TRIBES, HEROES, AND THE “REUNIFICATION” OF ATTICA

The subject of Greek associations has recently been described by one specialist as “intractable.” As he puts it, these groups are usually “difficult to define and, once defined, difficult to study owing to the scarcity and peculiar characteristics of the primary evidence.”¹ This is certainly true of the ten Athenian phylai or “tribes,” introduced in 508/7, which are notoriously hard to fit into modern analytical categories.

On the one hand, they appear to belong to what we would call “civil society,” that broad, loosely defined stratum of social life located somewhere between the individual citizen and the official organs of government. Here, they took their place alongside a wide range of social organizations that had long been familiar features of the Athenian cultural landscape. As was the case in, say, the phratries, the genē, and the orgeōnes, membership in the new phylai was hereditary. Like these and other older groups, the tribes were essentially self-governing, self-financing entities, whose corporate life was organized around regular cult practice.²

But unlike these other kinds of association, the new tribes were also inseparable from the Athenian state. The term phylē was widely used in the Greek world to describe the groups into which a given citizen body was divided, usually for military and/or political purposes, so that all citizens by definition belonged to one or another tribe. At least in known historical instances, these en-
ties thus did not originate, as it were, organically, willed into existence by their members, but were collectively installed from above—fully formed—at a single, specific moment in time. The Cleisthenic phylai were no different, and they now provided the operational basis for a range of new national ventures, notably the citizen army and the Council of 500.  

According to current orthodoxy, translating the term phyle as “tribe” is therefore misleading, since the very existence of phylai presupposes the emergence of a centralized, “posttribal” form of political organization, however rudimentary. Given their inherently civic, or “public,” character, phylai should therefore be distinguished quite sharply from the more obviously “organic” and “private” Greek associations. But at least in the case of the Cleisthenic tribes, the best-attested of all phylai, it would be a mistake to press the distinction too far. Notwithstanding their synthetic origins and inseparability from the state apparatus, these groups still shared many characteristics with independent cultic organizations and descent groups. This was probably no accident; it appears that a great deal of effort was invested in making them look and feel just like “private” associations from the very start. To understand why, we should look at the role played by the tribes in the overall scheme of the changes attempted in 508/7.  

ORIGINAL RATIONALE

The immediate raison d’être of the phylai was, as I have already noted, to provide the organizational structure for state initiatives like the citizen army and Council of 500. But it was not preordained that complex, purpose-built “tribes” had to be used to perform such functions, let alone tribes made up of trittyes drawn from three different parts of Attica. The reasons for using units of this particular kind become clear when we consider the larger goal of the reforms of Cleisthenes and the radical changes necessary to achieve this goal.

This larger goal was integration, the creation of a new kind of region-state in Attica. The viability of this region-state required more than the passive consent of a large and far-flung citizen body; it was predicated on the citizens’ willingness to participate, directly or indirectly, in the very mechanics of government on an almost continual basis. Given the traditional quietism, parochialism, and effective political exclusion of much of this population in earlier times, the mass participation necessary to animate the new order could hardly be taken for granted. The full incorporation of Attica needed more than a few strategic adjustments to the state apparatus in Athens. Unlike the changes authored by Ephialtes or even Solon, it required a fundamental shift in consciousness. The experiment begun in 508/7 could only succeed if free, native-
born males throughout Attica embraced a new vision of political community and adjusted to new ways of seeing themselves, their fellows, and the world around them. And this adjustment probably would not take place unless new patterns of behavior could soon be established in areas outside the strict realm of the state as well as within it. Hence the decision to blend the ten phylai into “civil society.”

Each tribe was conceived, in effect, as a kind of microcosm of the citizen body, drawing together three discreet groups of individuals from three different areas of Attica to form a single miniature community. The rationale behind this brazenly artificial scheme was at once to neutralize the influence of localist sentiment on affairs of state and, more positively, to foster the growth of a collective consciousness in the region as a whole, by giving citizens the chance to interact with fellow tribesmen from other districts on a regular basis. Evidently, it was thought that individuals were more likely to feel that they were part of the larger national community if they were first able to form attachments with a small, but representative, sample of that community, such as each citizen would now find within his own tribe.

Thus, important as the specific political functions of the phylai may have been, their unorthodox composition points to a larger, more general socializing function. And unless we take them seriously as associations and see that this is what they were intended to be from the very start, we can barely begin to appreciate the critical role they were to play in the new order. A social organization can still be genuine, however arbitrarily or synthetically created. The only real measure of authenticity here is the extent to which members feel themselves to belong to the organization. In the case of the Cleisthenic tribes, the development of a sense of fellowship and belonging among members was, for reasons I have already stated, unusually significant. But it was also, by any standards, unusually problematic.

THE DESIGN OF THE TRIBES

In the normal scheme of things, there was little earthly reason why citizens who lived in Sounion would have forged a special association with men from Skambonidai in central Athens and Paionidai on the slopes of Mount Parnes. But in 508/7, as newly minted members of the tribe Leontis, they were expected to do just that. And here we see the principal difficulty facing those responsible for implementing the new phylai: how might a genuine group sentiment arise among such disparate and far-flung segments of the population? Clearly, conditions favorable to the growth of this sentiment would have to be manufac-
tured and built into the design of the tribes from the outset. Though no exact precedent for these particular tribes was available to guide the designers in this task, existing associations in Attica and elsewhere in Greece did provide a range of proven formats for possible imitation. It appears that elements were borrowed from a number of different models.

First, the name. As noted above, phylai were traditionally the most broadly inclusive of all Greek social organizations, serving, in effect, as administrative divisions of the citizen body; this, presumably, was why the term ϕυλή was applied to the entities introduced by Cleisthenes. Of course, four groups called ϕυλαί already existed in Athens at this point, the system of Geleontes, Aigikoreis, Hopletes, and Argadeis, which was also found with some variations elsewhere in the Ionian world. We can be almost certain that these venerable bodies now lost whatever major administrative functions they might once have held, even if they managed to maintain a vestigial presence in the symbolic life of Athens long afterward. Unfortunately, too little is known about these functions or about the corporate life of the Ionian tribes for us to assess the extent of their influence on the design of their successors. The little we do know actually points more to difference than to similarity.

