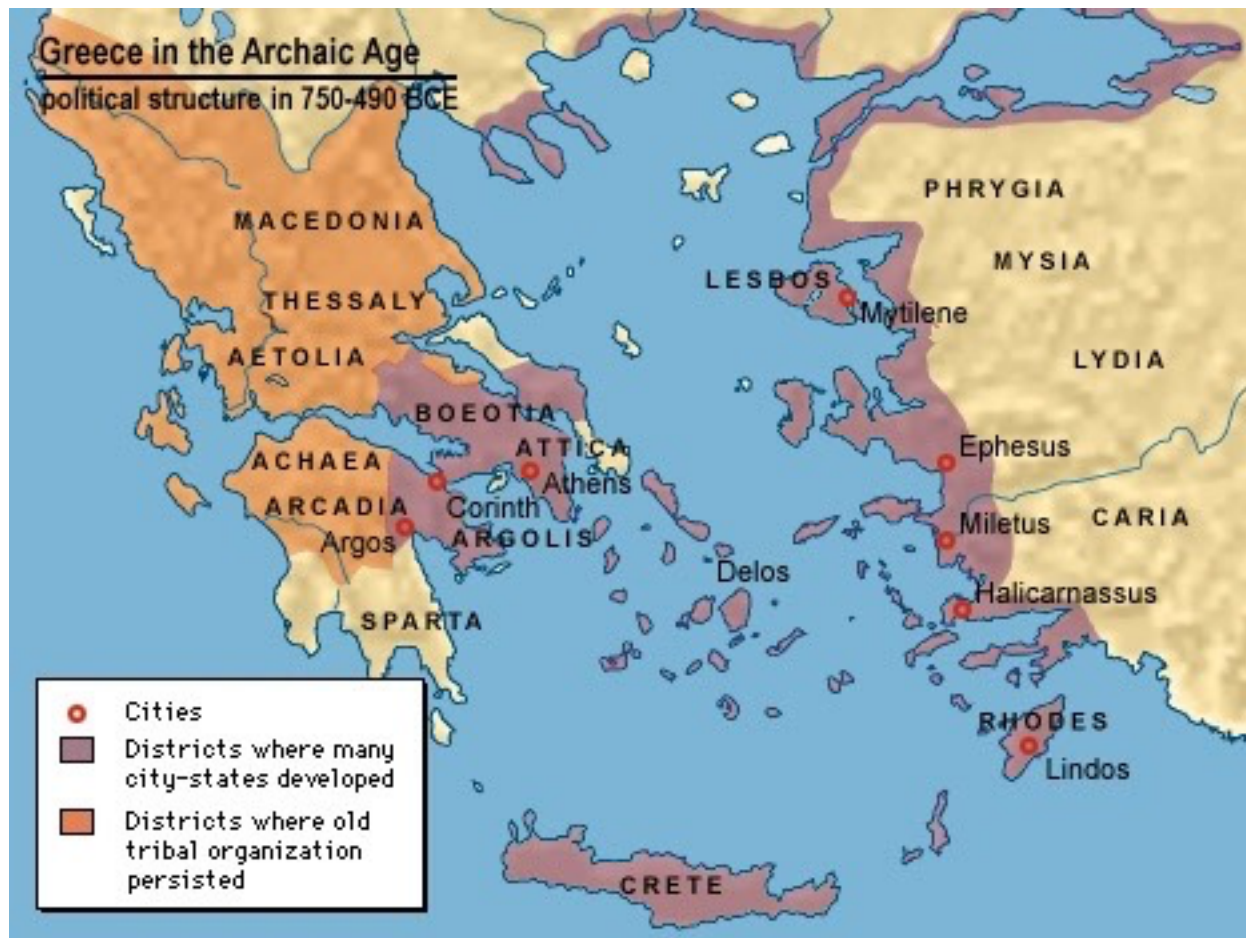




## Periander of Corinth



For most of its history, Corinth was a *kingdom* and a *monarchy*. For a brief period, the Kingdom of Corinth was a *diarchy* (rather than a *monarchy*), but the kingdom very quickly went back to being a monarchy. Yet by the year 747 BCE, the king was overthrown by the Corinthian nobles. As a result of the Corinthian *aristocratic* revolt, the Kingdom of Corinth came to an end, and Corinth's *monarchy* was abolished. In place of a *monarchy*, Corinth became an *oligarchy*, because it was ruled by a *few* nobles (who annually elected a *president* to govern the city). Yet by the year 657 BCE, the *oligarchy* was brought to an abrupt and violent end at the hands of the Corinthian nobleman Cypselus, who was the *polemarch* (or battle leader) in command of the Corinthian military. After killing the Corinthian oligarchs and most other Corinthian nobles, Cypselus crowned himself as King of Corinth. As a result, Corinth once again was a *kingdom* and a *monarchy*. Yet even though he had made himself a *king*, Cypselus was widely known as a *tyrant*, because his power as a *monarch* came from his popularity among the Corinthian commoners, whom he actively encouraged to rob and kill the Corinthian nobles. In the end, the Corinthian nobles (other than Cypselus and his immediate family) were all gone, because those who were not killed had fled from Corinth for their lives.



1. By the time that Cypselus had become King of Corinth, he had fathered his two sons Periander and. Noticing how his father's power as a tyrant ultimately came from the power of the common people,<sup>1</sup> Periander of Corinth said, "Democracy is mightier than tyranny."<sup>2</sup> Do you agree with Periander? Why or why not? Explain.



2. During the year 627 BCE, Cypselus died, his eldest son Periander became King of Corinth. Like his father Cypselus, Periander was described as a tyrant, because his power as a monarch came from his popularity among the poor Corinthians, who trusted him to help protect them from being exploited by the rich Corinthians. According to Periander, how we should treat others does not depend on whether or not they are rich, and how we should treat our friends does not depend whether or not they are poor. He said, "How you should treat your friends when they are rich is the same as how you should treat them when they are poor." Do you agree with him? Why or why not? Explain.

