

THE *DĒMOS* IN *DĒMOKRATIA**

The meaning of *dēmokratia* is widely agreed: ‘rule by the people’ (less often ‘people-power’), where *dēmos*, ‘people’, implies ‘entire citizen body’, synonymous with *polis*, ‘city-state’, or πάντες πολῖται, ‘all citizens’.¹ *Dēmos*, on this understanding, comprised rich and poor, leaders and followers, mass and elite alike. As such, *dēmokratia* is interpreted as constituting a sharp rupture from previous political regimes.² Rule by one man or by a few had meant the domination of one part of the community over the rest, but *dēmokratia*, it is said, implied self-rule, and with it the dissolution of the very distinction between ruler and ruled.³ Its governing principle was the formal political equality of all citizens. In the words of W.G. Forrest, between 750 and 450 B.C. there had developed ‘the idea of individual human autonomy ... the idea that all members of a political society are free and equal, that everyone had the right to an equal say in determining the structure and the activities of his society’.⁴

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¹ P. Cartledge, *Ancient Greek Political Thought in Practice* (Cambridge, 2009), 6, 62, 74, though cf. 57; J. Dunn, *Democracy: A History* (New York, 2005), 34; M.I. Finley, *Democracy Ancient and Modern* (New Brunswick, 1985), 12; R. Harrison, *Democracy* (London, 1993), 2–3; J.A.O. Larsen, ‘Demokratia’, *CPh* 68 (1973), 45–6, at 46; K.A. Raaflaub, ‘The breakthrough of *dēmokratia* in mid-fifth century Athens’, in K.A. Raaflaub, J. Ober and R.W. Wallace, *Origins of Democracy in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley, 2007), 105–54, at 106; P.J. Rhodes, *Ancient Democracy and Modern Ideology* (London, 2003), 18–19; J.T. Roberts, *Athens on Trial* (Princeton, 1994), 14; R.K. Sinclair, *Democracy and Participation in Athens* (Cambridge, 1988), 15. For the full range of meanings of *dēmos* in the classical period, see M.H. Hansen, ‘The concepts of *demos*, *ekklesia*, and *dikasterion* in classical Athens’, *GRBS* 50 (2010), 499–536. J. Ober, ‘The original meaning of “democracy”: the capacity to do things, not majority rule’, *Constellations* 15 (2008), 3–9 and *Demopolis: Democracy before Liberalism in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge, 2017), 18–33 reconsiders the meaning of κράτος; both here, implicitly, and explicitly in ‘The *kratos* in *dēmokratia*’ (paper presented at the American Political Science Association annual meeting, August 30, 2018) I defend an interpretation much closer to ‘majority rule’, though on different grounds from those that Ober rejects.

² Particularly emphasized by J. Ober, ‘“I besieged that man”: democracy’s revolutionary start’, in K.A. Raaflaub, J. Ober and R.W. Wallace, *Origins of Democracy in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley, 2007), 83–104; S. Wolin, ‘Norm and form: the constitutionalizing of democracy’, in J.P. Euben, J.R. Wallach and J. Ober (edd.), *Athenian Political Thought and the Reconstruction of American Democracy* (Ithaca NY, 1994), 29–58 and ‘Transgression, equality, and voice’, in J. Ober and C. Hedrick (edd.), *Dēmokratia* (Princeton, NJ, 1996), 63–90.

³ Spelled out clearly by Harrison (n. 1), 3. Cf. W. Brown, *Undoing the Demos* (New York, 2015), 20.

⁴ W.G. Forrest, *The Emergence of Greek Democracy* (New York, 1966), 44. Cf. C. Farrar, *The Origins of Democratic Thinking* (Cambridge, 1988), 11, 104.