While there is good evidence that the older groups were also comprised of subdivisions called trittyes, the one surviving trittys name (Λευκοταϊνοι, meaning “the men with white headbands”) suggests that the Ionian tribes bore little resemblance to the unusually complex territorial entities created by Cleisthenes. Likewise, the new tribes had no equivalent of the phylobasileis, the “tribal lords” of the older phylai, who operated as a kind of priestly college, performing sacral and judicial functions on behalf of the entire polis community. Nor should we assume that the later tribes simply inherited their political and military functions from their predecessors, since it is unlikely that any probouleutic council or a well-developed mechanism for levying a citizen army existed in Athens before 508/7. Overall, though long experience of tribal life under the old system must have influenced the shape of the ten Cleisthenic phylai to some extent, this influence may not have been as great as is sometimes supposed.5

In every sense, the defining features of the younger tribes were the ten Eponymous Heroes, and here again the new phylai conformed to a familiar, time-honored pattern. All manner of social entities in the Greek world—from kinship groups and small settlements to larger regional or ethnic populations, like “the Ionians”—identified themselves with an illustrious hero or ancestor, whose name they collectively bore and whose memory they celebrated. The rationale behind the practice is well described by Kearns (1989, 85):
[T]he eponymous hero had a special significance to the group; the coincidence in name signified a coincidence in substance, and the hero was in some sense the projection of the group itself onto the plane of myth or cult or both, and its expression in a unified, individualised form.

In the case of the new tribes in Athens, the need for this kind of group “expression” was even greater than usual. Just as the highly artificial and arbitrary composition of the phylai made them innocent of any preexisting loyalties to people or place, it also made them essentially interchangeable. As a result, the ten heroes were really the only features that distinguished one tribe from another and, thus, the only source of difference on which an individualized corporate identity could be built.6

Inevitably, the initial assignment of heroes to phylai was as artificial and arbitrary as the tribes themselves. Almost everything we know about this process is contained in a single sentence in AP (21.6):

And [Cleisthenes] assigned to the tribes ten eponymous heroes whom the Pythia had chosen from a preliminary list of one hundred founding fathers [arkhe–geto–n].

Brief as it is, this passage gives us some idea of the effort invested in making the tribes feel like authentic associations from the start. The decision to seek Apolline sanction from Delphi for the phylai perhaps deliberately recalled the longtime practice of Greek colonists, who likewise hoped to lend an instant legitimacy to their new ventures. The result, as Parker (1996, 118) observes, was that the new tribes were “not really artificial because not really man-made.” Reinforcing this impression of authenticity was the manner in which the role of the epōnymoi was now presented. Though, in reality, the relationship between any given hero and his tribe was largely arbitrary, the characterization of these figures as arkhe–getai suggested otherwise. The epōnymoi were to be more than inanimate tokens or emblems, serving merely to distinguish the name of one phyle from another; they were cast as the imagined “founders,” “leaders,” and, so to speak, “progenitors” of the new groups.7

This conceit of the hero as Stammvater was obviously intended to give each tribe the air of an extended kinship group, along the lines of associations like the phratries and the gene. Where once only the clans of the traditional elite could claim the privilege and prestige that accrued from heroic forebears, these entitlements were now extended, in a sense, to the citizen body as a whole. And
the familial image of the tribes will only have strengthened over time, with admission to membership, through the demes, determined—except in extraordinary circumstances—by heredity.

By the fourth century, it is actually possible to find the phyletai of a given tribe referred to as “descendants” of their eponym, using a plural patronymic form based on the hero’s name. A remarkable passage in the otherwise unremarkable Demosthenic funeral oration (60.27–31) describes the phyletai of all ten tribes in these terms and goes on to suggest that the performance of tribal units in a recent battle, possibly Chaeronea, was characterized in each case by qualities “inherited” from their “founding fathers” [arkhēgoi]. A rhetorical trope perhaps, but one that was only effective if a meaningful sense of attachment had in fact developed between the phylai and their epo–nymoi. The notion of common corporate descent may have been no more than a well-worked metaphor, but the vitality of the metaphor bespeaks a genuine group solidarity. As Parker (1996, 121) comments on the use elsewhere of the patronymic Antiokhidai to describe the phyletai of the tribe named for Antiochus, son of Heracles:

This is not to say that anyone “really believed” that a social unit first constituted in the late sixth century in fact carried the line of Heracles, but that no difficulty was experienced in applying to it the idiom of fictional kinship in which phratries too, for instance, were traditionally conceived. The artificial creation had become no less natural than its predecessors.

Also favoring this process of naturalization was the fact that the “founding fathers” were not obscure, generic heroes but, for the most part, established luminaries of Attic lore and cult. The Pythia’s inspired selection included four figures (Erechtheus, Cecrops, Pandion, and Aegeus) who were now—if not earlier—deemed to have ruled in Athens as kings. Also chosen were a kinglike figure (Leos) associated with a prominent local landmark, the sons of two of the most storied characters in Greek legend (Acamas and Antiochus), two “culture heroes” (Oeneus and Hippothoon), and a Homeric warrior of the first rank (Ajax). The omission of Theseus aside, the list could hardly have been more impressive, and it presumably owed little to Apollo’s promptings.9

As a result, each of the ten tribes inherited not only a “founding father” of some distinction and a kind of vicarious prestige from the legends attached to their hero but also a certain patina of antiquity. Just as the metaphor of common descent helped to bridge the prohibitive geographical and social distances that separated the members of each phyle, so this association with existing
Athenian traditions must have helped to offset the experimental novelty of the tribes and to ease their assimilation into the fabric of society. And even if some of these traditions were not especially familiar or impressive, they were now, one suspects, clarified, modified, or embellished accordingly.

While an established visibility must have been the primary criterion for inclusion on the final list of ten heroes, it is also striking how many of these heroes were (or could be) implicated in some way with the territorial integrity and/or the unification of Attica. Although Theseus, the synoecist par excellence, was absent from the list, his presence is keenly felt through others who were included, notably his father, Aegeus, and son Acamas. At least in later traditions, Pandion figures as the hero’s grandfather, while Leos, Antiochus, Ajax, and Hippothoon appear to have been associated with Theseus in some fashion by the early fifth century. Meanwhile, two other epōnymoi were deemed to have prepared the way for full political incorporation: Cecrops apparently took the first step toward synoecism, by bringing together the twelve independent states of Attica into a federation known as the Dodekapolis; and Erechtheus later overcame the most significant opposition to the federation, when he defeated the forces of Eumolpus and Eleusis.10

We might also note that several of the heroes had historical links with areas that were either marginal or adjacent to Attica. The selection of Pandion, Ajax, and Hippothoon as epōnymoi was especially provocative in this regard, since it carried with it implicit Athenian claims to control the Megarid, Salamis, and Eleusis, respectively. The full “Atticization” of these heroes served to clarify in no uncertain terms where the Athenians now believed the historically contested western borders of their polis to lie.11

Thus, in these different ways, almost all of the figures installed as “founding fathers” of the tribes brought with them memories or traditions that drew attention to the idea of Attica as a single, unified political entity—the very idea the tribes themselves were designed to promote. Presumably, this was not a coincidence. The arbitrary, unorthodox composition of the phylai was the most serious impediment to their success as associations; if the image of regionwide communion could somehow be made attractive, citizens might be inspired to lay aside their seasoned localism and develop a sense of solidarity with their fellow phyletai in distant demes. Hence came the decision to choose epōnymoi whose legendary deeds, local origins, and/or family connections would lend an appealing glamor to the pan-Attic character of the phylai and would perhaps advance the larger cause of national integration in the process.

