A COMPANION
TO GREEK
DEMOCRACY AND
THE ROMAN
REPUBLIC

Edited by
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WILEY Blackwell
CHAPTER 2


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1 Introduction, Questions, Sources

Ancient Greek democracy emerged in its most fully developed form in Athens in the mid-fifth century BCE. Naturally, under the conditions prevailing in the ancient world, women, noncitizens, and slaves were excluded from political rights (Cartledge 2002a: chs. 4–5; Raafslaub 1998: 26–36); in world history, the political enfranchisement of women and the full integration of the descendants of slaves are very recent phenomena, and noncitizens generally remain excluded. Despite these limitations, Athenian democracy was most radical in realizing the idea of an egalitarian and participatory citizen community; it was unparalleled in the ancient world, and after its demise at the end of the fourth century it was not matched again for more than two millennia. Emerging in an extraordinary constellation after the Persian Wars and, remarkably, in an imperial city, this democracy remained exceptional. But more moderate democracies sprang up in other Greek communities as well.

Earlier, by the end of the sixth century, “proto-democratic” or “isonomic” constitutions, based on the equal participation of at least the landowning citizens who qualified for service in the army, became quite common in the Greek world. They resulted from a long process of development that the extant evidence permits us to follow from the mid-seventh to the late sixth century. Even earlier, reflecting conditions in the eighth to early seventh century, the epics of Homer and Hesiod offer insights into the interaction of leaders, councils, and assemblies, and the role of these as yet informal institutions in communal life. Other evidence too suggests a widespread political culture that, lacking centralized power and authoritarian structures, was to some extent based on civic equality and elements of “people’s power.” This was the foundation upon which the Greek polis (pl. poleis, see below) developed in the ninth and eighth centuries.

This chapter will discuss the development of participatory *polis* constitutions from their earliest informal traces to fully developed democracy. Unlike historians of early Rome, those of archaic (c.750–480 BCE) and classical Greece (480–c.320) are able to rely on contemporaneous written sources, whether literary or epigraphical. Initially, with the exception of written laws, such evidence is limited to poetry. Prose emerged only in the late sixth century (Grethlein 2011), and literature with specifically political content was not produced before the fifth. But in the small face-to-face societies of Greek *polis*, the poets not only entertained but also educated their audiences and voiced public concerns (Maehler 1963; Nagy 1989). Hence political thinking is pervasive in early Greek poetry (Raafaba 2000). The dramatic poets and historians of the fifth century inherited this public function and often reflected on issues that agitated their contemporaries (Meier 1993; Boedeker and Raafaba 2005; Raafaba 2010). From the late fifth century, political pamphlets, inscriptions, political and court speeches, the *Constitution of the Athenians* (*Ath. Pol.*) produced in Aristotle’s school, and Xenophon’s, Plato’s, and especially Aristotle’s works of political theory and philosophy illuminate political decisions, procedures, structures, and constitutions on an ever broader scale. Later writers, such as Plutarch and Pausanias, add valuable material that, however, requires critical assessment.

Those readers who wish to learn more about the historical background to the developments discussed in this chapter will find rich information in the titles listed in “Further Reading” at the end of this chapter.

2 Foundations and Early Stages: The Eighth and Early Seventh Centuries

The magnificent “Mycenaean” Bronze Age civilization ended around 1200 BCE in a wave of destruction that affected the entire eastern Mediterranean (Ward and Joukowsky 1992; Dickinson 1994) initiated a long period of decline. The subsequent centuries (c.1200–800, often called the “Dark Age” (Osborne 1996; Snodgrass 2000; Dickinson 2006), were characterized by regional and local focuses. People lived in villages under the leadership of “chiefs,” who counted their wealth in herds and excelled in raids of neighboring villages or coasts (*Od.* 9.39–61; 14.211–275; see also Farenga, Chapter 6, on early notions of authority).

Gradual recovery began around 1000 BCE. Populations increased, farming became more prominent, international contacts intensified, and new types of communities, the *polis*, emerged. The *polis* was a citizen community rather than a city-state (Hansen 1993a). It had a main settlement, but cities developed much later, if at all. “The men are the polis,” says Thucydides (7.77.7; cf. Hdt. 8.61), preceded centuries earlier by the poet Alcaeus (frs. 112.10; 426 in Campbell 1982); hence Homer’s Greek soldiers in their fortified camp near Troy or Xenophon’s 10,000 mercenaries form *polis*, though temporary ones (Raafaba 1993: 47–48; Hornblower 2004). This explains the *polis* egalitarian foundations. Despite their ambitions and pretensions, members of an emerging elite were large farmers and did not stand far above the other free farmers. The landowning citizens fought in the army and sat in the assembly; members of the elite formed a council and provided leadership. As *polis* territories filled up, land became scarce and was contested both within and among *polis*. Wars between neighboring communities for booty or land were frequent and intense.

By the end of the seventh century, the agora was also a market, but, as in the other cases, it is dependent on the communal society in which it appears.

In the following section we deal with the further development of the Mycenaean political tradition in the Greek world.
or land became more frequent, well attested in the *Iliad* (11.670–761; 18.509–540) and in traditions about early Greek warfare (Raafaelb 1997b).

By the eighth century, in many parts of Greece the *polis* was the normal type of community (Thomas and Conant 1999). A more rapid pace of development began. This is also the "age of Homer." The historicity of "epic society" has elicited much controversy but, in contrast to the foregrounded events and heroic actions, their social background is depicted with sufficient consistency to reflect a historical society that can be dated to the eighth or early seventh century (Finkelberg 2011: 359–361, 682, 810–813). In this society, and in the epics' narrative, collective decision-making plays a prominent role.

In the story of his adventures, Odysseus mentions the outrageous and lawless Cyclopes. These people have no institutions, no meetings for counsels; rather they make their habitations in caverns hollowed among the peaks of the high mountains, and each one is the law for his own wives and children, and cares nothing about the others.

