

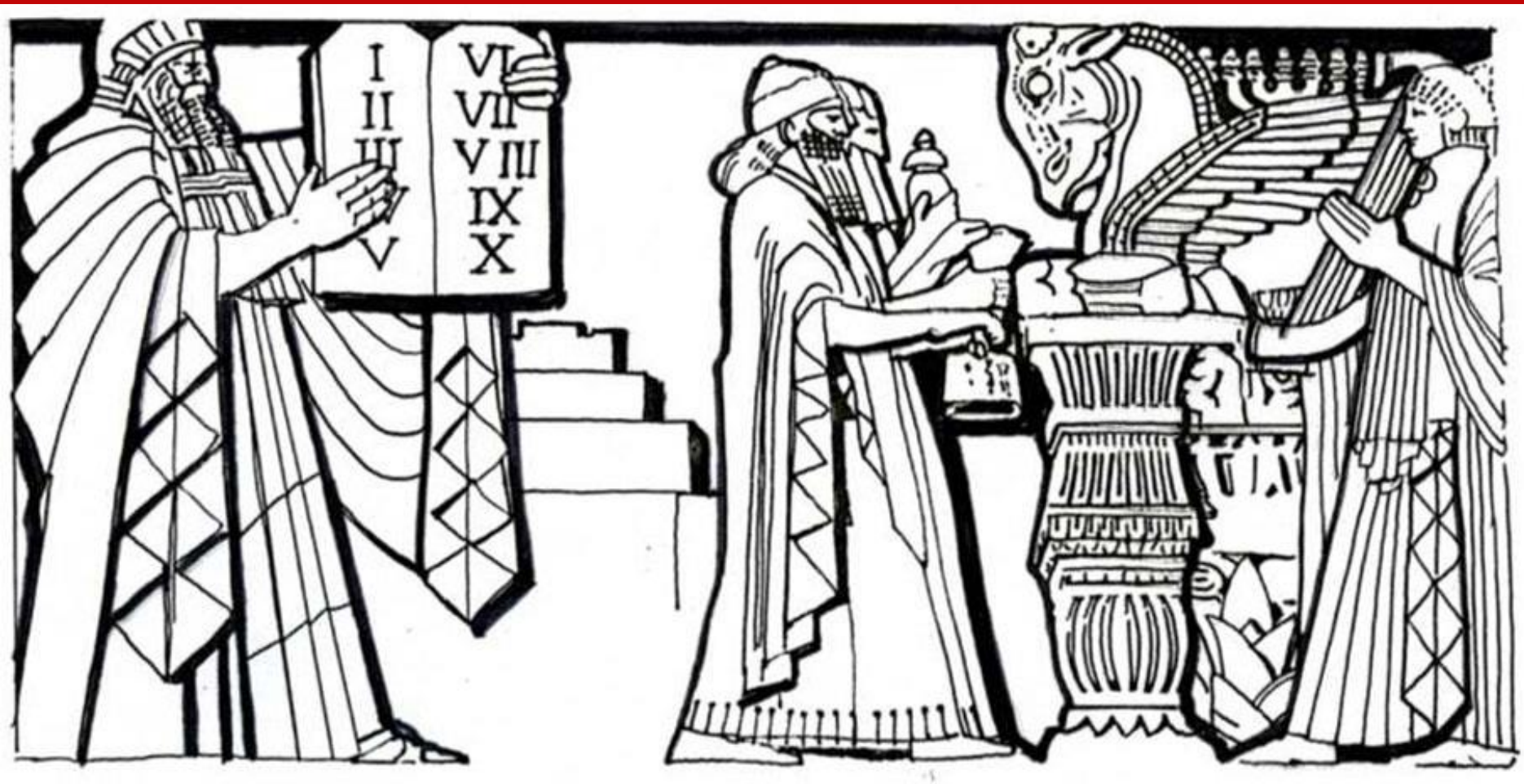
# Ghosts of Western Civilization Haunt the Nebraska State Capitol

The Capitol is a memorial to the men of Nebraska who fell in service of their country in the Great War--WWI. The broad square base and rising central tower mimic a pyramid, a memorial and funeral architecture of ancient Egypt. Soldiers fell on the European battle fields believing they were creating a world where peace would reign, fighting the war to end all wars. They hoped the blood they spilled would end thousands of years of the bloody history of Western Civilization.



Western civilization is filled with bloody events, some represented in Lee Lawrie's exterior relief sculpture circling the Nebraska Capitol. Above the county names on the west façade bloodshed and death influenced society's move toward a more civilized life.