The new tribes also drew heavily on existing models in their corporate life. Though most of our evidence comes from the fourth century, there is no good
reason to doubt that the kind of organizational apparatus we see described in our sources was in large part already in place soon after the tribes themselves were introduced. At any one time, the phylai were served by a number of functionaries, such as secretaries, treasurers, and heralds. But executive authority appears to have been concentrated in the hands of officials known as epimelētai, or “caretakers.” Three—one from each trittys—were selected annually and served together as a college or board. Their primary responsibilities included representing the tribe’s interests on the national level, convening tribal assemblies, and managing the group’s cult life and funds. As far as we can tell, the phylai were financially independent. While there is later evidence that at least some of them received income from land leases, it is perhaps safest to assume that they relied largely on the munificence of wealthy phyletai for funding in their early days.

Tribal cult practice was essentially an exclusive, internal affair. It may be that most—perhaps all—of the epōnymoi were honored with some kind of sacrifice by their phyletai during the performance of larger state festivals with which the heroes were connected. But this public expression and affirmation of the special bond between phyle and arkhēgetēs is securely attested only for Pandionis at the Pandia, a major festival of Zeus. Otherwise, the religious activities of the tribes took place away from the public gaze, within the sacred precinct of each epōnymos.

Two features of the tribal cults are particularly interesting. First, their location. To the best of our knowledge, up to four of the shrines (those of Erechtheus, Cecrops, Pandion, and possibly Aegeus) were on the Acropolis itself; two (Leos and Ajax) were in the Agora area, and two were located a little further from the center, in the districts of Kynosarges (Antiochus) and the Kerameikos (Acamas). Of the remaining two shrines, one (Hippothoon) was certainly situated outside Athens altogether, in Eleusis, while the other (Oeneus) may likewise have been some distance from the city, in Acharnae. Given that the new system of phylai was introduced, fully formed, at a single moment in time, this relatively uneven distribution pattern is somewhat surprising. More surprising still is the apparent lack of interest in ensuring that all the precincts were located in demes belonging to the phylai that actually controlled the cults, especially if the shrines were also to serve as the principal sites for tribal “gatherings,” or agorai. Clearly, these were not new, purpose-built precincts. Rather, it appears that the phylai simply took over existing cults and shrines of the heroes concerned and reused them for their own purposes. And where the hero had no previous cult in a suitably accessible location, established precincts
of close relatives were adopted, as seems to have been true in the case of the tribes Aiantis, Antiochis, and perhaps Leontis.\textsuperscript{18}

The second noteworthy feature of the tribal cults concerns personnel. Evidence from the fourth century and later reveals that three of the phylai (Erechtheis, Cecropis, and Hippothontis) were served by “priests of the \textit{epōnymos}” who were not actually members of the tribes in question. Apparently, in 508/7, the tribes inherited more than just the cults and shrines of the heroes. The priests of Erechtheus and Cecrops were presumably members of the (Eteo-) Boutad and Amynandrid \textit{genē}, who are known from elsewhere to have controlled these cults. The identity of the family that presided over the cult of Hippothoon is not known, though the priesthood appears to have remained gentilician down to at least the second century B.C.\textsuperscript{19} Unless some special dispensation was granted to these three families, it seems reasonable to infer that the priesthods of the other existing hero cults were also retained, at least initially, by their original patron \textit{genē}, regardless of their tribal affiliation under the new order. As Kearns (1985, 194) notes, control must then have been “severally and sporadically transferred from \textit{genos} to tribe during the period between 508/7 and the late fourth century, when the relevant evidence begins.”\textsuperscript{20}

**TRIBES AND HEROES IN A CHANGING CULTURAL LANDSCAPE**

In an effort to understand the cultural logic of the Eponymous Heroes and their overall contribution to the symbolism of the new order, some authorities look to parallels with Greek colonial ventures. According to this view, by installing the \textit{epo–nymoi} as tutelary hero-\textit{arkhe–getai} of the tribes, Cleisthenes gave the impression that his project was not to reform the state but to found it afresh, much as he would a new settlement abroad. In this task, he himself assumes the guise of \textit{oikistēs}—intermediary between his community and the god in Delphi, as well as architect of civic space and cult life for his new foundation. As such, he was in effect asking his fellows to abandon their past and join him in a new kind of political enterprise; but unlike literal colonists, the Athenians would not have to leave their homeland to participate.\textsuperscript{21}

The parallels here are certainly suggestive; the hero-\textit{arkhe–getai}, the appeal to Delphic authority, and the reconfiguration of the Agora area could point to the play of a colonial metaphor. And there can be no doubt that the Cleisthenic project actually was a dramatic departure from earlier practice, a discontinuity of far-reaching significance. However, we should be careful not to extend the
metaphor too far. The realia may have been all about innovation and experiment, but the representation was less straightforward.

To begin with, it is far from clear that Cleisthenes presented himself as the author of bold new beginnings. As we saw earlier, the literary tradition is curiously ill informed about the Alcmeonid; he is generally remembered only as one of a series of reformers, and the momentous importance of his measures seems to have become quickly forgotten in time. For this reason and others to be discussed in chapter 9, one suspects that he probably did not much advertise the significance of his own role in the transformation, let alone glamorize himself as some pioneering oikistès figure. It is, in any case, hard to believe that a leader who was apparently so reluctant to draw attention to the novelty of his reforms might have sought to portray himself as an arch-innovator. Certainly, he and his colleagues oversaw a major reconfiguration of civic space in Athens. But far from flaunting any novelty, the scheme and fabric of their new Agora communicated above all an unwavering fidelity to the practices of the past.