This is not, of course, the only interpretation of *dēmokratia* available in our sources. Many classical authors, most famously Aristotle, interpreted *dēmokratia* as ‘rule by the common people’, where *dēmos* was synonymous not with *polis* or πάντες πολῖται but with πλῆθος, ‘mass’ or ‘majority’.⁵ On this understanding, *dēmos* denoted not the entire citizen body but rather a ‘sociologically delimited fragment’ of the citizenry, namely the poor majority, the less educated, the lower class—in short, the mass *as opposed to* the elite, rather than a body encompassing both.⁶ But scholars today are skeptical of this reading. It is said to have had a ‘pejorative overtone’ and is attributed only to elite anti-democrats who deprecated the inclusion of all citizens in the political process.⁷ ‘Skilled democratic rhetoricians’ such as Pericles are said to have rejected it, instead taking ‘the *dēmos* that was sovereign in Athenian democracy’ to include ‘every voter, no matter how poor—or how rich’.⁸ This disagreement has far-reaching methodological implications. According to Hansen and others, since the use of *dēmos* to suggest ‘the mass’ was simply a slur, any study of *dēmokratia* that aims to be faithful to democratic ideology must disregard all sources in which that usage appears—which amounts to all extant poetic, philosophical, historical and polemical works.⁹ Only inscriptions and speeches given before democratic bodies such as the Athenian assembly or courts remain.

Dēmos may also be rendered ‘assembly’, said to be synonymous with ἐκκλησία, a political meeting.¹⁰ As Hansen has emphasized, this is in fact its most common meaning in the classical sources, appearing in scores of inscriptions and speeches.¹¹ However, this usage is said to derive from the prior meaning: ‘entire citizen body’. Even Hansen and Ober, whose differences on the interpretation of *dēmos* run deep, agree on this point.¹² Ober invokes the literary figure of synecdoche, in which the part stands for the whole, to explain the relationship between what he calls ‘the ecclesia’ and the entire *dēmos*: like every other institutional ‘part’ of the citizenry, he suggests, the assembly ‘could stand for and refer to the whole citizen body’.¹³ Hansen maintains that, when used in an institutional sense, *dēmos* simply meant ‘assembly’, while other institutions were conceived as representing the *dēmos* in some way; but he too accepts that ‘ideologically a meeting of the ecclesia was a meeting of the entire people’.¹⁴ And this claim seems plausible, since democratic assemblies (such as the Athenian, the specific

⁵ Arist. *Pol.* 1278b, 1290a30–b20; cf. Ps.-Xen. *Ath. pol.* 2.20; Pl. *Resp.* 565e.

⁶ Ober (n. 1 [2008]), 8.

⁷ R. Osborne, *Athens and Athenian Democracy* (Cambridge, 2010), 42. Cf. Cartledge (n. 1), 74; W. Donlan, ‘Changes and shifts in the meaning of demos in the literature of the archaic period’, *PP* 25 (1970), 381–95, at 381; Finley (n. 1), 12–13; Hansen (n. 1), 505–7; Harrison (n. 1), 3; Larsen (n. 1), 45; Ober (n. 1 [2008]), 3; Raaflaub (n. 1), 139; Rhodes (n. 1), 19; Roberts (n. 1), 14, 49; Sinclair (n. 1), 15; G.E.M. de Ste Croix, ‘The character of Athenian empire’, *Historia* 3 (1954), 1–41, at 22; E.M. Wood, ‘*Demos* versus “We, the People”’, in J. Ober and C. Hedrick (edd.), *Dēmokratia* (Princeton, NJ, 1996), 121–37, at 126–7. For a contemporary exploration of the same ambiguity with respect to ‘people’, see G. Agamben, *Homo Sacer* (Stanford, 2005), 176–9.

⁸ Roberts (n. 1), 49. Cf. Wood (n. 7), 127.

⁹ Hansen (n. 1), 505–7; Ober (n. 1 [2008]), 8.

¹⁰ I will argue below that, although *dēmos* certainly meant ‘assembly’, *dēmos* and ἐκκλησία were not in fact synonymous (as Hansen also now believes: see Hansen [n. 1], 507).

¹¹ Hansen (n. 1), 510. ML 5.11, 14.1; RO 31.7, 41.3–4; Aeschin. 2.17; Dem. 18.248, 24.9.