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<sup>1</sup> Quite literally, democracy (δημοκρατία) is the power of the common people, because it is the might (κράτος) of the *demos* (δῆμος) or *demoi* (δῆμοι), who were the common people or commoners [as opposed to the *aristoi* (ἄριστοι), who were the nobles].

<sup>2</sup> δημοκρατία κρεῖττον τυραννίδος



5. Around the year 606 BCE, the Athenians and the Mytilenaeans had been at war over the city of Sigeion. Yet after several years of inconclusive battles, they decided to settle their territorial dispute with words (instead of weapons). As a result, the two warring parties had agreed to let Periander of Corinth decide who should have control over the city of Sigeion, which was near Troy.



When he was first approached by the Athenians and the Mytilenaeans, Periander advised, “Whatever agreement you make, stick to it.” Is it ever okay to break a promise by purposely not doing something that you agreed to do? Why or why not? Explain.

6. Periander of Corinth first met with the Mytilenaeen envoy, who said, "Sigeion was built by Mytilenaeans, and the people of the city are Mytilenaeans. Therefore, it is a Mytilenaeen city!" Periander then met with the the Athenian envoy, who said, "Regardless of who built the city (and/or who lives there), Sigeion sits on land that has belonged to the Athenians since before Mytilene became a city. As such, Sigeion is an Athenian city!"  
If you had been Periander, what would you have decided? Explain.

7. After hearing each side plead their case to him, Periander ultimately had decided that Sigeion should be controlled by the Athenians (rather than by the Mytilenaeans). Although Periander had decided in favor of the Athenians, the Mytilenaeans respected his decision, and the war over Sigeion finally came to an end. If you were a Mytilenaeen, would you have respected Periander's decision enough to support ending the war? Why or why not? Explain.