A very similar approach was taken toward the new phylai. Just as the existing buildings and monuments of the old Peisistratid square were left largely undisturbed to afford the Agora a degree of physical continuity with earlier eras, so the new tribes were inserted into a “civil society” that, at least on the surface, was otherwise little changed. The phratries, the gene-, local religious associations like the Marathonian Tetrapolis, and even the original Ionian tribes survived the transition to the new order in some form. And this was the result not of chance or inertia but of conscious choice by the political leadership, as AP (21.6) attests. To have abolished the old groups would have been to threaten the overall appearance of cultural continuity that the leadership was so eager to sustain. Perhaps there was, in any case, no real need to abolish them. The old loyalties and affiliations could be allowed to persist alongside the new ones, because the values, the assumptions, and the social relations that gave them meaning were no longer of much political relevance.

At the same time, every attempt was made to ensure that the new tribes themselves did not disturb this carefully composed image of continuity. Just as even the new structures in the Agora appeared to be more redolent of tradition than innovation, so almost every feature of the ten phylai seems to have been shaped and measured to make them feel like ancient confraternities, rather than the bold, experimental entities they actually were.

For their basic format, elements were drawn from a variety of proven organizational models; in style, these most synthetic of groups thus bore a reassuring resemblance to Attic associations of yore. And in most—if not all—cases, the cults and shrines of the eponymoi (the focus of tribal corporate life)
were already familiar features of the Athenian landscape, giving the phylai, in Parker’s words (1996, 119), “a pleasing, natural-seeming diversity.” No less important, the reuse of existing hero cults also offered a very visible link to the practices of earlier times, especially in instances where priests were still supplied by the families who had traditionally controlled the cults, even when these priests were not actually members of the tribes in question.23 Here again we see signs of a distinct and willful aversion to starting afresh and building from scratch. In creating a suitable cultural setting for their new order, it seems that Cleisthenes and his associates preferred, wherever possible, to preserve the legacy of the past and to reuse old spaces, monuments, and practices to serve new purposes. The epōnymoi themselves offer another good illustration of this approach.

Earlier, we saw how monuments in the Agora and on the contemporary Acropolis were used to stir in the Athenians a deeper sense of their collective heritage. The aim, it appears, was to immerse them in an environment saturated with historic references and images, to build around them a cultural landscape that at least purported to bear the marks of their long and slow, but essentially continuous, evolution as a political community. For the time being, the story of this evolution, the history of the Athenian people, was perhaps no more than a series of vague historical imaginings. But even this somewhat inchoate vision of the past still needed fixed beginnings, and this is where the epōnymoi came in.

Though already present in the environment in cult and myth, these figures were now, as it were, recycled and invested with new meaning. No longer were they just faceless names, timeless numinous powers of mostly local significance. Embraced by a new, emerging historical consciousness, they were collectively transformed into “founders,” not of any new order introduced by Cleisthenes, but of the traditional old order that Cleisthenes now claimed to be reviving. With just a little sleight of hand and adroit manipulation of half-remembered tales, they were recast as formative figures in the story of the Athenian people, heroes whose deeds had shaped or anticipated the realities of the present in the late sixth century. As a group, the epōnymoi thus helped to anchor a burgeoning collective memory, giving citizens a relatively concrete and vivid point of contact with the shared origins that they were now encouraged to imagine.

This conclusion is admittedly speculative (evidence from the period hardly allows otherwise). But given the style and cultural logic of other contemporary innovations, along with the general interest in raising historical consciousness, it seems reasonable to infer that the creation of the Eponymous Heroes was ultimately prompted more by the need to construct a suitable past than by any
particular desire to glamorize the present. Appealing as the colonial parallel may be, the primary role of these heroes was to establish a measure of continuity between the Athenians and their earlier history, not to distance them from it.

If there was a dominant metaphor at play here, it was that of the family. In earlier times, the possession of a glorious past had been the exclusive preserve of the great aristocratic clans. Through forms of ancestor worship, genealogical claims, and orally transmitted memories of the deeds of their forebears, these extended families had defined and perpetuated their exalted place in the world. Likewise, through the cults, the claims, and the memories offered by the new tribes, all Athenians now had a share in a distinguished national past that defined and shaped their identity in the present. With all the ties of blood, interest, and accomplishment that linked the ten “forebears” of the phylai to one another, it was not difficult to see each tribal history as but one strand in the story of a larger, more inclusive “family,” the manifestly ancient collectivity of the Athenian people.24

It would be idle to pretend that we can form anything more than a general impression of the scope and contents of “official” collective memory in the early years of the new order. By this point, if not earlier, the more illustrious of the ten heroes were presumably seen as “kings” ruling in some kind of dynastic order, and one can imagine that fairly standardized accounts of the deeds of the epónymoi, their genealogies, and their relations with people and events in Attica and elsewhere were in wide circulation. But about one particular detail of this vision of the past we can be more certain. Since it is possible to associate almost every one of the epónymoi in some fashion with the territorial integrity or unification of Attica, we can infer that the synoecism of the region was now widely seen as an achievement of the heroic age; political union was thus deemed, in effect, to be Attica’s natural birthright. However, the question remains whether this tradition was a recent invention or the creation of some earlier era.

THESEUS AND THE SYNOECISM TRADITION

Our earliest and best source for the synoecism is Thucydides (2.15.1–2). Though the historian elsewhere scorns the value of received traditions about the distant past, this particular legend, it seems, was above suspicion.

For during the reigns of Cecrops and the first kings down to the time of Theseus, Attica contained [a number of] independent states [Attike . . .
kata poleis oikeito], each one with its own town hall and government officials [prutaneia te ekhousas kai arkhontas]. Except in times of danger, they did not come together to deliberate with the king [in Athens]. Rather, they were all autonomous and used to determine their own courses of action [autoi hekastoi epoliteuon kai ebouleuonto]. Some even fought against the kings, as did the Eleusinians under Eumolpus against Erechtheus. When he was king and had established himself as a ruler of intelligence and power, Theseus, as part of his reorganization of the country [ten khoran], brought everyone under the sway of the single state that now prevails [in Attica] today [es ten nun polis ousan . . . xunoike pantas], after dissolving the councils and offices of the other states and creating one single council chamber and town hall [hen bouleuterion apodeixas kai prutaneion] for all. And though individuals were allowed to retain the property that they had hitherto held, he compelled them to use this one state [for their political life] [enankase miai polei tautei khrthesthai]. And with all now contributing to it, this state became powerful and was handed down as such by Theseus to his successors. To commemorate his accomplishment, the Athenians to this day celebrate the Synoikia, a public festival in honor of Athena.