¹² See Ober’s account of their arm-wrestling match at the 1986 meeting of the American Philological Association in J. Ober, *The Athenian Revolution* (Princeton, 1996), 107.

¹³ Ober (n. 12), 117–18.

¹⁴ Hansen (n. 1), 514. The same claim appears in M.I. Finley, *Politics in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, 1983), 1; Larsen (n. 1), 45.

topic of Ober's and Hansen's discussions) were in principle open to all citizens, though in practice only a part of the citizenry could attend any given meeting.

The foregoing interpretation is well established, internally consistent and analytically crucial, given the foundational role it plays in our understanding of ancient Greek politics. Yet, it is not entirely satisfactory. For one thing, though it implies a conception of *dēmokratia* as self-rule, no such conception appears in our sources.¹⁵ Forrest's terminology is instructive. The key word in his sketch is 'autonomy', 'giving oneself the law', from the classical Greek *αὐτόνομος*. But being *αὐτόνομος* meant that the *polis* was not ruled by a foreign power, not that each citizen participated in ruling; and no other classical Greek word performed that function.¹⁶ For another, the claim that *dēmos* came to mean 'assembly' via its denotation of the entire citizen body seems doubtful, since *dēmos* (or the Doric *dāmos*) denoted 'assembly' all over ancient Greece, not only in democratic regimes.¹⁷ Jettisoning the evidence for the meaning of *dēmos* found in 'elite' authors also seems unwise. Even if their use of *dēmos* to mean 'common people' was coloured by anti-democratic feeling, others may have used it the same way, either descriptively or with approbation. Certainly some fourth-century democrats sometimes conceived of the *dēmos* as a part rather than as the whole of the citizen body. This is shown by their use of the adjective *δημοτικός*, 'in favour of (or in the interests of) the *dēmos*'.¹⁸ Being in favour of one agent necessarily presupposes distinction from another, and this is supported by our sources. Demosthenes, speaking before a popular judicial panel, described a certain politician as 'a good man, *δημοτικόν*, very eager in the defence of your majority (*τὸ πλῆθος τὸ ὑμέτερον*)' (24.134). Hypereides challenged another judicial panel thus: 'Why should you spare this man? Because he is *δημοτικός*?' (2.10). Demosthenes' *Against Meidias* confirms the point. 'Beware of bearing this testimony against yourselves: that if you detect a man of the middle class or a *δημοτικόν* committing an offence, you will punish him, but pardon the insolence of a rich man' (21.183, transl. Vince). In each case, a 'partial' reading is inescapable. The *dēmos* envisaged is not the entire citizen body but a part of it.

Another reason to question the accepted view is the evidence of our earliest sources, which will be my focus here. Pre-democratic texts are not usually consulted for what they can tell us about the *dēmos* in *dēmokratia*, but they have much to offer.¹⁹ We do not know exactly when *dēmokratia* was coined, though it was certainly in use during the third quarter of the fifth century (and as Hansen and others have argued, we can hardly expect to find it attested before then, as so little evidence of the right sort survives).²⁰ But whenever the term was developed, it will have been with the then-current meaning of *dēmos* in mind, in other words that established before the mid

¹⁵ Aristotle's idea of 'governing and being governed in turn' (*ἐν μέρει*, 'by parts', *Pol.* 1261b4, 1317b2) comes close, but none the less differs from ruling continually over oneself.

¹⁶ M.H. Hansen, 'The dependent *polis*: further considerations', *GRBS* 55 (2015), 863–83; M. Ostwald, *Autonomia* (Oxford, 1982).

¹⁷ M.H. Hansen and T.H. Nielsen (edd.), *An Inventory of Archaic and Classical Poleis* (Oxford, 2004), especially Appendix 12, 1341–2.

¹⁸ Transl. Cartledge (n. 1), 49–50. See also de Ste Croix (n. 7), 22–3.