*(Od. 9.112–115, trans. Lattimore 1967)*

The poet conceptualizes here an atomized "non-community," consisting of unconnected, autonomous family units: the extreme opposite of civilised society. By contrast, normal human society is organized by the structures of a *polis*. The idealized epic Phaeacians too live in a *polis* with all its essential features (6.262–268: walls, harbor, sanctuary, and a permanent assembly place); they have shared norms and meetings for communal decision making, and are governed by a council of elders and a recognized leader (bks. 6–8, 13; Scully 1990).

A strong focus on the community pervades the epics, signaled already in the proem of the *Iliad* (1.1–7) that emphasizes not great deeds of mighty heroes but the misery caused by the quarrel of two leaders. The epic's story line highlights good and bad leadership, exemplified by Hector and Agamemnon (Raafaelb 2000: 29–31), and the leaders' interaction with peers and community in council and assembly. The leader, a *prima inter pares*, owes his privileges (materially and ideally) to the community and must justify them through good leadership (II. 12.310–321). His duty is to make sure that his "people be safe, not perish" (1.117; 2.233–334).

In the epic *polis* all citizens, except for the poor and landless, have important communal functions in army and assembly (Raafaelb 1997a, 2008). There is a sense of a public realm, separated from the private, and an awareness of a communal will and action, attributed collectively to the people, both domestically and in dealing with other *polises*. Leader and community depend on each other. The *agōrē* represents the middle of the community where important communal acts take place. Descriptions of meetings and scattered references illustrate procedures (Finkelberg 2011: 104, 143). Though not regulated, the assembly plays an indispensable communal role: every decision is made in assembly (*agōrē*), and even the gods meet in assembly (II. 4.1–72; Od. 1.22–95; Flai̇g 1994). Although they do not vote, the men express their opinion unmistakably by voice or feet, and it is difficult to act against their firmly expressed opinion (Od. 13.239; cf. II. 15.721–723). If the leader ignores their will and fails he is in trouble. A good leader listens to his peers' advice and follows the best proposal. Consensus and conflict resolution are important; hence the ideal leader is best in fighting, *and speaking* (II. 1.274; 3.216–224; 9.440–443; Od. 8.169–173).
Normally the elite leaders speak; despite a hierarchy of power and age (II. 9.31–36, 50–62; 14.109–227), they are roughly equal. Yet any man who has something useful to contribute will be heard. Lowly Thersites (2.211–277) gets disciplined not for venting the anger of the masses and berating Agamemnon for his neglect of duty (222–223, 233–242) but because he speaks "not according to order" (kosmos, 213–214) and thus violates traditional norms.

An especially informative assembly takes place at the beginning of the Odyssey (2.6–257; Raafaelub 2000: 32–33). Clearly, the assembly is expected to deal only with public (démion: 30–32), not with private business, not even that of the leader. The people therefore remain silent and passive, when Telemachus appeals to them for support in his quarrel with his mother's suitors. But in a crucial episode (229–241) a speaker directs attention precisely to the question of when the community should get involved. What appears to be a private conflict, he says, is in fact of utmost importance to the community because it determines the relationship between leader and polis and thereby the well-being of all (230–234; cf. 4.687–695; 16.424–432). For the first time in extant Greek thinking a cause-and-effect relationship is here observed on a primarily political level and then applied to a political issue.

Although this effort to stir the people into action remains unsuccessful, the suitors are alarmed by Telemachus' initiative and the potential danger he poses to them (4.630–672). Their attempt to assassinate him fails. And now they have reason to fear the people:

So act! before he can gather his people in assembly.
... He'll rise and rage away, shouting out to them all how we,
we schemed his sudden death but never caught him.
Hearing of our foul play... they might do us damage, run us off our lands,
drive us abroad...


The people thus represent a potential force, and if provoked sufficiently, their collective will might translate into uncontrolled action (cf. 16.424–432). In the Iliad, Paris and the war he has provoked are not popular among the Trojans (3.454; 7.390). Chastising him for his poor performance, Hector says:

What cowards, the men of Troy—or years ago
they'd have decked you out in a suit of rocky armor,
stoned you to death for all the wrongs you've done!
(II. 3.56–57; trans. Fagles 1990)

On the Greek side, Agamemnon experiences humiliation when the masses, instead of rising to his challenge, rush to the ships, thus voting with their feet to abandon the war (II. 2.84–154).

To sum up, the epics show us early citizen communities in which council and assembly are firmly established forums for the performance of politics (Hammer 2002) and the centers of communal and political life. The poet takes them for granted and usually thinks with these institutions, occasionally even about them. Although not formally regulated, these institutions are crucial for sounding out popular opinion and forming as well as expressing a collective conscience. Hence the leader's relationship to the polis.

The poet was especially critical of the "worker aristocrats" who settle down, competing with the farm owners. Hesiod, Homer, and as an average citizen, Herodotus relies primarily on "crooked laws" (Rhoades 2000: 34–37) and "f fashion," to describe him with the words "too many for the state, too little for the tongue" (person, FF 2.135); "impartial in judgments" (2.114). It makes clear that he is not a corollary of a citizen, but of a city.

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expressing a communal will that a leader disregards at his peril. The masses of citizens are seen as capable of taking common action and perceived as a potential power factor. Hence the leader’s and the elite’s ability to control this factor by persuasion, and a positive relationship between leaders and masses are decisive for the communal well-being.

The poet who dramatizes these issues from a communal perspective that can be critical of the leaders is not an elite person but an itinerant specialist, a δημιουργός (“worker among the people”; Od. 17.382–386; Vriller 1980), and thus, even if he settles down, an outsider (μετονομές, “resident alien”; Gschüttner 1981: 29, 33–34), competing with others for acclaim and remuneration (Hes. WD 17–26, 654–659). Hesiod, Homer’s younger contemporary and author of didactic epics, presents himself as an average farmer who keeps away from the town with its legal or political fights, relies primarily on his neighbors, and chastises the elite judges as corrupt and prone to render “crooked judgments” (220–224, 248–251, 260–264; Millett 1984; Raafflaub 2000: 34–37). Conversely, in characterizing Zeus as an ideal leader, Hesiod links him with the personifications of justice, good order, peace, memory (important for upholding communal norms), and the Muses who bless a leader with a “honeyed tongue” (persuasive speech) to lead his people with expert knowledge and “straight judgments” (Theog. 901–903, 81–93). Again, the poet’s choice of words and images makes clear that leadership rests on persuasion, not sheer power. This requires as a corollary a citizen body and assembly that play a communally significant role.