If the institutional details of Thucydides’ account owe something to the author’s characteristically rich, but disciplined, historical imagination, the general picture of the unification process he presents is consistent with that found in all later sources. Apparently, no rival versions of the tradition were ever formulated. By the later fifth century, we infer, it was simply axiomatic that Attica had once been home to a number of independent states and that the farsighted king Theseus had peacefully amalgamated these states into a single political entity centered on Athens; thus was created, in a single administrative stroke, the distinctive, formidable region-state inherited by the classical Athenians.25

So when was this tradition invented? Given its unusually stable place in collective memory, the story could have been in circulation for centuries before Thucydides came to write his account. However, it can scarcely have been an artifact of the Dark Age or some earlier period. The institutional incorporation of Attica is far from a conventional epic or folkloric exploit; the invention of a tradition of this kind presupposes a certain level of political self-consciousness and a recognition that the Athenian state had its own interests and history beyond those of the families or individuals who happened to control it at any given time. The synoecism tradition cannot, therefore, have been created much before the era of Cylon and Draco, when a developed state appara-
tus is first fully visible in Athens. As for a terminus ante quem, there really was no cause to invent a legend of prehistoric unification after about 500 B.C. The primary purpose of political traditions like this one is to help legitimize an action that is in some sense problematic, and there is no evidence to suggest that the issue of a united Attica was especially contentious or controversial following the reforms of Cleisthenes.26

Political logic therefore places the genesis of the synoecism tradition somewhere between the later seventh century and the end of the sixth. Can we be more precise? Depending on one’s view of the evolution of the Athenian state, it would of course be easy enough to observe some resemblance between the actions of Theseus and those of a Solon, a Peisistratus, or a Cleisthenes and then date the tradition accordingly. But the question demands a more satisfactory resolution. While we may lack any unambiguous evidence for the synoecism story in the art or literature of the archaic period, the relative abundance of evidence from this time for other Thesean feats offers a further line of inquiry.

The preeminence of Theseus among Athenian heroes during the classical era was unchallenged. His many illustrious deeds were recounted in dithyrambs, eulogized in funeral orations, reenacted in plays and ceremonies at festivals, celebrated on innumerable vases, and immortalized on major public monuments. At least part of his extraordinary appeal he owed to what might best be described as a composite heroic persona. As a fearless adventurer in the tradition of Heracles, he was a prolific slayer of monsters and brigands, often in distant, outlandish locales; as a constitutional monarch, he led his countrymen in defense of Athens against Amazon attack, invented or reinvented a range of important public institutions, and, of course, united Attica.

It remains unclear whether the Athenians themselves felt there to be any contradiction between the world-traveling vigilante Theseus and the more sober ruler-reformer who did so much to shape the political destiny of his homeland. Perhaps they simply saw these two dimensions of his character as mutually reinforcing. What is clear is that this composite hero figure was the product of a long and fairly complex evolutionary process; Athenian perceptions of Theseus and his heroic persona change steadily during the course of the archaic period. In the hope of finding some oblique or implicit evidence for the invention of the synoecism tradition, we should now look at this process in some detail.

It is widely recognized that the ascent of Theseus to the heroic firmament in Athens was a relatively late development. Even if authentic, the small handful of incidental references to him in early epic do not necessarily represent him
as an Athenian, since Thessaly and probably Troezen also had strong claims to him at this stage. More telling still is his surprisingly tenuous foothold in Athenian cult. We know of only one sanctuary of Theseus within the walls of Athens itself during the classical period, and this may not have been established until the mid-470s, when Cimon needed a suitable home for the bones he had recently “repatriated” from Skyros, the supposed site of the hero’s demise. Even at the height of Theseus’s celebrity, the Herakleia in Attica conspicuously outnumbered the Theseia. The Athenians were not oblivious to the discrepancy, nor were they troubled by it. With characteristic legerdemain, they simply explained it away as a product of their hero’s fabled generosity.

But most revealing is the ceramic evidence. To judge from this testimony, Theseus did not begin to attract much interest in Athens until the second quarter of the sixth century, conspicuously later than elsewhere. He was already something of a minor fixture in Greek art by the time the first images of his exploits began to appear on Attic vases in ca. 570. Even then, we do not yet see any real signs of a distinctively Athenian contribution to the hero’s iconography. For now, Attic artists seem to have been content to follow the lead of others, confining themselves to scenes from the small cluster of traditional stories associated with Theseus’s Cretan adventure and his partnership with the Thessalian Peirithoos, king of the Lapiths (fig. 17).

But during the period 550–510, the picture changes quite sharply. Ceramic images of Theseus deeds, especially the battle with the Minotaur (fig. 18), are now produced with far greater frequency in Athens, suggesting an appreciable rise in local interest. No less significant, it is also during this time that we see the first hints of a conscious effort among Attic artists to assert the hero’s Athenian identity and to control his iconography and take it in new directions. A once narrow repertoire is now expanded to include a number of new episodes, notably the struggles with the Marathonian Bull and Krommyonian Sow and the rape of Antiope. What should we make of these developments?

A number of authorities believe that they must reflect the formal adoption and promotion of Theseus as Athenian national hero, most likely by the Peisistratids. The idea is certainly tempting, especially given the tradition that the family sought to embellish the hero’s image by tampering with the texts of Homer and Hesiod (see Plut. Thes. 20.1–2). But it must also be qualified.

If there was such a thing as a national hero in Athens at this time, it is beyond question Theseus who held that honor; no other indigenous hero enjoys even a comparable level of popularity in the art of the Peisistratid era. However, it is also plainly apparent that Theseus was still very far from being the hero most celebrated in Athens. For the time being, at least, he was forced to
exist in the shadow of another, the very formidable cultural shadow cast by Heracles. As we saw in the last chapter, it was Heracles not Theseus whose image adorned the pediments of the mid-sixth-century Acropolis. And for all the growing fascination with the deeds of Theseus during the Peisistratid period, Attic vase painters were still at least eight times more likely to put Heraclean exploits on their pots in the years before 510.34

That said, even were the differential somewhat narrower, such evidence would not in itself bring us any closer to tracing the genesis of the synoecism tradition. Raw measures of popular appeal can tell us only so much; we also need to see evidence for a significant shift in the nature of this appeal. In other words, did the Theseus figure of this time still conform to the traditional paradigm of muscular, individualistic heroism? Or are there hints here of a new persona, one that also included a more political and public-spirited dimension? Was he yet seen as the kind of constitutional ruler who might once have overseen a far-reaching reform of his home state? It is possible that he was, but unlikely. And the primary reason, again, is the long shadow of Heracles.