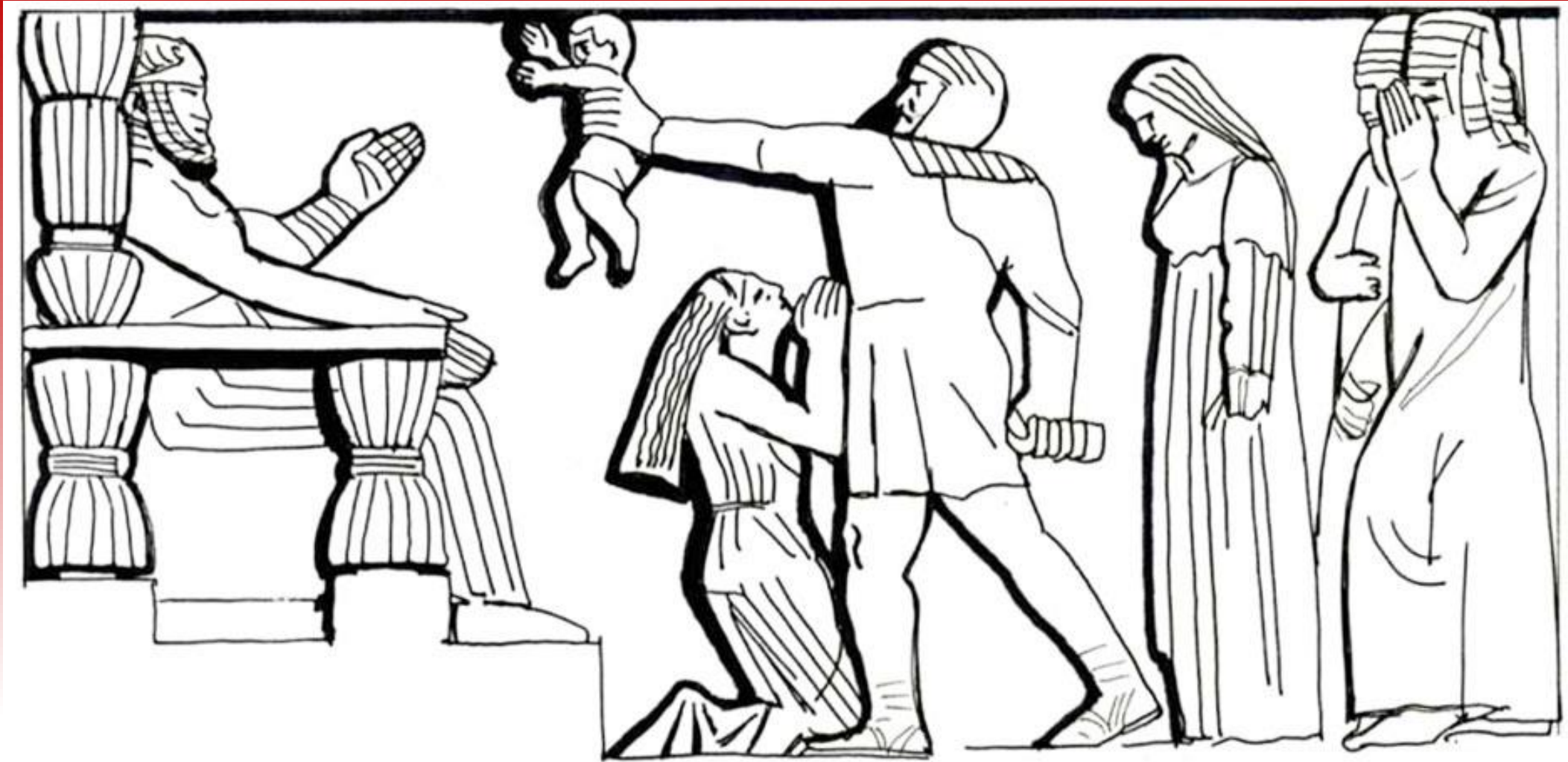


The story of Hebrew Law begins in the northwest corner with the Commandments. Moses returns to the Israelites with the tablets and encounters his people venerating a golden calf. Moses instructs that the thousands who worshipped the calf be slain by sword.



Around the corner west, Deborah administers justice under a palm. A wise leader, she rallied men to fight against their enemies and inspired murder. Early Hebrew history is filled with war and treachery as tribal leaders fight for dominance.