8. Recall how Periander said, “Whatever agreement you make, stick to it.” According to him, it is dishonorable to break a promise (on purpose), and it is honorable to keep a promise. In the same way, Periander believed that it is honorable to keep a secret. For example, he said, “Betray no secret.” If someone trusts you enough to tell you a secret, is it ever okay to tell the secret to others (without permission)? Why or why not? Explain.
9. Periander once said, “Pleasure comes and goes, but honor lasts forever!” In your opinion, which is better: pleasure (ἡδονή) or honor (τιμή)? Explain.

10. Are pleasure and honor related in any way at all? Why or why not? Explain.

11. By the year 600 BCE, the Lydian-Milesian War was still ongoing. Frustrated at his inability to force Thrasybulus of Miletus to surrender, Alyattes of Lydia ordered the Lydian army to set fire to the farmland around Miletus. Powerless to stop the Lydians from setting the Milesian farmland on fire, Thrasybulus watched his city's main source of food go up in smoke, and it would not be long before there would be no food left to eat in Miletus. Whenever two countries are at war, are there any military tactics (or strategies) that should never be used under any circumstances whatsoever? Why or why not? Explain.

12. In quite an unexpected turn of events, Alyattes suddenly became ill, and his illness dragged on for a concerning amount of time. In desperation, he sent a Lydian messenger to the Temple of Apollo in Delphi. When the Lydian messenger asked the Oracle of Delphi about

why Alyattes was ill for so long, the Delphic Oracle said, “When the Lydian army set fire to the Milesian farmland, the flames burned down Athena’s temple in Assesus. Hence until Athena’s temple is rebuilt, Apollo has nothing to say to Alyattes!”



Unless the Temple to Athena were to be rebuilt, Alyattes would not recover from his illness. Yet in order for the Lydians to rebuild the temple, they needed to take a break from fighting the Milesians. As a result, Alyattes sent a messenger to negotiate a truce with Thrasybulus. Once the temple was built, Alyattes would resume his fight against Thrasybulus, and the Lydians finally would defeat the Milesians once and for all! Yet unbeknownst to Alyattes, Periander heard what the Delphic Oracle had said, and so Periander perfectly understood the reason why Alyattes wanted a *truce* (rather than a *peace treaty*). As a result, Periander faced a dilemma. On the one hand, his friend Alyattes would not recover if Athena’s temple remained in ruins. Yet on the other hand, if Alyattes were to recover then he would capture or kill Periander’s other friend Thrasybulus. One way or another, Periander would have to betray one of his friends to the other. and so he faced a rather daunting dilemma. Alas, which is worse: helping to *let someone die* or helping to *kill someone*? Explain.



13. As the Lydian messenger was fast approaching Miletus, Thrasybulus told the Milesians to take out all of their food and throw a big party in the city center. Weary of war, the Milesians were more than happy to do so. Hence when the Lydian ambassador finally had arrived in Miletus, he saw the Milesians happily indulging in an abundance of food! Of course back in Lydia, Alyattes had been convinced that Miletus had almost no food left at all, and that was the truth! Yet when his messenger told him all about the wild party in Miletus, Alyattes was entirely unaware that his messenger had been so easily fooled, and so he actually believed what the messenger had told him. Concluding that peace with the Milesians would be the only way for the Lydians to rebuild Athena's temple, Alyattes promptly made peace with Thrasybulus, who happily accepted the offer. As a result, the Lydian-Milesian War came to an end. After making peace with Thrasybulus, Alyattes had two temples to Athena built, and Alyattes soon recovered from his illness. Hence thanks to Periander's help, Thrasybulus had tricked Alyattes into ending the Lydian-Milesian War. Did the Lydian messenger tell Alyattes a lie?
14. Perhaps remembering how Thrasybulus cleverly snatched victory from the jaws of defeat, Periander once said, "Whenever you are unfortunate, unlucky, or unsuccessful, be prudent (or resourceful)." Is that always good advice? Why or why not? Explain.