3 From Civil Strife to Civic Integration: The Formalization of Institutions in the Late Seventh and Sixth Centuries

The eighth century was a period of rapid change and “structural revolution” (Snodgrass 1980; Morris 1998). From the late eighth to the sixth century (Osborne 1996; Fisher and van Wees 1998; Hall 2007; Raafflaub and van Wees 2009) Greeks founded new poleis along the coasts from the western Mediterranean to the Black Sea. Social and economic tensions caused civil strife, facilitated the rise of temporary monarchies (“tyrannies”, Murray 1993: ch. 9; Lewis 2009), and necessitated new ways of resolving conflicts through communal legislation and the appointment of lawgivers (below). In this period the Greeks formed their unique culture (Meier 2011) and developed political thought (Meier 1990; Raafflaub 2000), philosophy (Barnes 1979; Kirk et al. 1983), and a variety of literary genres (Raafflaub 2009b). They stabilized the polis by regulating officials and institutions and aspired to realize a “good order” (eunomia) based on justice, responsible and accountable leadership, and the political involvement of large numbers of citizens. Prompted by opposition to tyranny and based on the political involvement of at least the landowning citizens capable of fighting on equal terms in the heavily armed infantry (hoplite) army (van Wees 2004), new “isonomic” polis constitutions emerged (Robinson 1997), reflecting the value of political equality (isonomia; Raafflaub 1996). Three cases of broad reform in Sparta and Athens, based on the newly discovered potential of communally enacted laws, best represent these developments.

Legal texts had been inscribed in the ancient Near East for millennia. Influenced by this habit but using it differently (Raafflaub 2009a: 41–48), Greek poleis began in the mid-seventh century to enact and inscribe laws. Prompted by negative experiences,
many of these laws dealt with political issues and government, attesting to the process of formalizing institutions and "institutionalizing" the polis (Gagarin 1986, 2008; Thomas 2005; Farenga 2006; Hawke 2011).

The earliest extant law begins with "This was decided by the polis" (Meiggs and Lewis 1988: 2; Effenteurre and Ruzé 1994: 81; trans. Fornara 11); similar formulae occur in other laws: it was thus the collectivity of citizens that enacted laws. This particular law shows that by 650 BCE, the small polis of Dreros on Crete had several officials and regulated rotation in the chief office. From other laws we learn about a variety of officials, a council of elders, and a "popular council" with specific powers (ML 8; Effenteurre and Ruzé 1994: 62; Fornara 19). Tradition remembered lawmakers (below) who enacted clusters of laws (Hölkeskamp 1999). An inscribed collection of laws has survived in Gortyn on Crete (Willett 1967), while much of Solon’s comprehensive legislation is cited by later authors (below).

Early laws suggest that poleis acted with a collective will and voice, had a differentiated government apparatus they tried to regulate, and defined their membership and relations with others. Laws were tools to realize the community’s will and to change its order and institutions. They were inscribed, mostly on stone monuments, and thus intended to be visible and to last; that they were often placed in sacred places under divine protection demonstrated respect for the law and the gods (Thomas 1996; Whitley 1998). Laws were thus fixed and made accessible, which improved the security of law (Eder 2005), but they also became changeable. Realizing that they had control over their law, and recognizing its significance for communal stability, communities expanded, refined, and adapted it to changing needs. Greek law thus was dynamic. Like Greek culture in general (Meier 2011), Greek legal culture was developed from a position in the middle of citizen communities. This facilitated constitutional creativity and reform.

4 Sparta’s “Great Rhetra,” the Sovereignty of the Demos, and the Restoration of Eunomia

In several wars the Spartans subdued Laconia and Messenia. Their polis subsequently comprised an exceptionally large slave population (helots) and numerous dependent communities (perioikoi). According to tradition, the Messenians rose in revolt around the mid-seventh century and were subjected again in a long and difficult war that caused civil strife (stasis) and disorder (hakonomia), until a lawyer, Lycurgus, restored internal stability and a "good order" (eunomia; Hdt. 1.65–66; Thuc. 1.18). Lycurgus' historicity is disputed, and many of the reforms attributed to him (Plut. Lyg.) date to a later period. As archaeological evidence and poetry show, Sparta long shared the culture of other Greek poleis. Its rigidly militaristic system evolved gradually from the late seventh to the fifth century, probably in response to the need to control the large dependent population. Although much of this continues to be debated, recent research has profoundly improved our understanding of early Spartan history (Finley 1981; Hodkinson 2000; Cartledge 2002a; Welwei 2004; Luraghi 2008).

Perhaps also as a consequence of the Messenian crisis, the precarious minority status of the citizens (Spartiates) in their large polis, and the crucial importance the Spartiate army assumed in defending the citizens’ privileges, Sparta enacted the earliest known polis constitution, the “Great Rhetra” (“Pronouncement”; Effenteurre and Ruzé 1994: 61,
Fornara 12). Scholars agree on its essential authenticity, though not on details (van Wees 1999; Cartledge 2002b: 113–117; Welwei 2004: 59–69). Plutarch (Lyc. 6) mentions a new sanctuary, new civic subdivisions, and a gerousia (council of elders), including the two leaders (archontes, also called basileis, kings); assembly meetings were to be held regularly on the festival day of Apollo at a specified place, "so as to propose and stand aside. But to the people shall belong the authority to respond[?] and power [kratos]."