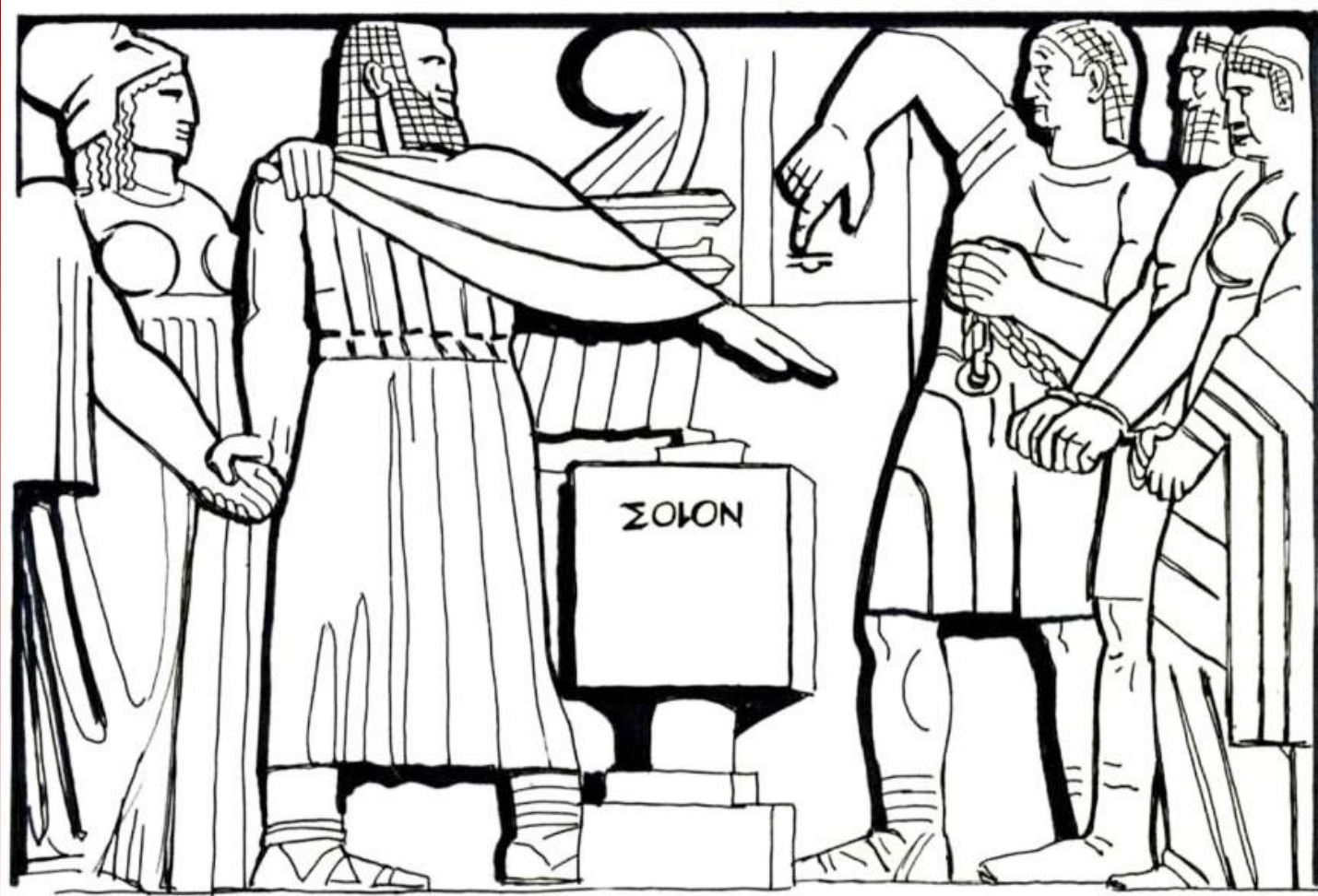




Next, Solomon threatens to cut a baby in half and give equal parts to the two women claiming the child wisely knowing the true mother would be willing to give up her child to save it. Solomon was divinely inspired in his application of the law.

The panels on the West pavilion show the Greeks and Romans working to build a more just society. Throughout the ancient world the wealthy classes used their wealth and power to prevent the poor from gaining political power.

Left to right:



In ancient Greece, Solon, a war hero, returns to find Athens ruled by tyrants who oppress the lower classes by enslaving families for non-payment of debts. Elected chief magistrate, he introduces a new constitution eliminating slavery for debts and gives the lower classes more rights, opening public service and leadership roles to most citizens, not just the elite and wealthy.