15. Hoping to learn more about how to rule over a city, Periander sent a messenger to pose the question to the tyrant Thrasybulus of Miletus. While taking Periander's messenger on a walk through a field of wheat, Thrasybulus made no conversation. Instead, he casually went about cutting off all of the tallest ears of wheat. When he finally spoke to Periander's messenger, Thrasybulus said, "If Periander wants to secure his administration of his city, he must kill every citizen who is powerful enough to overthrow him, regardless of whether or not they are hostile towards him. Alas, not even a companion is above suspicion!" By taking the advice of Thrasybulus, Periander became a very harsh ruler. If you were Periander, would you have taken the advice? Why or why not? Explain.



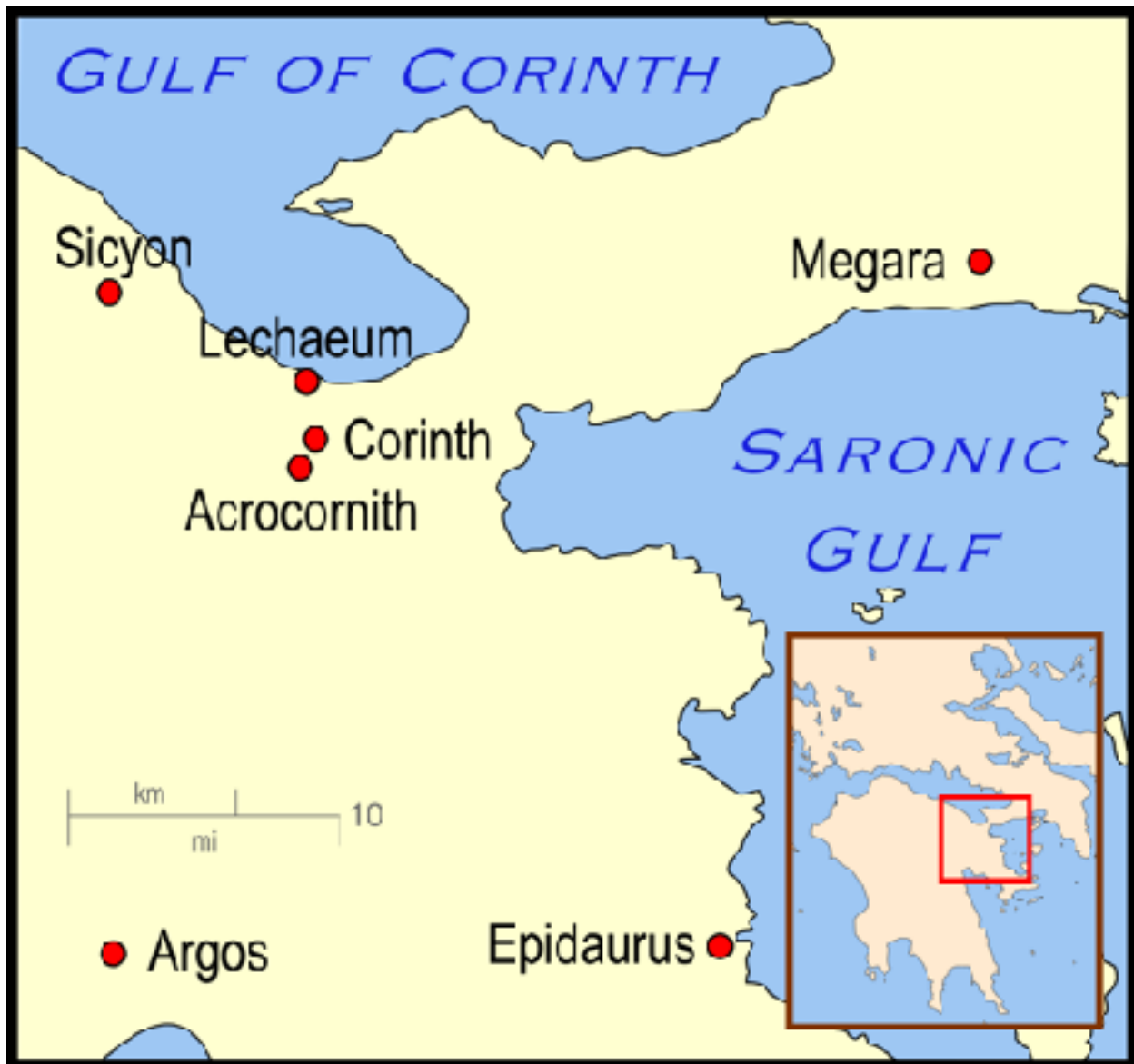
16. In order to prevent the Corinthians from conspiring against him, Periander restricted the number of slaves in Corinth so that the citizens would always be too busy working. Was it harsh, inhumane, or brutal for Periander to have done that? Why or why not? Explain.