"Making proposals" is unproblematic, while "to stand aside" seems corrupted; perhaps the demos responded to proposals made by others. Undoubtedly, the demos was intended to hold power. In an elegy entitled "Eunomia" (fr. 4.3–10 in West 1992), the poet Tyrtaeus defines a hierarchy of speaking: first the "kings," second the other members of the gerousia, last the commoners. The demos has the final decision (nikē) and in this sense power (kratos).

The two documents complement each other, suggesting both a civic/military and a political reform. New civic subdivisions elsewhere (in Athens and early Rome) reflect organizational adjustments necessitated by hoplite fighting. The reform's communal importance was emphasized by placing it under the protection of Zeus and Athena. The institutions and process of decision making were regulated. The gerousia (Schulz 2011) now consisted specifically of thirty men, distinguished by age and experience. The fixed number implies an election; the method was collective shouting (Plut. Lyc. 26). Attested in early Rome as well (suffragium, vote, from frangere, noise), this method is valuable because it takes into account both numbers and the strength of voters' feelings (Flaig 1993). Although the demos ultimately decided, the councilors introduced proposals, spoke first, and apparently retained some kind of veto power (Plut. Lyc. 6.7–8). Whether there was open discussion remains unclear. Five ephors were later added to the system. Elected for one-year terms by the assembly, they somehow represented the demos and balanced the power of leaders and gerousia (Richer 1998).

Overall, the Rhetra formalized the assembly's decision-making power by placing the final decision firmly in the hands of the citizen-soldiers, the bomoni, "peers" (Cartledge 2001: 68–75). Despite all restrictions, it sealed the demos' sovereignty in a system that was characterized by "good order" (eunomia).

5 Solon's Reforms in Athens, the Restoration of Eunomia, and the Institutionalization of Civic Responsibility

Widespread social and economic crisis, intense rivalries among elite families, and their ruthless exploitation of dependent labor, debt, and debt bondage (Finley 1981: ch. 9) resulted in social unrest (stasis) that prompted the Athenians in 594 BCE to appoint Solon chief magistrate (archōn) and mediator with full power to enact necessary reforms (Welwei 1992: 150–206; Blok and Lardinois 2006; Wallace 2007; Meier 2011: ch. 21).

Offering a peaceful resolution, such mediators or "straighteners" (kurtartistēs) were a uniquely Greek response to stasis and the threat of tyranny. They were connected with the Delphic oracle (that advocated moderation) and, standing above the conflicting parties, represented a "third position" (Meier 1990: 40–52). As "sages," they enjoyed far-reaching authority (Wallace 2009). Their power was similar to that of a tyrant—Aristotle calls Pittacus of Mytilene an "elected tyrant" (Pol. 1285a35ff.), and
Solon apparently could easily have assumed the same position (fr. 33, cf. 32 in West 1992)—but the crucial difference was that these “straighteners” were appointed by the community and acted on its behalf. Solon explicitly addresses the Athenians as a fellow citizen (fr. 4.1–8, 30, 36.1–2 in West 1992), standing between the conflicting parties and preventing either from hurting the other or profiting unjustly (fr. 5, 36.20–27; 37 in West 1992).

Solon formulated his ideas and justified his actions in extant poems (collected in West 1992: pp. 139–168; trans. in West 1994: 74–83); many of his laws survive (Ruschenbusch 1966, 2010). Aristotle’s (Ath. Pol. 5–13) and Plutarch’s (Solon) description of his activities draw mostly on this evidence. A programmatic elegy (also entitled “Eunomia”) offers insight into the theoretical foundations of his reforms (fr. 4 in West 1992). Emphasizing that not the gods but the citizens themselves are responsible for their fate (ibid., lines 1–4) and that it is greed and abuses especially of the leaders (5–6) that cause stasis with disastrous consequences for all (ibid., lines 18–25), Solon constructs an inescapable chain of cause and effect that is based on empirical observation, comparable to laws of nature (such as thunder following upon lightning; fr. 9 in West 1992), and links socio-political wrongdoing by citizens with socio-political harm suffered by the community (fr. 4.5–25 in West 1992; such as civil strife or enslavement by a tyrant). In Hesiod Dike (goddess of justice) exacts her punishment through the power of her father, Zeus (Hes. WD 256–262); Solon conceives of Dike as an independent demon of revenge, almost an abstract principle: justice will prevail—with certainty (fr. 4.14–17 in West 1992), and it will affect the entire city; nobody can escape (ibid., lines 26–29).

A political process is here analyzed entirely on the political level—a breakthrough in political thought. Using empirical knowledge and theoretical insight, Solon understands the political causes of communal problems. This enables him to devise specific measures to eliminate these problems and thus prevent their aggravation or recurrence. Afflicted by “bad order” (dynomia), the community, “taught” by the mediator (4.30), can re-establish “good order” (eunomia, 4.30–39). Equally affected, the aristocracy has a strong interest in collaborating (Eder 2005). As in Hesiod (Theog. 901–903) and Tyrtaeus’ Sparta (Tyr. fr. 4 in West 1992), eunomia appears here as a central communal value (Sol. fr. 4.31–39 in West 1992) that lawgiver and community, suffering from crisis and conflict, aim to restore.

Solon’s legislation affected most spheres of communal life (Andrewes 1982a). He abolished debt bondage and guaranteed the citizens’ personal freedom (Raaffaub 2004: 45–53). He improved certainty of law by giving citizens access to justice and involve them in jurisdiction: for example, any person who wished (bo bondomeno) was empowered to take legal action on behalf of an injured third party (Rhodes 2006b). Solon’s statement, “I wrote down ordinances for low and high alike, providing straight justice fitted for each man (or case)” (fr. 36.18–20 in West 1992), approximates the principle of equality before the law (later expressed fully by isonomia; below). In the political sphere (Hansen 1999: 29–32), Solon divided the citizens into “classes” (based on military and economic capacity) that determined political participation and access to political office. This made it more difficult for the aristocracy to monopolize power and introduced more openness into politics. An annually elected council with 400 members, if authentic (Rhodes 1981: 153–154), was intended to balance the aristocratic Areopagus Council’s power and enhance the assembly’s role. Hence Solon probably also regulated the assembly’s meetings, the Athenian institution where citizens took to side: (Rhodes 2006b: 15).