It hardly needs repeating that many of the details in the biography of Theseus bear more than a passing resemblance to those of Heracles. It is generally agreed that the career of the former was in many respects modeled on that of the latter. Never is this more apparent than in the years ca. 550–510, when for the first time the Theseus figure is fully defined and developed in Attic art. Every one of the major new episodes that enters the repertoire during these years seems to have been directly inspired by a similar Heraclean feat: the Cretan Bull reemerges as the Bull of Marathon; the Erymanthian Boar is transformed into the Krommyonian Sow; Hippolyte becomes Antiope.35

The rationale behind this extraordinary, slavish imitation is not difficult to comprehend. The era was nothing if not competitive; Athenian elites were as eager to compete with their rivals elsewhere in Greece as they were with each other. And in Theseus, the Peisistratids evidently saw the makings of an Athenian version of Heracles, a native hero who, if suitably promoted, might develop into a lucrative source of Panhellenic prestige both for themselves and for their city. This kind of initiative was not new. The marketing of Theseus to a wider Greek public recalls a similar exercise in self-aggrandizement from a generation or so earlier, when Athenian leaders contrived to produce their own facsimile of the Olympic Games, another cultural product of proven mass appeal. Indeed, so keen were the organizers of the Great Panathenaia to establish the Panhellenic pedigree of their new games that they took the unprecedented step of offering valuable prizes to victors, hoping that these might encourage the best athletes in the Greek world to come to Athens to compete.36
Whether or not the Peisistratids went to comparable lengths in their promotion of Theseus and actually inserted references to the hero into the canon of Greek epic poetry, they do seem to have prompted the creation of several new stories about him during the years of their hegemony in Athens. But these new stories did not include the synoecism tradition. Despite the importance of Theseus’s Athenian identity, his historical engagement with his home state was still minimal at this stage. There are no signs of any attempt to politicize his career and present him as a constitutional monarch, let alone as a visionary founding father. In fact, there is little discernible change in his heroic persona at all; the new deeds assigned to him in the years ca. 550–510 are of much the same traditional stamp as the old. For the time being, the exigencies of Panhellenic appeal and fidelity to the Heraclean model required him to remain essentially a “prepolitical” hero, a glamorous adventurer still preoccupied with tackling the world’s monsters and outlaws.

It was suggested earlier that there would have been little political need for a synoecism tradition after around 500 B.C. We have now seen that, for very different reasons, the story probably could not have been invented before the fall of the Peisistratids in 511/0. And since the parallels between the legendary unification of Attica and the historic reforms of 508/7 are self-evident, we can conclude that the synoecism tradition was in all likelihood created around this same time. If so, we might expect to see that Theseus was now viewed by his countrymen very differently than before. Crediting him with an achievement of this momentous historical and political significance will have transformed Athenian perceptions of the hero almost overnight; in a single mythopoeic stroke, the monster slayer of fable is improbably reinvented as a farsighted ruler-reformer—in effect, the founding father of the Athenian state. This abrupt transformation must have left some trace in the contemporary record.

There is certainly very good evidence that the popularity of Theseus reached an altogether new order of magnitude during the last decade of the sixth century. It is at this point that the first “cycle vases” were produced, most of them cups, which show the hero battling with a succession of three or more adversaries on the same vessel (fig. 19). Several of the opponents (the Minotaur, the Marathonian Bull, and the Krommyonian Sow) are familiar. Some are entirely new: Sinis, Skiron, Kerkyon, and Prokrustes—all outlaws who made the fatal mistake of challenging the youthful Theseus as he made his way from Troezen, his birthplace, to join his father, Aegeus, in Athens. Over twenty such vases are known from the period ca. 510–490, and seven of them date from 490 or earlier. Here, the artists’ use of multiple adjacent scenes on a single sur-
face to convey the idea of an entire cycle of deeds is unprecedented in earlier Greek art.39

It is also during the last decade of the sixth century that the deeds of Theseus first appear in Athenian monumental sculpture. As we saw in the previous chapter, a commemoration of the combat with the Marathonian Bull and a statue group (see fig. 17) showing the hero wrestling with Prokrustes (?) were probably erected on the Acropolis in the closing years of the century. Still more impressive was the metope series that adorned the southern flank of the Athenian treasury in Delphi, a building erected probably around 500 B.C. These sculptures represent our earliest certain evidence for the promotion of Theseus on an Athenian state monument. One of the nine panels is badly damaged, and its subject cannot be identified. The other eight feature three of the older episodes (the Minotaur, the Marathonian Bull (fig. 20), and the Amazon), the four new combats seen on the cycle vases (with Sinis, Skiron, Kerkyon, and Prokrustes), and a remarkable central panel that shows the hero with Athena, apparently in a quiet moment between exertions. If doubts still lingered around Greece about the local identity of Theseus, the treasury metopes put them conclusively to rest.40

But for our purposes, perhaps the most striking feature of the treasury is its juxtaposition of Theseus with Heracles, whose own, more storied labors decorated the metopes on the building’s northern side. As if to emphasize the former’s independence from the latter and his emergence as a major hero figure in his own right, there seems to be a conscious effort to avoid duplicating accomplishments in the two metope series, with both the Krommyonian Sow and the Cretan Bull episodes omitted. And as scholars have often observed, it is the exploits of Theseus, not Heracles, that were displayed on the building’s more visible and prominent southern facade. It is almost as if a cultural displacement of Heracles by Theseus were taking place before our very eyes.

As it turns out, this process of displacement is broadly confirmed by contemporary vase painting. As noted above, Athenian artists were over eight times more likely to depict Heracles than Theseus in the years before 510 B.C. Thereafter, the proportions shift quite dramatically: Theseus appears on a full 23 percent of known Attic vases in the first quarter of the fifth century, Heracles on only 19 percent.41

Taking all of this evidence together, the Theseus portrayed in Athenian art of the last decade of the sixth century is an altogether more exalted and more secure figure than the Theseus of the recent past. Freed from the shadow of Heracles and adopted as an official emblem of the state, he was, for the first time, clearly without rival as national hero of Athens.42
synoecism tradition early in the decade would of course go a long way toward explaining the sudden elevation of Theseus and his subsequent eclipse of Heracles. It would also explain two fundamental changes in the way that he is now perceived.