17. In order for someone to live in Corinth, they had to have Periander's permission to do so. For any country anywhere, who should decide on who gets to live in the country? Explain.

18. Periander said, "Punish *not only* wrongdoers *but also* anyone who *intends* to do wrong." Hence for him, bad *deeds* and bad *intentions* were *both* worthy of punishment. What do you think about that? Do you believe that people should be punished for thought crimes? Why or why not? Explain.

19. Although he was a harsh ruler, Periander nonetheless said, "If a tyrant wants to remain safe, he must protect himself with the loyalty of others, because weapons will not protect him." If you want to prevent others from harming you, which is better: making other people *fear* you or making other people *love* you? Explain.
20. Periander concluded that, in order to win over the loyalty of the Corinthians, he needed to bring prosperity to Corinth. If you were a Corinthian who was unhappy with that fact that your country was ruled by a brutal tyrant, would you feel differently if the tyrant were to make your country a nice place to live?

Periander found clever ways of bringing prosperity to his Peloponnesian city of Corinth. Often mistaken for an island, the Peloponnese is actually a large *peninsula* that is connected to the *rest* of Greece by the Isthmus of Corinth. The *isthmus* was a natural *land bridge* that separated the Gulf of Corinth from the Saronic Gulf. Hence in order to sail between the two gulfs, ships had to sail all of the way around the entire Peloponnese. If only there had been a shorter route! Indeed, anyone who could control a shorter route would make a *fortune* by charging tolls for using the route!



Periander thought, "If only we Corinthians could dig a canal through the Isthmus of Corinth, then we could make a fortune by controlling the shortest route between the the Gulf of Corinth from the Saronic Gulf!" He probably was inspired by what was happening at that time in Egypt, where a massive canal-building project was well underway.

Egypt borders two seas: the Mediterranean Sea to the north and the Red Sea to the east. Yet, the two seas were separated by a natural land bridge known as the Isthmus of Suez, and the Egyptians had no idea how long it would take for a ship to sail from one sea to another.