¹⁹ An important exception is Donlan (n. 7). More generally, see D. Hammer, *The Iliad as Politics* (Norman, OK, 2002); H. van Wees, *Status Warriors* (Amsterdam, 1992); M.-J. Werlings, *Le Dēmos avant la Démocratie* (Paris, 2010).

²⁰ M.H. Hansen, 'The origin of the term *dēmokratia*', *LCM* 11 (1986), 35–6. The earliest possible attestation is *IG I³* 37.48 (447/6?), in which the letters δ-ε-μ-ο are legible. After that, see Hdt. 6.43, 131; Ps.-Xen. *Ath. pol.* 1.4–8, 2.20, 3.1, 8–12; Ar. *Ach.* 618; Antiph. 6.45; DK 251. Note also Aesch.

fifth century at the latest. That meaning must therefore be excavated—and the results are revealing.

From Homer around the eighth century B.C. down to at least Aeschylus in the second quarter of the fifth, the meaning of *dēmos* was, I shall argue, remarkably stable. It had three essential features. A *dēmos* was a *singular collective* agent, that is, numerous individuals conceived as a single entity, in contradistinction from the same individuals conceived as a multitude of disaggregated persons (in Greek, λαοί). It was an *independent political* agent, conceived as possessing a will of its own and able to make that will felt across the community, in contradistinction from the same individuals conceived collectively as the union of (typically armed) followers of a leader (λαός). And it was a *partial* agent, consisting not of the entire community but of the ordinary people who constituted the majority of the population, in contradistinction from both the political elite (ἡγήτορες, ἡγεμόνες, βασιλεῖς, γέροντες) and the entire citizenry (*polis*, πάντες πολίται).

Putting these points together, I suggest that the original meaning of *dēmos* and that implied by *dēmokratia* were ‘assembly’, defined as the collective political agent constituted by the common people. This agent was conceptually distinct from those individuals who played leading political roles, such as princes, councillors, elders, generals and orators—including orators in regimes where anyone who wished might speak publicly, such as democratic Athens. *Dēmos* indicated not all assembly-goers, that is to say, but specifically the audience: those who listened, deliberated internally and voted en masse, as opposed to those who spoke publicly or performed other solo political actions.²¹ By extension, *dēmos* denoted all those who participated in politics through collective action, as opposed to those who had personal political significance. The former category comprised the great majority of citizens but not the entire citizen body, since those who performed leading roles were by definition not part of the *dēmos*. From Homer to Aeschylus and typically thereafter, *dēmos* was an oppositional term, defined by contrast with the political elite.²² Only once *dēmokratia* existed was *dēmos* used—on occasion—to denote the entire citizen body, the elite as well as the mass, presumably because only in *dēmokratia* did the assembled mass make decisions on behalf of the *polis* as a whole.

What this means is that Aristotle was right, but right in a way not yet fully elaborated by modern scholars. *Dēmokratia* did imply rule by the poor—even, as Paul Cartledge has rather mischievously suggested, the dictatorship of the proletariat²³—if only because the poor constitute the great majority of those who, though personally politically insignificant, are powerful when they engage in collective action. But the interpretation

Supp. 604, 699, with V. Ehrenberg, ‘Origins of democracy’, *Historia* 1 (1950), 515–48 (discussed on p. 55 below).

²¹ I defend this distinction between orators and *dēmos* in ‘Deliberation in ancient Greek assemblies’ (forthcoming, *CPh*). In brief, though it is often said that the *dēmos* (here conceived as encompassing orators and non-orators alike) ‘discussed’ political matters, our sources draw a significant distinction between orators, who addressed the *dēmos* (δημηγορέω) and advised (συμβουλεύω), and the *dēmos* which deliberated internally (βουλευόμεθα). The very act of coming forward made an orator no longer simply one of the crowd. The fact that he later raised his hand to vote along with everyone else did not mitigate his difference from those who engaged in exclusively collective political action.

²² The *dēmos* was also implicitly distinct from those on the margins of political life: women, slaves, foreigners. But this article focusses on relations within the formal political community.