All these measures were abuses and established for political participation a crucial condition: a citizen suffered from stasis for the common good. Even if his measures were temporary, the community itself enabled them to change.

6 Isonomia

Solon’s reforms had the effect of enhancing the community’s and the establishment’s control of the city (until 510 BCE). In this, Cleisthenes’s reforms, enhancing the community’s control of the city’s building and benefiting non-aristocrats, was a crucial condition (Shapiro 1989; Wehrli 1985).

After the fall of the tyrants, Cleisthenes secured the community’s control. When his rival Phrynichus was deposed, Cleisthenes took control, he promptly to (Ath. Pol. 20–22). In Cleisthenes’s statements or laws, there were measures that provided teams for organized hoplite aid. Cleisthenes replaced Solon’s third parts by equal numbers, serving the community. The council members, serving the council known in Athens, was an important function (Hansen 1999: 29–32). Moreover, the fifty executive commit...
the assembly's meetings and procedures (as the Rheta did in Sparta). Protecting the Athenian institutions from subversion, he outlawed tyranny and made it mandatory for citizens to take sides in the event of sittasis ([Arist.] Ath. Pol. 8.5, 16.10; Plut. Sol. 20.1; Rhodes 2006b: 156, 220–222).

All these measures served three purposes: to stabilize the community by eliminating abuses and establishing a firm system of justice, to balance elite power by creating avenues for political participation by non-elite citizens, and to prevent civil discord with the potential result of tyranny. They reflect Solon's understanding of civic responsibility: if every citizen suffered from political abuses, every citizen had to assume responsibility for the common good. Even so, Solon's thinking was far from democratic (below) but some of his measures were crucial in setting Athens on a path that eventually led to democracy. The community itself had become the object of the citizens' political action: legislation enabled them to change and improve their communal order.

6 Isonomyia and the Integration of the Athenian Polis in the Late Sixth Century

Solon's reforms had not cut deep enough to prevent the recurrence of factional strife and the establishment of a tyranny. Peisistratus and his sons ruled for almost forty years (until 510 BCE). In suppressing elite rivalries, weakening aristocratic power structures, enhancing the central role of Athens through cults, festivals, temples, and other public buildings, and introducing measures that fostered peace and prosperity and especially benefited non-elite citizens, the Peisistratids' rule deeply influenced the community and was a crucial condition for future changes (Andrewes 1982b; Stahl 1987; Lewis 1988; Shapiro 1989; Welwei 1992: 229–265).

After the fall of tyranny, aristocratic factions renewed their fierce rivalry. In 508/7, Cleisthenes secured the people's support by announcing reform plans that proved popular. When his rival Isagoras summoned outside support to consolidate his own faction's control, he prompted a popular uprising that crushed his party (Hdt. 5.66–73.1; [Arist.] Ath. Pol. 20–22.1). Cleisthenes now realized his reforms. Although he left no personal statements or laws, we are able to reconstruct the details of his reform and subsequent measures that profoundly transformed the Athenian polis (Ostwald 1988; Ober 1996: ch. 4; Ober 2007; Welwei 1999: 1–27; Anderson 2003).

A comprehensive territorial reorganization combined local districts (demes) into thirty "thirds" (trittyes, ten each in Attica's central plain, coastal areas, and interior hill-country) and one of these from each region into ten tribes (phylai). Each tribe, comprising a similar number of citizens from all regions of Attica (Traill 1975, 1986; Whitehead 1986), provided teams for competitive performances at polis festivals, one regiment of the reorganized hoplite army (Siewert 1982), and fifty members of the "Council of 500" that replaced Solon's popular council. Elected by the demes in proportion to their citizen numbers, serving for one year, and eventually restricted to two non-consecutive terms, the councilors thus evenly represented the citizen population in the first representative council known in world history (Larsen 1955: ch. 1; Rhodes 1972). This council had important functions in the polis' government and prepared motions for the assembly. Moreover, the fifty councilors of one tribe served for one-tenth of the year as the council's executive committee, and for a third of this time the members of a trittys of that tribe
were constantly present in a specific building in the agora (Camp 1986: 76–77). The quota of representation (about 1:60) was dense: the councilors, connecting their demes with the polis center and serving as information carriers, thus virtually made the citizens present in Athens (Meier 1990: ch. 4). Eventually, therefore, an extraordinary proportion of citizens (below) gained intensive experience of politics and the way government worked (Hansen 1999: 249). The demes in turn had their own officials, assemblies, cults, and cultural events: their “grassroots democracies” provided another arena for learning participatory politics.

The challenge had been to eliminate the scourge of destructive factional and regional rivalry. Cleisthenes’ intention thus probably was to make the citizens present and active in the community, and to “mix” them, enhancing familiarity, solidarity, collaboration, and shared knowledge (Ober 2008). Virtually on a drawing board, in a complex and sophisticated reform embedded in a host of other changes (Anderson 2003), the entire structure of the civic community and relations among citizens were radically redesigned. The result was an integrated community encompassing all of Attica. This made spectacular successes in outside relations possible, culminating in the decision to fight the invading Persians at Marathon (490 BCE).

Another sophisticated innovation was “ostracism,” a vote without announced “candidates,” in which citizens wrote on potsherds (eisphora) the name of the person they wanted exiled. If the prescribed high quorum was met the “winner” was banished for ten years, without loss of citizenship or property. Ostracism thus was a “negative election” that made it possible to choose between alternatives offered by two political rivals, especially when their competition ended in a stalemate (Hansen 1999: 35–36; Forsdyke 2005).

Herodotus explained Athens’ success with its liberation from tyranny: when the Athenians gained their liberty and achieved equality (isagoria, equality of speech), they were enabled to pursue their own interest in their common cause (Hdt. 5.78). Isagoria is closely related to isonemia (equality before the law, political equality; Ostwald 1969: esp. pt. 2). Both terms are attested in the late sixth century (Raaflaub 1996: 143–148). “Equality” was thus probably crucial in propagating Cleisthenes’ system. His reform illustrates the extent to which the citizens had assumed control over their communal order. Everything could be changed, even profoundly, if the citizens wanted it and voted for it.