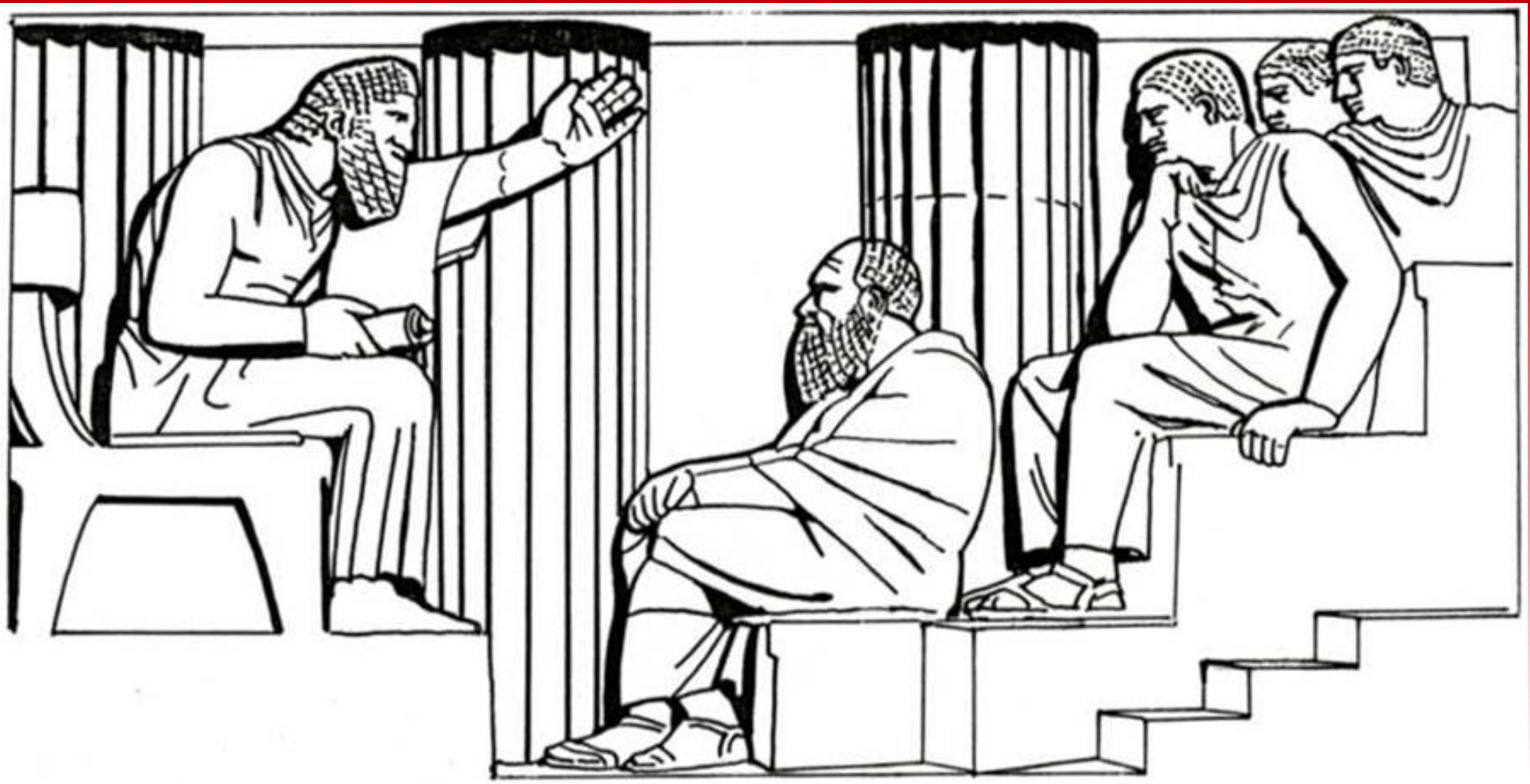
The Publishing of the Twelve Tables in Rome codified laws that had been in practice for many years and allowed all people access to the law. Leaders could no longer make up their own laws or manipulate the existing traditions.