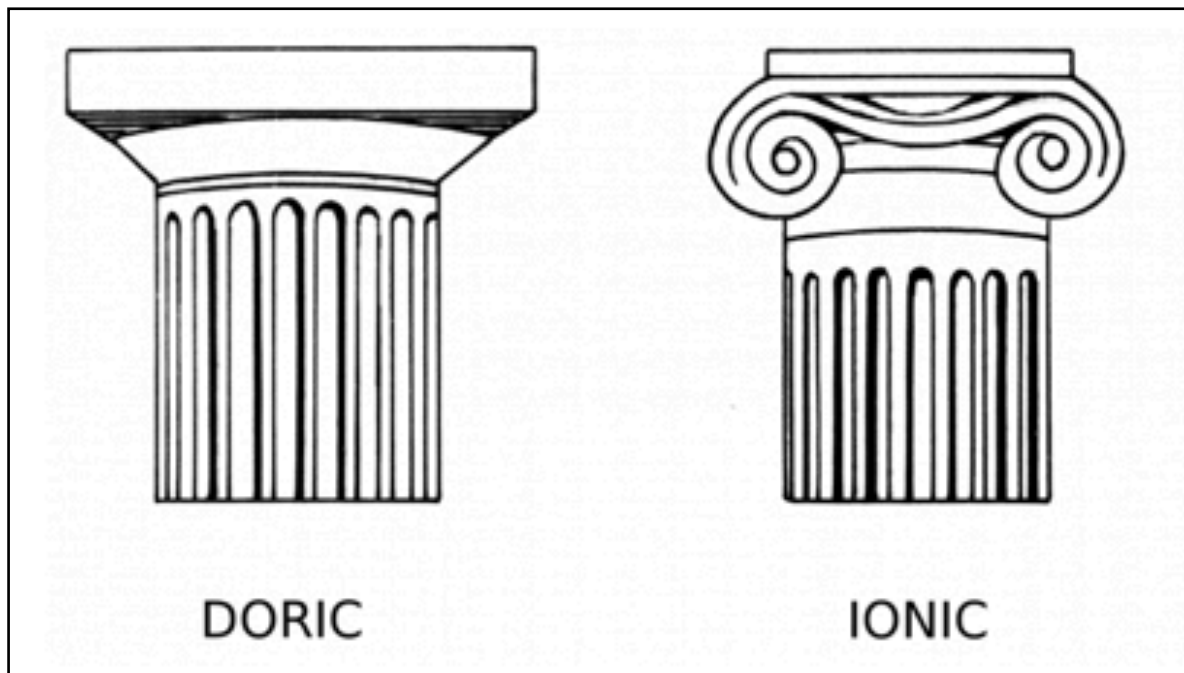


Hence at the time when Psamtik's son Necho II was King of Egypt, Necho II hired Phoenician sailors to find a sea route between the two seas. Setting sail from Egypt's Red Sea coast, the Phoenician sailors sailed their ships in a clockwise direction around the entire continent of Africa. Two years later, they had arrived at Egypt's Mediterranean Sea coast. At one point on their journey around Africa, the Phoenician sailors noticed that the sun was to their north. On the basis of that observation of theirs, they concluded that the earth is shaped like a ball!



While the Phoenicians were circumnavigating Africa, their royal employer Necho II of Egypt had grown impatient, and so he decided to create a route between the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea. In order to allow ships to sail directly from one sea to the other, Necho II began to have a canal dug through the Isthmus of Suez. Yet in the year 595 BCE, Necho II died, and his son Psamtik II became King of Egypt. Even though the canal project was still well underway, Psamtik II abandoned the project, and the Ancient Egyptians never again attempted to dig a Suez Canal.

Back in Greece, Periander of Corinth visited the Temple to Apollo in Delphi, where he sought advice from the Delphic Oracle on how to dig a canal through the Isthmus of Corinth. Speaking to Periander, the Oracle of Delphi said, "It is far too dangerous to dig that canal!" Perhaps fearing that Necho II had died as a result of trying to create the Suez Canal, Periander abandoned his plans for a Corinth Canal, and he instead directed the Corinthians to build the Δίολκος (or Haul-over), which was a limestone pathway that made it easier for ships to be hauled (or dragged) over the isthmus between the two gulfs. By controlling the shortest route between the two gulfs, the Corinthians were able to charge a toll to anyone who used the Δίολκος. In the end, the toll revenue from the Δίολκος was so great that he used the money to fund the construction of many new buildings with Doric-style columns all throughout Corinth.



Additionally, he funded the construction of a new temple, and he also hired poets, writers, and the fabulist Aesop to visit Corinth and entertain the Corinthians.