7. Eunomia, Isonomia, and Democracy

Sparta’s “Rheta” gave power (kratos) to the dèmos, making us think of dèmokratia. In Solonian Athens too the assembly passed final decisions. Some scholars thus date the beginning of democracy to this early period (Hansen 1994: 33; Ruschenbusch 1995). For Sparta this seems more than doubtful (Raaflaub, Ober, and Wallace 2007: 39–40): Sparta was later perceived as an ideal of oligarchy (Rawson 1969), and the council’s prerogatives severely constrained the assembly (above). The dèmos was sovereign but certainly did not rule the polis. This corresponds to a widespread pattern in the Graeco-Roman world: despite the assemblies’ decision-making monopoly, republican Rome was no democracy either (Jehne 2006: 14–22).

Although Solon adjusted the institutions to make broader citizen participation possible, his ideal was not democratic (Stahl 1992; Wallace 2007) but rather conservative
(Raaflaub, Ober, and Wallace. 2007: 142–144): the aristocracy was to lead, the demos, clearly not considered capable of leading, was to follow (Sol. fr. 5–6 in West 1992). Access to political office was restricted by law to the propertyed classes who were eligible for service in the hoplite army; the same restriction perhaps applied de facto to active political participation in the assembly (Rhodes 1981: 140–141; Raaflaub 2006: 494–423). Even if the latter was not the case democracy in any meaningful sense was far beyond Solon’s horizon.

Herodotus claims that Cleisthenes gave the Athenians their democracy (6.131), although he fails to explain how the new phylai achieved this. Through the activities of the demes, the Council of 500, and probably more frequent assembly meetings, his system certainly formalized and intensified citizen participation. Whether all citizens were fully included, and whether this really instituted democracy remains debated (Ober 2007; Raaflaub 2007a: esp. 144–150). Decades after Cleisthenes, the third form of constitution (besides monarchy and aristocracy), often simply called demos, was still identified with sevatos, the army (e.g., Pindar, Pythian 2.86–88; Raaflaub 2007a: 107–108). Cleisthenes’ system, although probably more sophisticated than others, fits well into the broad range of “isonomie” (egalitarian) constitutions that were quite frequent by that time (Robinson 1997). Democracy in the strict sense of the word was yet to emerge.

8 The Emergence of Fully Participatory Democracy in Mid-Fifth-Century Athens

Militarily, the reformed hoplite army proved Athens’ decisive weapon, achieving victories in 506 BCE and over a Persian army at Marathon in 490. In the 480s, debates about whether or not to resist a second Persian invasion prompted a series of ostracisms, while the discovery of a new silver mine in Attica permitted the construction of a large fleet. When the Persians returned in 480–479, the Athenians decided in assembly to bank their survival on this fleet (Hdt. 7.142–144); sacrificing their city, they contributed decisively to the Greek victories (Green 1996). After 479, the Greeks continued the war, to liberate Greeks still under Persian control, secure the gains, and prevent another Persian attempt at conquest. When Sparta lost interest in this war, Athens and the liberated Greeks founded a new alliance, centered on Delos (the “Delian League”). Within two decades, the Athenians turned leadership in this alliance into rule over a naval empire (arche) that eventually comprised close to 200 poleis around the Aegean and beyond. They treated attempts to leave the league as treason and suppressed them ruthlessly. In the late 450s hostilities with the Persians ended, and in a time of crisis the Athenians moved the league’s seat to Athens and henceforth used their own assembly to make decisions concerning its policies and the allies. By then Athens had long been involved in wars with Sparta and her allies, but in 446, under Pericles’ leadership, concluded a thirty-year peace (Meiggs 1972; Fornara and Samons 1991: chs. 3–4; Rhodes 1992b).

In the emergency of 480–479, citizens of all classes, resident aliens, and slaves had manned the fleet. Had the war ended in 479 and most of the fleet become unnecessary, constitutional development probably would not have moved much beyond Cleisthenes’ system. But the continuation of the Persian War and the creation of the arche transformed the dynamics of Athenian social, economic, and political life (Raaflaub 1998). The improvisation of 480–479 became permanent. Although the hoplites remained
important, success in war and control over the archē—and with it Athenian security, power, and prosperity—increasingly and constantly depended on the fleet that was rowed by lower-class citizens, together with resident aliens (metics), slaves, and mercenaries. The shipyards in the Piraeus, where hundreds of triremes were built and maintained, required a huge labor force; large numbers of citizens moved from rural Attica to the Piraeus, which became a large, planned city, connected with Athens by the Long Walls in the 450s (Garland 1987; Gabrielsen 1994; but see Biss 2009). Thousands of lower-class citizens, employed on the fleet and in the shipyards, now lived close enough to the political center in Athens to make their voices and wishes heard there. They had previously counted little politically because they did not qualify as hoplites. In their new military role, they assumed vital importance for the community. This changed the distribution of military responsibility among the citizens and called for political adjustments. Moreover, because of Athens’ archē and active foreign policy (an exception among Greek poleis), political activities on every level and the range of administrative offices in the poleis and empire multiplied. The intensity of political life and the individual citizen’s involvement in it increased enormously.

In 462/1 reforms were enacted under the leadership of Ephialtes (Meier 1987; Fornara and Samons 1991: ch. 2; Rhodes 1992a; Raaffaib 2007a). Details are debated, but overall powers and responsibilities were shifted from the Areopagus Council to the Council of 500, assembly, and law courts. The institutions that directly represented the citizen body became responsible for the entire political process (below). The demos now really ruled (Eur. Supp. 352, 406). Subsequent measures, realized until 450, partly under Pericles’ leadership, were intended not least to facilitate the involvement of all citizens. Although democracies emerged in other poleis as well (Robinson 2011; see also Rhodes, Chapter 8), most of these lacked the specific conditions prevailing in Athens and were thus probably more moderate.

