, referring to particular times and situations,” and that “Such poems, even if not in the Kynos-book or ‘sealed’ with the name of Kynos (if that is the meaning of the word *sphregis* in 1.19) are still quite likely to be by Theognis, especially if they fit the circumstances of sixth century Megara known to us from Aristotle and Plutarch.”⁸⁰ Thus, in looking at the historical information as it is presented in the *Theognidea*, it shows itself to fall within these parameters of authentic creation by Theognis, as much of it displays these personal and situational aspects.

Regarding the attributions to other poets, we also see that this does not invalidate the authorship of Theognis of much of the *Theognidea*. As Burn explains, “the appearance of fourteen short passages a (forty-nine lines) which are also quoted by Greek authors as from other poets...is no argument against Theognis’ authorship of most of the corpus, or even of these lines. It was, as we have seen already, customary and good manners to quote, adapt, and paraphrase other men’s lines.”⁸¹ From Theognis himself, as discussed earlier, he sees the duty of the poet as being τὰ μὲν μῶσθαι, τὰ δὲ δεικνύναι, ἄλλα δὲ ποιεῖν, “to seek after some things, and to show forth other things, and to create other things,” (Theognis, *Theognidea*, 771). So, Theognis shows

⁷⁸ T. W. Allen, “Theognis,” *The Classical Review* 19, no. 8 (1905): 390. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/696164>.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Andrew R. Burn, “Theognis and the Decline of Megara,” In *The Lyric Age of Greece* (United States of America: Minerva Press, 1968), 263-264.

⁸¹ Andrew R. Burn, “Theognis and the Decline of Megara,” In *The Lyric Age of Greece* (United States of America: Minerva Press, 1968), 247.

that the appearance of these verses which elsewhere had been attributed to other poets is a part of being a poet and of fulfilling the poet's duty to the Muses. And so, given the considerations previously discussed and given the fact that the inclusion of verses found in the poems of others does not invalidate the authorship of Theognis, Highbarger provides a succinct summary of the reasons for doubting the position of taking the *Theognidea* as an anthology rather than taking, at least, much of it as under the authorship of Theognis. As he explains, "(1) They do not conform to the arrangement of the anthologies; (2) the testimony of antiquity, where it can be applied, does not support this view; (3) there is a striking degree of unity of language, thought and style in the poems; (4) the various subjects included are not different from those commonly treated by a poet of the lyric period."⁸²

Thus, to conclude, given the importance which *muthos* still held in the time of Theognis and the authority which it granted to the poets who brought their *muthos* forth, and the fact that poetry still was an important archival medium for the histories of the times in which the poems of various poets were set, the *Theognidea* appears to be a key place to look to for information regarding the history of sixth century Megara, and specifically that of the *stasis* and political change occurring there at the time. In looking at the *Theognidea* with the later accounts provided to us by writers such as Aristotle and Plutarch, and in considering the ways in which Theognis' personal experiences affected the way he interpreted and presented the history, the *Theognidea* shows itself to be a valuable source for historical information of *stasis* in sixth century Megara. For while Theognis' biases and other such factors no doubt shape his interpretation and presentation of the evidence, the *Theognidea* is nonetheless a contemporary account whose

⁸² Ernest L. Highbarger, "A New Approach to the Theognis Question," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 58 (1927): 198, <https://doi.org/10.2307/282910>.

historical information shows itself to hold considerable weight in various circumstances, given the substantiation which it receives from other sources like Aristotle or Plutarch, or even Alcaeus and Solon. And further, the *Theognidea* presents a fuller account of the historical information when looking at similar instances as they appear in the works of Aristotle or Plutarch and others, giving first-hand experience and familiarity with the evidence which provides a deeper understanding than the just the brief examples for a larger topic with Aristotle or answering a part of a larger question with Plutarch.

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