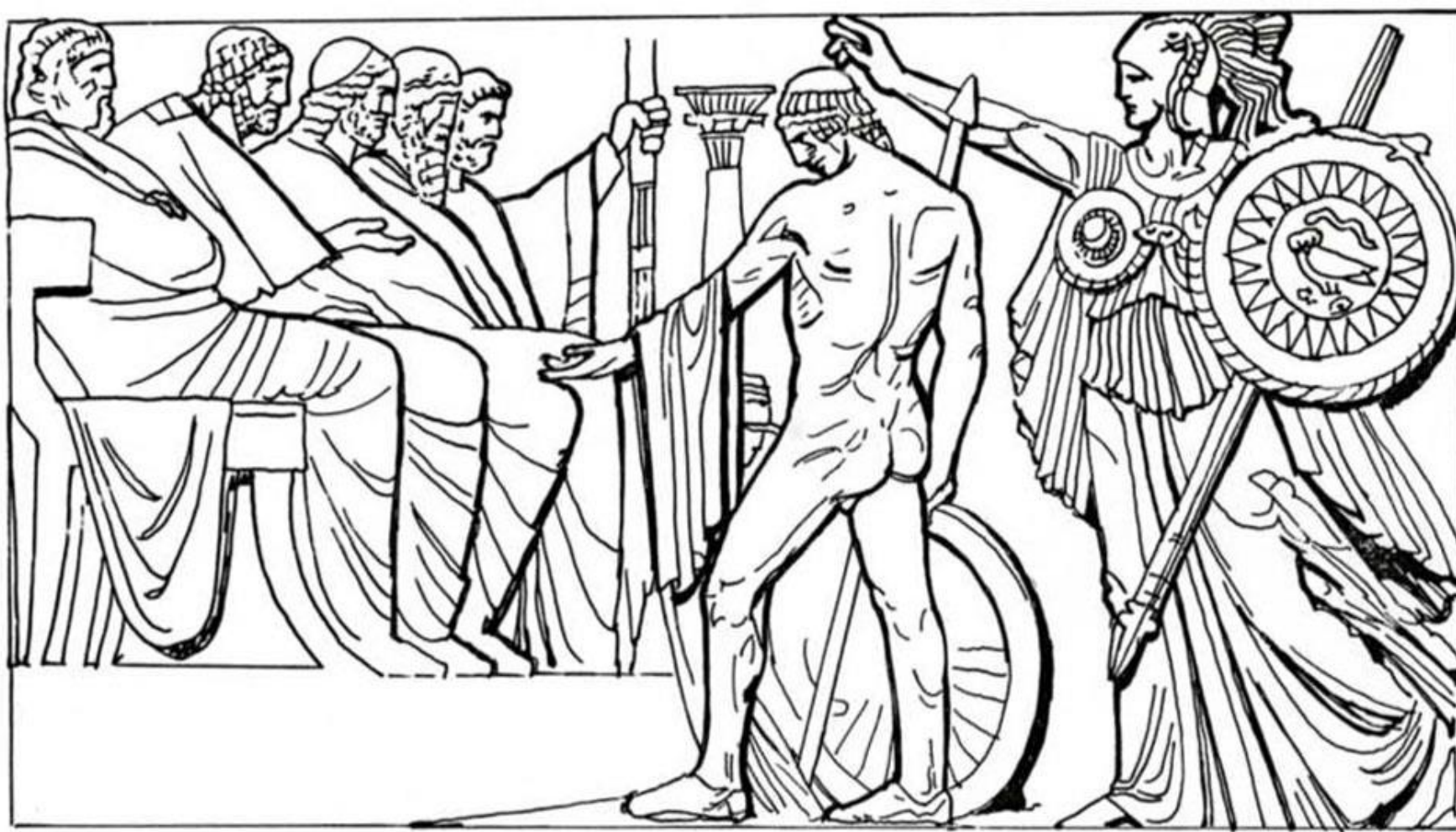
The final panel of the trio is the Establishment of the Tribune of the People. A powerful patrician magistrate manipulates facts so he can claim a free born girl as a slave. As her father pleads for his daughter's freedom, the patrician filled tribunate rules against them. After this unjust ruling, the father kills his daughter to preserve her honor and keep her from slavery. The horror of this event leads to the expansion of the tribunate to include the lower classes, balancing the power of the elites with plebeian interests.

The last two panels on the west façade represent events from Greek history.





Plato's dialogues provide the basis for understanding western political thought and are a record of Socrates' philosophy. Plato, a student of Socrates, teaches in the Academy. Socrates is included in the relief, indicating his influence on Plato. Socrates drank poison hemlock rather than renounce his political views.



The southern-most panel on the west side is a scene from Euripides tragic play “Orestes”. Orestes, returning from war, learns his mother has murdered her husband and his lover. Orestes is bound by blood to avenge his father and kill his mother. The bloody revenge murders end when the goddess Athena pleads Orestes case in front of the Areopagus. A judicial body, rather than an individual, shall provide justice.

The ancient foundations of Western Civilization are covered in blood.

These events paved the way for leaders and citizens to create the legal documents on the south façade of the Capitol which provide a framework for modern democratic governments.

From the oppression of individuals by the powerful leaders of ancient civilizations, the individual freedoms represented on the east façade of the Capitol evolved.