The reformers of 462–450 apparently had a clear concept of what democracy ideally should be—while of course taking slave labor and the political exclusion of women for granted (above). Through pay for time-consuming offices, the extensive and sophisticated use of the lot, “term limits” for councilors (Rhodes 1972: 3), and the distribution of executive and administrative responsibility among many sizable committees (Blecken 1994: 530–533; Hansen 1999: 230–242), they intended to achieve the broadest possible citizen involvement in government, according to the principle of “ruling and being ruled in turn” (Eur. Supp. 406–407), and to exclude manipulation, group interests, and bribery. Many thousand citizens were needed every year to run this system (Hansen 1999: 313) that was based on belief in civic equality and every citizen’s ability to serve in communally useful functions (Thuc. 2.37.1). Discussions of democracy that pervade fifth-century literature illuminate these ideas (Raaffaib 1989).

Probably in the mid-460s, the Athenians coined for this system the word δημοκρατία (Hansen 1987: 69–71). Resistance to Ephialtes’ reforms was strong and violent; they were seen as the victory of a faction that served the interests of only part of the citizen body; stasis seemed a real threat. Intense debates ensued (visible in Aeschylus’ tragedies: Meier 1990: ch. 5; 1993: ch. 5), resulting in terminological differentiation, ideological contrasts (especially between democracy and oligarchy), constitutional conflicts, and constitutional theory (Farrar 1988; Winton 2000: 89–101; Raaffaib 2004: 21). The need to close ranks against foreign threats, constant involvement in war, the success, despite setbacks, of imperial policies and the profits of empire, and Pericles’ strong and charismatic leadership turned disaster into triumph (Munn 2002). The late fifth century was a time of creative experiment by the association of 399 produced “a larger constitutional without foreign interference.

Despite that, a year-long third citizen assembly of Aristotle (Hansen 1999: 249). Promotions to active apparently numerous to the several hours were attention provided space for other issues on one day (Ath. 24.6), ekklēsia control

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officials in various. Numerous occupations, officials and officials and (Hansen 1999: 248).
charismatic leadership helped restore and maintain internal stability. Only under the pressures of the long and bitter Peloponnesian War and especially the crisis after the Sicilian disaster *stasis* surfaced again and prompted two short-lived and violent oligarchic coups (Munn 2000; Osborne 2011; Shear 2011). Constitutional measures introduced in the late fifth and early fourth century were intended to prevent hasty and arbitrary decisions by the assembly (Ostwald 1989), and a comprehensive revision of laws between 410 and 399 produced a system of somewhat clearly defined institutions that approached a “constitution” (Hansen 1999: 162–165). In this more moderate version, democracy survived without further interruptions to the late fourth century, when it was abolished by outside interference (Rhodes 1979, 80, 2010; Ober 1989; Eder 1995).

9 Participatory Democracy at Its Height

Despite these and other changes, in all essential respects democracy was fully developed by the middle of the fifth century. This democracy was “unparalleled in world history” (Hansen 1999: 313). It mobilized a multidimensional and intense commitment to communal affairs of extraordinary numbers of citizens of all classes, generated enormous enthusiasm, and prompted the citizens to develop a “political identity” that was supposed to take priority over their social identity (Meier 1990: ch. 6); it was also both uniquely productive, stimulating an amazing cultural upswing (Sakellariou 1996; Boedecker and Raafflaub 1998), and sadly destructive, tied to aggressive imperialism, shocking brutality in war, and the systematic exploitation of others. Defeated by Sparta in 404, Athens barely escaped wholesale destruction.

What does unparalleled citizen participation mean concretely? The systematic part of Aristotle’s *Ath. Pol. (42–69)* offers valuable details. Most time-consuming was the year-long membership in the Council of 500 (above). Due to term limits, at least every third citizen over 30, and about two-thirds of those over 40, held this office (Hansen 1999: 249). The council dealt with foreign policy issues, reports of officials, issues and motions to be decided by the assembly, and the supervision of the entire administrative apparatus ([Arist.] *Ath. Pol. 45–49*; Rhodes 1972). The assembly (*ekklēsia*) met numerous times during the year (forty in the fourth century); meetings lasting from several hours to whole days, often with a prescribed agenda ([Arist.] *Ath. Pol. 44–46*), were attended by several thousand citizens—the assembly place on the Pnyx hill provided space for 6,000, and this was the quorum prescribed for ostracisms and a few other issues. Assembly and council were presided over by citizens selected by lot for only one day ([Arist.] *Ath. Pol. 44*). Assisted by the council and law courts (*dikaiōtērēs*), the *ekklēsia* controlled the entire political process from planning policies to making decisions on a vast number of small and large issues, to supervising their execution in every phase, controlling the officials, and holding them accountable (Hansen 1987).

Professional personnel was limited to a few hundred state-owned slaves who served officials in various functions and provided a rudimentary police force (Hunter 1994: 3). Numerous committees of various sizes were in charge of a wide range of administrative duties, some of them every day year-round; they assisted the council and various officials and were in turn supervised by them. Their membership totaled about 700 (Hansen 1999: ch. 9), and in the fifth century hundreds of other officials served in various functions throughout the empire ([Arist.] *Ath. Pol. 24.3* with Rhodes 1981: 305;
Balcer 1976). Except for very few offices with major financial or military responsibilities that were filled by election (Ath. Pol. 43.1, 44.4), all officials were selected by lot (Ath. Pol. 8.1, 43.1, 47–48, 50–55.1). About 2,000 citizens, also selected by lot and assigned to various courts by a sophisticated allotment machine that made abuses virtually impossible (Ath. Pol. 63–66; Boechhold 1995: 58, 230–234; Demont 2003), served in several large boards as collective judges (rather than jurors) who on court days (about 200 per year) tried cases simultaneously in various locations. In democracy, the law courts had an important function as, so to speak, a continuation of politics by different means (Christ 1998; Hansen 1999: ch. 8 and 313; Herman 2006).