21. If you had been a Corinthian at the time when your country's brutal tyrant Periander had made your country prosper (and showered it with riches), would you have been a supporter of the tyrant? Why or why not? Explain.

22. When someone had asked him *why* he was a tyrant, Periander said, "It's just as dangerous for me to step down from power as it is for me to have my power taken away from me!" If you were a monarch of some sort, would you ever retire? Why or why not? Explain.

23. One way or another, every monarch loses their power. A monarch might die of old age while still in power, a monarch might have their power taken away from them, or a monarch might retire. Regardless how a monarch might lose their power, if you were a monarch, who would you want to govern your country after you're no longer the monarch of your country? After you're no longer the monarch of your country, how would you want your country to be governed? Would you want your country to remain a monarchy? Why or why not? Explain.

(a) If you'd *want* your country to remain a monarchy, then *who* would you want to be your successor (or replacement) as your country's monarch (and *why*)?

(b) If you *wouldn't* want your country to remain a monarchy, then *what* kind of government would you want to replace your country's monarchy (and *why*)?



24. As the second tyrannical King of Corinth, Periander wanted his son to succeed him, but he and his wife Lyside had two sons. Their younger son Lycophron was highly intelligent, and their eldest son Cypselus was dimwitted and feebleminded. According to the tradition at that time in Greece (and in the Near East), if a king dies then his eldest son becomes the new king. If you had been Periander, which one of your two sons would you have wanted to succeed you as King of Corinth (and why)? Explain.
25. Favoring greater intelligence over greater age, Periander decided that his highly intelligent younger son Lycophron (rather than his dimwitted older son Cypselus) ought to be the Crown Prince of Corinth. Yet, not all was well in the family. If you will recall, Periander's wife Lyside was the mother of their sons Cypselus and Lycophron. Yet one day in a violent fit of rage, Periander accidentally killed Lyside (by pushing her down a flight of stairs). Grieving her death, their son Lycophron refused to speak to Periander. To punish his son Lycophron, Periander banished the crown prince from the royal palace. Yet in spite of the punishment, Lycophron still refused to speak to his father Periander. Hence in order to put even more pressure on his son Lycophron, Periander then went so far as to pass a law making it illegal for each and every Corinthian to speak to Lycophron. Yet even so, Lycophron still would not speak to his father Periander, who fell into a depression. Four days after Periander had made it illegal for any Corinthian to speak to Lycophron, Lycophron was approached by Periander, who said, "Please, forgive me! Tell me what I must do to repair our relationship!" In response to his father's pleas, Lycophron said, "You have just broken your very own law! How can I respect a man who does not even obey his own law?" Is it ever okay to break your own rules? Why or why not? Explain.

In order not to continue breaking his own law, Periander shipped Lycophron off to the island of Corcyra, which was a Corinthian colony at the time.



Hoping to learn the location of a treasure that his dead friend had buried, Periander had met with the Oracle of the Dead (at the Acheron River in Thesprotia). Yet as soon as he had asked the oracle to reveal the location of the treasure, the ghost of Periander's wife Lyside appeared, and she said, "I will not reveal the location of the treasure, because I am cold. When you buried me, you buried my clothes with my body. You did not burn my clothes, so I cannot wear them!" As a result, Periander robbed all of the women's clothes of Corinth, and he burned them as he prayed to his dead wife Lyside. As a result, she finally had clothes to keep her warm in the afterlife, and so she told her widower Periander the location of the buried treasure. Yet according to another version of the story, he wanted to make a bronze statue, and so he robbed all of the Corinthian women of their bronze jewelry. Some of that bronze might have been used to make a tripod. Indeed by the year 594 BCE, Periander sent Thrasybulus a bronze tripod that was inscribed with an inscription, which read, "To whomever is wise." Yet, the tripod never made it to Miletus. Instead, the ship carrying it was shipwrecked in the Saronic Gulf, and the tripod fell to the bottom of the Athenian Sea.