First, in its careful blending of new stories with old to form a cogent sequential narrative, the deed cycle attests to an emerging interest in Theseus as a concrete historical individual. Granted, in earlier images of the three older stories, there seems to have been a growing consensus that he performed these deeds in his youth, and he had always been generally identified with those, like Heracles, who “lived” in the generation before the Trojan War. But we get no real sense before 510 of any conscious attempt to organize the events of his career into a coherent “biography” and give larger order and meaning to his existence. His “life” was then little more than an assemblage of heroic tableaux, an accumulation of power statements and claims to Panhellenic renown. But after 510, an episode like the encounter with the Krommyonian Sow was no longer just another self-contained demonstration of arete; it was now one of a series of formative experiences—definitively located in place and time—that brought the young hero from boyhood to manhood. Theseus had finally entered history.

Second, the cycle reveals a new emphasis on Theseus’s engagement with Attica and its environs. Aside from the Marathonian Bull episode, all of his traditional accomplishments had taken place at some remove from his native land—probably the further away the better, if, like Heracles, he was to enjoy a genuinely Panhellenic celebrity. And where Theseus’s older exploits usually celebrated little more than the hero’s personal triumph over adversity, the new struggles on his journey around the Saronic Gulf showed him in his first sustained role as a benefactor of Athens, removing all manner of threats from the western approaches to his home state. No less important, the cycle also reflects a very contemporary concern with territoriality. As we saw earlier in this chapter, more than one of the Eponymous Heroes had links to areas on or beyond the western margins of Attica (notably Eleusis [Hippothoon] and the Megarid [Pandion]), and their selection as eponyms carried with it a compelling Athenian claim to control of these locales. Such claims can only have been strengthened by the placement of three of the four new Thesean deeds (the combats with Skiron, Kerkyon, and Prokrustes) in these same disputed areas. It seems that the hero’s actions were now laden with political implications of a kind we have not seen before.43

But the best evidence for the politicization of Theseus in the last decade of the sixth century is actually negative, namely, his omission from the list of
Eponymous Heroes. The presence of less illustrious relatives (e.g., Pandion, Aegeus, and Acamas) on the list tells us all we need to know about the reason for his omission: he was now, in the words of Ostwald (1988, 325), “too much revered as the hero of all Attica to give one tribe the signal honor of worshiping him as its mythical forebear.” And since the list included several figures (not least Theseus’s own father) who were recognized now, if not earlier, as rulers of the fledgling Athenian state, it is inconceivable that Theseus himself was not also seen as a onetime king of Athens by this time.

In short, there appears to have been an abrupt shift in Athenian perceptions of Theseus in the last decade of the sixth century. Only at this point do we see the first real traces of that signature ruler-adventurer persona, the persona that would secure his unique place in Athenian consciousness for decades to come. Realistically, there can be only one explanation for this sudden image makeover and precipitous rise in acclaim. While it may not be possible to prove conclusively that the synoecism tradition was invented at this time, it does not take a rich imagination to identify signs of its impact everywhere in contemporary evidence. As we have seen, the genesis of the tradition could only have come after a certain point in the evolution of Theseus’s heroic identity and under certain, specific political conditions. If there was ever a timely moment for these two axes to intersect, it came shortly after the fall of the Peisistratids.

I would guess that the tradition originated roughly as follows. To help legitimate the deme/trittys/tribe reform that finally sealed the political unification of Attica, Cleisthenes and his associates sought a precedent from the distant past. Casting around for a suitable agent of this prehistoric synoecism, they chose Theseus. The choice was not necessarily an obvious one. Though more colorful than the shadowy Cecrops or Erechtheus, Theseus was hitherto known primarily for individual feats of Heraclean derring-do. Moreover, he perhaps retained a suspect association with the previous regime. But yet again, the interests of continuity prevailed over political sensibility, and the hero was somewhat improbably recast as the founding father of the contemporary Athenian state, in the process ensuring his own exclusion from the ranks of the epónymoi and the inclusion of several close relatives.

In an effort to make this abrupt identity shift more credible, attention then turned to organizing the details of Theseus’s earlier life. The new cycle of youthful deeds was a remarkably artful exercise in mythmaking. Combining a number of purpose-built new episodes with several existing stories, the cycle was designed to serve as a coherent account of the hero’s development from adolescence to kingship; hence the decision to end the sequence with the Minotaur episode, the event that precipitated Aegeus’s suicide and Theseus’s...
ascent to the throne. Along the way, the cycle both confronted and resolved the problem of the hero’s birth in the Argolid, addressed the embarrassing shortage of ventures conducted in and around Athens itself, and anticipated his later concern with the territorial integrity of Attica. The result was a vivid and historically satisfying portrait of the formation of a future national hero, precisely the kind of individual who one could now imagine would go on to shape the political destiny of his homeland. Evidently, Athenian vase painters and their symposiast clients found the new cycle instantly appealing, and it is not hard to see why.

An important question remains: how was the new synoecism tradition publicized and promoted? No doubt it became a recurring topic in contemporary political discourse. The selection and assignment of the Eponymous Heroes would have inevitably given rise to public discussion of events in the early history of Attica, and we can only suppose that the region’s original unification by Theseus would have been a constant point of reference. But was the synoecism recognized or memorialized in some more permanent form?

It seems distinctly unlikely that the event was directly commemorated in any form of public monument. The synoecism did not particularly lend itself to artistic representation, and we know of no attempt in this or any other era to render it in painting or sculpture. Somewhat less unlikely is the possibility that a literary account was circulated at this time, one that perhaps included the synoecism among other old and new details in Theseus’s now impressively cogent life story. In their efforts to explain the hero’s sudden rise in visibility in the last decade of the sixth century, scholars have long speculated that a major epic poem, a *Theseid*, must have appeared around the year 510. But while more than one poem of this name is attested, none look to be this early. And besides, unless we can imagine such a thing as an “officially” commissioned epic, a contemporary *Theseid* would only have reflected the popularity of stories already current; it would not have been a vehicle for their initial dissemination.