In the mid-fifth century the Athenian citizen numbers rose to perhaps more than 60,000; after the losses of the Peloponnesian War they shrank to about 30,000 and hardly rose above that level throughout the fourth century (Patterson 1981; Hansen 1986; Akkigg forthcoming). Of these, every year many thousands were politically active, and many were so year after year. Many thousands of these same citizens also regularly served in the cavalry, hoplite army, or as rowers on the fleet. Hence Athenian democracy was not only direct in that decisions were made in open assembly, but the most direct imaginable because a fantastically large proportion of citizens was constantly involved in the business of governing their community and controlling all aspects of government and administration. Moreover, the principle of rotation of offices (Arist. Pol. 1317b2–7) guaranteed that those not involved in one year would be in another. Finally, through all these activities, the citizens acquired an exceptional level of knowledge about politics and administration (Thuc. 2.40.2).

Such involvement was voluntary, but lack of involvement was despised. “We do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say that he has no business here at all” (Thuc. 2.40.2; trans. Warner 1954). Literally, the passive (apragmón) citizen was useless (achreios) to the community (Carter 1986; Christ 2006; Demont 1990). The Athenians’ ideal was the active, involved citizen (polypragmón, doing a lot; Thuc. 1.70). This ideal shaped their private and public lives, their “political identity” (above), and their communal policies (Raafaelb 1994, 2001). It led them to extreme heights of power and achievement and, eventually, over the top into the abyss of defeat and near-destruction.

In the fifth century, this democracy was closely and in multiple ways connected with the empire. No other polis at the time was as active in so many directions and required such an intense citizen involvement. Hence democracy in its Athenian version was extreme and unique, an exciting experiment we might not want to imitate but from which we can still learn a lot (Ober 2005).

10 Greek Democracy and Roman Republicanism: Elements of a Comparison

In many ways, Greek and Roman state formation followed similar paths, and in their early phases Greek poleis and Rome were very similar, just as “city-state systems” on both sides of the Adriatic shared some important characteristics (Raafaelb 1990). For example, the Greek and Roman concepts of liberty developed from the same linguistic and social roots (Raafaelb 2004). They did develop, however, with careful analysis of the circumstances that encouraged them.

First, the polis. This included the land, and as the number of free men in it increased, the polis happily expanded. In Ireland and [...] this happy situation lasted for centuries.

Second, the hierarchy. The king, the aristocrats, the council, the officials, the oligarchic group, the council, the landowners, etc.

Third, the solution of the problem of democracy. The solution was, as we saw, to return to the principle of community rule. The problem of the “ending power” was solved.

Fourth, the rise of the empire. The city-state had become an empire and an empire-state (Casson 1984). The city-state expanded, became an empire, and was then replaced by another aristocratic system. The solution was much the same: a “best man” rule. Rome was the first.

Fifth, the city-state. Rome was the first and the empire. The city-state had remained a small, narrow group of citizens who were able to rule the city-state. The motor of the city-state was the democracy of the people. Rome was the first and the empire. The city-state had remained a small, narrow group of citizens who were able to rule the city-state. The motor of the city-state was the democracy of the people.
roots (Raaffaub 1984; 2004: 265–77). Yet a few hundred years later the differences were enormous, in both the value and political systems (see Eder 1996; Meier 1996). Why did developments lead into such different directions? This is a big question that requires careful and detailed discussion, but it might be useful as a start to emphasize a few aspects that emerge from the two chapters in this section.

First, the Greek polis emerged as a citizen-state with strong egalitarian foundations. This expressed itself early on in the indispensable role the non-elite citizens played in army and assembly. In Rome citizenship was initially mediated through powerful aristocratic clans and their followers and dependants (clients). Hence when voting was introduced, this happened on an individual basis in Greece, collectively by voting groups in Rome. Rome had citizens but never became a citizen-state.

Second, for reasons that are probably connected with the influence of the strongly hierarchical Etruscan city-states, Rome’s aristocratic clans were strong and powerful and retained their predominance throughout the regal into the republican period. Despite high aspirations, the Greek aristocracies never succeeded in dominating their communities or controlling power and politics in the way the Roman senatorial class did. Greek oligarchies were not confined to a political elite but always comprised elite and non-elite landowners.

Third, in both Greece and Rome problems caused by elite abuse of debt and exploitation of debt bondage prompted serious conflicts. The Roman aristocracy was able to resolve these and other problems at the expense of defeated enemies, while in Greece solutions could only be achieved by imposing limits on the aristocracy and setting the community on a broader base of citizen responsibility and participation. In Rome such internal conflicts were resolved without violent civil war by compromises within the existing power structures; in Greece they prompted frequent civil strife and war and often necessitated the intervention of lawgivers and reformers.

Fourth, in its formative period in the early republic, Rome was confronted for a very long time with serious outside pressure (to which many other Italian communities succumbed); this strengthened aristocratic leadership, a commitment to communal survival, and an ability to find compromise solutions for communal problems. Before Persian expansion reached the Aegean in the mid-sixth century, Greek poleis never faced such outside pressure. Strong and cohesive aristocratic leadership was thus not needed; the aristocracies could afford to exhaust themselves in rivalries and factional strife and lost much of their collective predominance when “tyrants” exploited such rivalries to establish sole rule, and the people were no longer willing to tolerate elite abuses.

Fifth, bolstered by elite solidarity and strong vertical ties between elite and non-elite, Rome opened itself to the integration of ever new groups (immigrants, allies, defeated enemies, former slaves) and thus constantly strengthened its manpower base. Greek poleis remained closed societies that jealously protected their citizen privileges. Within these narrowly defined citizen bodies, though, broader political integration and in exceptional cases an unprecedented maximum of power-sharing became possible. Hence Greece was able to develop democracy, and the tension between democracy and oligarchy became the motor that drove political and constitutional thought and development. In the framework of Roman republicanism, despite the decision-making power of the assemblies, democracy was never an option.
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FURTHER READING