Years later, Periander was ready to retire. To this point, he said, "Rest is beautiful!" Hoping to abdicate as King of Corinth, Periander asked his son Lycophron to return from Corcyra to Corinth. After initially refusing to become the next King of Corinth, Lycophron

eventually agreed strictly on the condition that Periander would take his place in Corcyra. Yet upon receiving the news that Periander would be spending his retirement in Corcyra, the Corcyrans murdered his son Lycophron. In revenge for the murder of his son, Periander had captured three-hundred young Corcyran men, whom he sent in chains to his friend Alyattes in Lydia, where they were to be mutilated and enslaved. In the year 585 BCE, Alyattes had died, and his son Croesus became King of Lydia. That same year, Periander abdicated (in order to retire), and his nephew Psammetichus became King of Corinth.

By the year 582 BCE, six sages had visited Croesus of Lydia.

- Pittacus of Mytilene
- Bias of Priene
- Solon of Athens
- Cleobulus of Lindos
- Chilon of Sparta
- Anacharsis the Scythian

Upon receiving the news about how *six* sages had visited Croesus in Lydia, a retired Periander invited the sages to visit him in Corinth. Outdoing (or one-upping) Croesus, *seven* sages had visited Periander. Indeed along with hosting the six sages who'd visited Croesus in Lydia, Periander also hosted the sage Thales of Miletus. The only *non*-Greek sage was Anacharsis, who left Greece when Periander and the other six sages went off to visit the Temple to Apollo in Delphi, where they authored the seven Delphic Maxims. Depending on the legend in question, Periander authored either one of the following two Delphic Maxims.

- \* “practice makes perfect” — “μελέτη ἔργον αὖξι”
- \* “control anger” — “χόλου κρατέειν”

After that, Periander returned to Corinth, where he planned his death.

Periander did not want anyone to know where he was buried. Accordingly, he had devised a plan. First, he told two of his most loyal servants to go out into the wilderness, kill the very first man they saw, and then bury the man. Then, he told four of his most loyal servants to follow the two men, kill them, and bury them. Finally, he told an even larger group of his loyal servants to follow the four men, kill them, and bury them. After giving his orders to the two men, to the four men, and to the larger group of men, Periander walked out into the wilderness, where the two men found him, killed him, and buried him. After that, the four men found the two men, killed the two men, and buried them. Finally, the larger group of men found the four men, killed them, and then buried them. As a result, Periander's grave was never found. By the year 582 BCE, Periander was dead, and his nephew Psammetichus was King of Corinth. Yet by the year 581 BCE, Periander's nephew Psammetichus was assassinated by powerful Corinthian families. As a result of the murder, the Kingdom of Corinth finally came to an end. Never again would Corinth be a kingdom.

In many of the various lists of the Seven Sages, Periander is listed as one of the Seven Sages of Greece. Yet according to legend, there never were Seven Sages of Greece. Rather, there only ever had been *five* Sages of Greece, and they were Chilon of Sparta, Thales of Miletus, Solon of Athens, Bias of Priene, and Pittacus of Mytilene. Yet jealous of the great reputation of the Five Sages of Greece, the tyrant Cleobulus of Lindos set out to fool the world into thinking that he was the sixth sage. To do this, he authored maxims very similar to the Delphic Maxims that the Five Sages had authored, and he used his political influence to circulate his manufactured maxims, which were very similar to the authentic Delphic Maxims. Hence even though Cleobulus was *neither* wise or *nor* virtuous, many

people began to think of him as the sixth of the Six Sages of Greece. Intrigued by what Cleobulus had done, Periander of Corinth decided to do the same. Hence even though he *also* was neither wise nor virtuous, Periander soon became regarded as the seventh of the Seven Sages. Although there is no way to know for sure whether or not Periander truly was one of the Seven Sages of Greece, the tyrant has become immortalized in the history of Ancient Greek thought