Another possibility is that the legend of the prehistoric unification of Attica was promoted in a regular public ceremony. This idea is altogether more attractive, not least because we know of a festival that served just such a purpose. The Synoikia is not particularly well attested, but surviving sources from Thucydides (2.15.2) on leave us in no doubt that it commemorated the synoecism. Supposedly dating from the time of Theseus himself, it was held annually in the middle of the month Hekatombaion, appropriately just before the Panathenaia, the festival of “all the Athenians.” Otherwise, we can be sure only that the sacrifices performed at the Synoikia were offered to Zeus Phratrios and
Athena Phratria, that they were decidedly modest in scale, and that representatives from the old Ionian tribes played a significant role in the proceedings.46

The presence of the old associations has encouraged a general assumption that the Synoikia must have been a festival of some considerable antiquity. The assumption is an easy one to make and may well be correct. But given that the Athenians of the late sixth century were quite adept at dressing up cultural innovations in the garb of timeless tradition, one wonders if the issue might not be a little less straightforward. Further complicating matters is our earliest evidence for the festival, a lex sacra from the second quarter of the fifth century, which reveals that the deme Skambonidae offered a mature victim at the Synoikia.47 Though there are as yet no signs that other demes participated, the fact that even one of Cleisthenes’ new local units did so arouses further suspicion that the festival known to Thucydides was not a relic from the distant past after all. At the very least, it must have been substantially reinvented—if not invented ex nihilo—relatively soon after 508/7 B.C.

The prominence of the old Ionian tribes at the festival need not contradict this conclusion. We are not told how the act of unification was figured in the ritual of the Synoikia. But it seems a reasonable supposition that the ceremony involved a symbolic reconciliation between different parties in Attica. And given that the Ionian tribes apparently constituted the principal divisions in Athenian society prior to 508/7 and had since been all but eliminated in the name of unity, it is hard to think of any entities better suited to representing the various fractions of the primeval community united by Theseus.

Supporting this inference is unambiguous later evidence that the old phylai were thought to have been associated with ancient territorial divisions of Attica. It appears that the tribes underwent several changes of name in the remote past before they finally became known as the Argadeis, Hopletes, Aigikoreis, and Geleontes, during the reign of Erechtheus. In their two earliest phases, under Cecrops and Cranaus, their names featured a combination of three toponyms (referring to the standard regional divisions—the coast, the hinterland, and the city) and one eponym (referring to the king who oversaw the naming process).48 Since the Synoikia was one of the very few contexts in which memory of the old tribal system was preserved, it seems distinctly likely that the purported territorial origins of the Ionian tribes were somehow articulated in the ritual of the festival, presumably to represent the disunity resolved by Theseus.

One final thought on the details of the festival. An emphasis on the territorial identity of the older phylai may also help to explain the presence of what is perhaps the most mysterious element in the Synoikia: the Leukotainioi, “the
men with white headbands,” a trittys of the tribe Geleontes, who participated in the festival’s preliminary sacrifice. Taken in context, this ritual recognition of the old trittys system suggests that the image of pre-Thesean Attica recalled by the festival involved not just a fourfold but, ultimately, a twelvefold political division of the region. It is very tempting to see here a reference to the primeval Dodekapolis, the loose federation of twelve independent poleis established by Cecrops that supposedly prevailed in the region before the synoecism. Though the precise identity of the twelve states was probably never standardized, the Dodekapolis tradition seems to have been universally accepted by the Arthidographers and other antiquarians.49 Since the whole purpose of the tradition was to project some intimation of political unity back to the very beginnings of Athenian history while still allowing Theseus the decisive role in the unification process, the idea of the Dodekapolis presumably does not predate the creation of the synoecism tradition.50

We might speculate that this idea, like various other innovations of the new order, was influenced by practice in Ionia, where a historical federation of twelve states provided an appropriate model.51 Be that as it may, it is not hard to believe that the Attic Dodekapolis tradition was first conceived in tandem with the synoecism tradition and that both traditions were originally disseminated at the Synoikia, a festival that must have been at least revamped, if not invented outright, in the aftermath of Cleisthenes’ reforms.52

The logic of the Athenian experiment required, inter alia, a transformation in the way Athenians apprehended what had gone before. Exclusions and divisions of earlier times had to be forgotten; the past had to be made to reflect and anticipate the new solidarities and collectivism of the present. Over the course of the last three chapters, we have been able to form some idea of how the authors of the new regime set about this task of shaping public memory.

The construction of a suitable past began with the suture of the most important division of all, the somewhat nebulous line that separated the area directly controlled by the Athenian state from the rest of Attica. If the new order was really to be seen as no more than an older order restored, then its signature innovation, the creation of a fully integrated region-state in Attica, would have to be projected back into the crepuscular recesses of early Athenian history. The synoecism tradition was thus invented to serve as a kind of historical charter for a united Attica. And, in the process, the cultural resonance of Theseus in Athens was forever transformed, with the ancient act of union displacing victory over the Minotaur as the defining moment in his career.
More generally, the preoccupation with the question of unification in the late sixth century ensured that the emerging vision of an Athenian past was essentially organized around this issue. This is apparent not only in the extraordinary prominence accorded to Theseus, the eventual agent of unification, but also in the choice of *epōnymoi*, a reliable guide as to which other heroes were now considered to have been significant players in the evolution of the early state. Just about every one of the eponyms was associated in some way with the territorial integrity of Attica or with the person of the synoecist. The earliest of the chosen heroes was Cecrops, the archetypal father of the Athenian state and the founder of the Dodekapolis federation, while the latest were Acamas and Antiochus, the sons of Theseus and Heracles. Thus defined, the decisive, formative period in Athenian history came to a fairly abrupt end in the generation after Theseus; it is almost as if the organizers of this sequence began to lose interest in their task once the unification issue had been conclusively resolved.

But the seeds of “official” memory had now been sown. Animated by a new historical consciousness, Theseus and the *epōnymoi* supplied the initial substance and color for this fledgling account of a shared past, an account that would be filled out with the reflexes of future triumphs and anxieties in the decades to come. And henceforth, no ancient voice we know of ever doubted that some kind of unity, whether intimated or fully realized, had prevailed in Attica essentially since time immemorial. Thus, to all appearances, the aim of Cleisthenes’ reforms was not so much to unify the region as to reunify it, to restore it to the condition long ago bequeathed by Theseus. Ironically and perhaps inevitably, the representation of the reforms in this fashion all but ensured that their true significance would lie hidden from view for the rest of antiquity.53

Once the core elements of a suitable past were in place, it remained to forge visible signs of continuity between the Athenians of the late sixth century and the putative founders of their historic citizen community. This would be achieved by making sure that almost every innovation in public life under the new order had a certain traditional flavor. We have already seen the contributions of the Agora, the Acropolis, and the new tribes to the creation of an appropriately “historic” cultural milieu. Further examples of this wholesale invention of tradition will be seen in the chapters that follow.