Aristophanes’ *The Clouds*
Minoan civilization
2200-1500 BCE
Mycenaean civilization
1600-1200 BCE

Groce in the Bronze Age. Three distinctive civilizations—Cycladic, Minoan, and Mycenaean—developed around the Aegean Sea in the third and second millennia BCE.
Age of Heroes
Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*
Historical timeline

- Codification of laws by Draco
- Athenian democracy established by Solon
- Panathenaic Festival established
- Rule of tyrants in Athens
- 621 BCE
- 594 BCE
- 566 BCE
- 546-510 BCE
Historical timeline

- First tragedy performed at Dionysian Festival
- Cleisthenes introduces further democratic reforms
- Persian Wars
- 534 BCE
- 508 BCE
- 490-479 BCE
Persian War

The Persian Wars
490 - 479 BC

Greek opponents of Persia
Extent of revolt by Greek city states: 500 - 494 BC
Neutral Greek states
Post-Persian War: Sparta v. Athens
### Inevitable Conflict

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sparta</th>
<th>Athens</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Monarchy</td>
<td>- Democracy</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Conglomeration of villages with dual kings</td>
<td>- Polis with surrounding urban center</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Conservative society</td>
<td>- Progressive society</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Militaristic (hoplites)</td>
<td>- Inclusivity of citizenship</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Independent women</td>
<td>- Naval power</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Slaves/ <em>helots</em> (majority)</td>
<td>- Trading power</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Confederation</td>
<td>- Delian League</td>
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Age of Pericles: Route to War
458-446 BCE

- Sparta attempts to prevent rebuilding Athens’ walls
- Spartan helot revolt
- Athens dominates/abuses Delian League
- Spartan allies: disadvantaged in trade
- Athens v. Sparta, Corinth, Aegina
Results of “First Peloponnesian War”

- Fortification of Athens
- Transfer of Delian treasury to Athens
- Respect for alliance system
- Athens abandons any land in Peloponnesia
- Proposed 15 years of peace
Age of Pericles: Golden Age of Athens

- 447 BCE: Construction of Parthenon begins
- 445-426 BCE: Herodotus writes his Histories
- Public works programs to feed the poor
- Athenians to live without paying taxes
  - Delian League funds?
  - Profits of Athenian merchants?
Peloponnesian War
431-404 BCE
Pericles’ Strategy

- Avoid conflict with superior Spartan *hoplites* on land
- Defense
  - Retreat within Athens’ walls
- Harrass by sea
  - Enemy trade routes and coastal cities
  - Prolong war beyond Spartan ability to continue
Peloponnesian War
431-404 BCE

- Dependence on grain from Egypt & the Crimea
  - Olive farms and vineyards destroyed
- Property values decline
- Population decline
  - 431 BCE - 172,000 citizens
  - 425 BCE - 116,000
- Plague of Athens begins -- 430 BCE
  - Pericles voted out of office and fined — dies in 429 BCE
- Athens suit for peace rejected
Cleon

- prosecutes and replaces Pericles (d. 429 BCE)
  - anti-nobility
  - fierce hatred of Sparta
  - charismatic
  - “sycophantic”
- 429 BCE: Recommends execution of all Mytilene males
- 425 BCE: co-general of land victory @ Sphacteria
  - Spartan prisoners taken
  - Changed course of war
  - Personal glory—free meals at the prytaneum
- 425 BCE: Prosecutes Laches after unsuccessful expedition to Sicily
Aristophanes

- 447 – 388 BCE (?) 
- Athenian -- Son of Phillippus
- Early plays establish him as Master of Old Comedy
  - The Banqueters (427 BCE)
  - The Babylonians (426 BCE)
- 40 plays in 40 years
  - 11 extant
  - Only Old Comedy plays extant
Old Comedy/ Aristophanes’ style

- Diverse audience
- Complex structure
- Pushed humor to its limits—from situational to ribald
  - Caricature, satire, ribald humor
- Diverse poetic forms
- Gods, politicians, ordinary people = targets
  - Emphasis on real people and local events
- “licensed buffonery”
- Close to slander/ libel
The Acharnians (425 BCE)
7th year of the war

- Insists that the miseries consequent on the War especially affecting the rural population
- Satires the tragedian Euripides
- Dikaiopolis wins a private peace treaty with Sparta
  - Ambassador from Persia
  - Grandee from Persia w/ effete Athenians as eunuchs
  - Corrupt mercenaries
  - Acharnian farmers/
    ex-soldiers
  - General Lachamus
The Knights (424 BCE)

8th year of the war

• Attacks Cleon, the Progressives, and the War policy
  • Agoracritus, vies w/Cleon for the confidence & approval of Demos (“The People”)
  • Agoracritus emerges triumphant from a series of contests and restores Demos to former glory
Athens, 434 BCE

- Cleon in power (d. 422 BCE)
- General Laches persuades Athenian Assembly for truce with Sparta
  - Truce violated by Sparta
The Clouds (423 BCE)
9th year of the war

- Satirizes Socrates, the sophists, and the “New Education”
- Unsuccessful in March, 423 BCE at Great Dionysia
- Revised to get a better response by reader (420-413 BCE)
Focus Questions

- What is Old Comedy? How is this play representative of this dramatic genre?
- Why does Aristophanes ridicule Socrates and the sophists in this play?
- Does this play contribute to the death of Socrates?
- Why did *The Clouds* place last in the Dionysian competition in Athens in 423 BCE?
- How effective is this play for modern readers?
Chronology of the plays

- **The Wasps** (422 BCE)  
  10th year of the war

- **Peace** (421 BCE)  
  11th year of the war

- **The Birds** (414 BCE)  
  18th year of the war

- **Lysistrata** (411 BCE)  
  21st year of the war
Chronology of the plays

- The Women celebrating the Thesmophoria
  - (411 BCE)
  - 21st year of the war
- The Frogs (405 BCE)
  - 27th year of the war
- The Assemblywomen (392 BCE)
- Wealth (Plutus) (388 BCE)