²³ P. Cartledge, *Democracy: A Life* (Oxford, 2016), 1.

of *dēmos* that I advance is not simply sociological. Though it builds on readings of *dēmos* as a class or status category associated with Marx and Ste Croix on the one hand and Weber and Finley on the other, it is not reducible to them, since it highlights a specifically *political* criterion: whether one influences political decisions as an individual or as part of a mass.²⁴ The mass in question, moreover, was typically formally constituted. The *dēmos* in *dēmokratia* was not a pre-constitutional or disorderly multitude, as argued by Wolin and Ober, but a political institution from its earliest appearance in the historical record.²⁵ My interpretation resembles that of Jacques Rancière, who identifies the *dēmos* as ‘the uncounted’.²⁶ Yet, that purely negative conceptualization tells only half the story, since *dēmos* was also always associated with a positive institutional practice: the mass meeting (ἐκκλησία), typically following a formal call-out (ἐκκαλέω, ‘call out’ or ‘summon’). Strikingly, this was also the view of Thomas Hobbes, who in *On the Citizen* argued that ‘[t]wo things ... constitute a Democracy, of which one (uninterrupted schedule of meetings) constitutes a Δῆμος, and the other (which is majority voting) constitutes τὸ κράτος or authority (*potestas*)’.²⁷

Interpreting *dēmos* in this way has important implications. It suggests that *dēmokratia* indicated not self-rule but the rule of the mass of ordinary voters over the political elite. This regime was born (and reborn) whenever the collective common people gained the advantage over those who had political influence as individuals. The traditional distinction between ruler and ruled was thus not dissolved in *dēmokratia*. Rather, the balance of power between mass and leading men was simply reversed. The *dēmos* was ὁ κρατῶν, the stronger ([Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 41), while those who occupied what had, in an earlier era, been positions of rule were reduced to acting as leaders only: generals in the field, δημογωγοί—‘demagogues’, literally *dēmos*-leaders—before the assembly.

THE *DĒMOS* WAS A COLLECTIVE AGENT

The single most important feature of the term *dēmos* is that it is a collective noun that takes a singular verb. As such it differs from the English ‘people’, which even when used with the definite article usually takes a plural verb, as in the sentence ‘the people have taken to the streets’. The singular version of that sentence, ‘the people has taken to the streets’, would suggest a conception of ‘people’ as a unified entity or corporate body

²⁴ Hence a poor or middling man who became politically influential was no longer, by definition, a man of the *dēmos*, although he might become one again if his influence waned. The converse does not appear to have been true, however: a wealthy and socially important man who never took a leading political role was not reckoned a man of the *dēmos*, perhaps because it was assumed that his social status could always translate into political influence if he chose. Cf. L.B. Carter, *The Quiet Athenian* (Oxford, 1986).

²⁵ Wolin (n. 2 [1994]); Ober (n. 2). Both draw on H. Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, 1958) and *On Revolution* (New York, 1963). The word *da-mo* actually appears earlier, in the Linear B tablets of the Mycenaean era. For a full catalogue, see M. Lejeune, ‘Le Δαμος dans la société mycénienne’, *REG* 78 (1965), 1–22.

²⁶ J. Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (New York, 2010), 70.

²⁷ T. Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, ed. and transl. R. Tuck and M. Silverthorne (Cambridge, 1998), 94. On Hobbes’s use of ancient Greek democracy, see further R. Tuck, ‘Hobbes and democracy’, in A. Brett, J. Tully and H. Hamilton-Bleakley (edd.), *Rethinking the Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2006), 171–90.

that contrasts significantly with the more common conceptualization of ‘people’ as a mass of disaggregated individuals. ‘Corporate body’, however, is exactly what *dēmos* implies. Like ‘team’ or ‘state’, *dēmos* signified a collective entity made up of numerous individuals who act (or perhaps better, were conceived as acting) as a single agent.²⁸

This is significant, since ancient Greek did not lack a term for ‘people’ conceived as numerous disaggregated individuals: the plural noun λαοί.²⁹ Other near-equivalents include στρατιῶται, ‘soldiers’ and πολῖται, ‘citizens’. Yet, λαοί, στρατιῶται and πολῖται share a feature that *dēmos* lacks. Each is closely related to a singular collective noun, that is, λαός, ‘people’, στρατός, ‘army’, and *polis*, ‘body of citizens’ or ‘city-state’. There is thus a clear verbal relationship between these collective nouns and their constituent parts. But at least in our earliest texts, there is no term δημόται representing the disaggregated individuals who, when united, comprised a *dēmos*.³⁰ The *dēmos* was strictly a collective entity. In fact, the word typically used in Homer and subsequently to describe members of the *dēmos* conceived separately is λαοί.

These relations between λαοί, λαός and *dēmos* are clearly visible in Book 2 of the *Iliad*. Agamemnon tells the heralds to summon the Achaeans to the place of assembly (ἀγορήν), and they (τοί) begin to gather (50–2). The troops are represented by λαοί on their way to the gathering and as they arrive (86, 96). Just as the meeting is about to start, however, the collective singular λαός appears: ‘With difficulty was the people (λαός) made to sit and stay in place, ceasing from its clamour’ (99–100). This ‘people’ continues to be depicted as a singular collective entity until the assembly is dismissed (394–5). πλῆθος, *dēmos* and στρατός also appear, indicating a consistently singular conceptualization of the attendees (142, 198, 207).

The same pattern appears in Book 18, in the description of the judgement-scene pictured on Achilles’ shield. In the line ‘[t]he people were gathering in the place of assembly’, ‘people’ is the plural λαοί (497). But when the poet switches to describing the meeting underway, those attending are identified first by *dēmos* and then by λαός, suggesting that, once they have gathered, they are conceived as a single entity (500, 503). This conceptualization is briefly interrupted, but it is a case of the exception confirming the rule: ‘And people (λαοί) were cheering both [speakers], favouring either side’ (503). Here the audience is plainly *not* acting collectively. Different people are supporting different sides. A unitary conceptualization is thus impossible.³¹ When the group is represented from the perspective of the heralds keeping order, however, the singular collective returns (503).

Similarly, in Book 2 of the *Odyssey*, when Telemachus enters the Ithacan assembly-place, those watching are described as λαοί (13); when he explains it was he who gathered them, λαός is used (41); and when Mentor rebukes the gathering, λαοί represents the disparate individuals over whom Odysseus is lord, but *dēmos* those currently present (234, 252). Another informative line is ‘are you willingly so oppressed or do the λαοί

²⁸ The singularity of *dēmos* is usually lost in English accounts. Even those who emphasize its corporate character tend to use the plural with ‘people’; e.g. Ober (n. 12), 34–5.

²⁹ See J. Haubold, *Homer’s People: Epic Poetry and Social Formation* (Cambridge, 2000).

³⁰ When δημόται does appear, it typically refers to the people of a smaller locality, not to members of the ‘national’ *dēmos* (e.g. Pind. *Nem.* 7.65; Hdt. 2.172). The δαμότας ἄνδρας mentioned at line 5 of the Spartan *Rhetra* (Tyrtæus, fr. 4, a difficult text; discussed on p. 53 below) is an important exception.

³¹ The definite article thus seems better avoided in English, though it is usually included, as in, for example, A.T. Murray’s Loeb translation; G. Nagy, *Homeric Responses* (Austin, TX, 2003), 74.

throughout the *dēmos* hate you?' Again, λαοί indicates separate individuals, *dēmos* the entity they make up (3.214, 16.95).³²

Solon, too, used *dēmos* rather than λαοί when referring to his act of uniting the people: 'But what did I leave unaccomplished, of all the goals for which I brought the *dēmos* together?' (Solon, fr. 36.1–2). Pindar described how Pyrrha and Deukalion had, in Opous, founded a single *dēmos* out of many λαοί (*Ol.* 9.42–6), while in Aeschylus' *Suppliants* Pelasgus calls the λαοί to vote, after which they are identified as the *dēmos*.³³ The same distinction is implied by the traditional call-outs to the dispersed people, ἀκούετε λεῶ, 'hear ye, people' (for example Ar. *Pax* 551) and δεῦρ' ἴτ' ὦ πάντες λεῶ, 'come hither, all ye people' (for example Ar. *Pax* 296). Plutarch claimed that the latter had been used by Theseus to establish the Athenian πάνδημος, 'whole *dēmos*' (*Thes.* 25). As before, the multitudinous λαοί, once gathered, formed a singular collective agent, either λαός or *dēmos*.

THE *DĒMOS* WAS A POLITICAL AGENT

Dēmos thus indicated 'people' in a singular-collective sense, as opposed to plural-individual. As noted, this puts the word in the same linguistic category as λαός, 'people', στρατός, 'army', and *polis*, 'city-state'. What differentiated *dēmos* from these proximate terms?

One factor is military. στρατός suggests the physical presence of men under arms, which is why, in translations of Homer, it is often rendered 'camp'.³⁴ It occasionally appeared outside a military setting, as in Pindar's line 'under every regime the straight-talking man excels: in a tyranny, when the boisterous στρατός rules, or when the wise watch over the city' (*Pyth.* 2.86, transl. Race), or in the chorus' prayer, in Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* (467), for the *polis* to be saved and the στρατός not to be destroyed by fire (221–2).³⁵ Even in these authors, however, military uses predominated.³⁶

The military factor also distinguished *dēmos* from λαός.³⁷ In the *Iliad*, λαός is often translated 'army', as when Hector and his λαός are prevented from taking the fight to the ships of the Achaeans (15.721). 'Army' or 'host' may also be the right interpretation of the epithets ποιμένα λαῶν, 'shepherd of hosts' (for example Hom. *Il.* 10.3, *Od.* 4.24), and λαοσσόος, 'host-raising' (for example Hom. *Od.* 22.210; Hes. [*Sc.*] 3, 37). Similar uses appear in the *Homeric Hymn to Athena* (4), the description of the Greek army's embarkation for Troy in Hesiod's *Works and Days* (652), Pindar's first Nemean ode (17) and Aeschylus' *Persians* (126), where λαός specifically suggests 'infantry'. *Dēmos* never appears in this context.

Another distinction relates to territory. A λαός is portable, attached primarily to its leader: the λαοί of Agamemnon and other leaders attend them wherever they go

³² Cf. Hom. *Il.* 7.175, 24.1; *Od.* 2.252; Thgn. 53–60.

³³ Aesch. *Supp.* 517–19, 601–4, 621–4, 942–3.

³⁴ Hom. *Il.* 1.318, 1.384, 2.779, 10.336, 10.385.

³⁵ Cf. *Pyth.* 1.87, *Isthm.* 1.11; Aesch. *Eum.* 668–9, 683.

³⁶ Pind. *Nem.* 8.11, 9.18, 10.25, *Isthm.* 7.28, *Ol.* 9.96, 10.43, *Pyth.* 4.191, 6.11, 8.52, 10.8, 11.8; Aesch. *Pers.* 65–6, 91, 126, 241, 255, *Sept.* 79, *Ag.* 638.

³⁷ See further E. Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society*, transl. E. Palmer (London, 1973), 371–2.

(*Il.* 13.492, 16.548). *Dēmos* often appeared in connection with origins, as in the ‘catalogue of ships’ in *Iliad* Book 2, where it identifies the people of Athens and Apasos respectively (545, 828; cf. *Hom. Il.* 15.738–45). Requests to tell one’s country (γαῖαν), people (*dēmon*) and/or city (*polin*) are also common in the *Odyssey*, suggesting that these concepts were closely identified (for example 8.555, 13.233). Similar associations of people and place appear in the Homeric hymns, Hesiod, Pindar and Aeschylus.³⁸

This territorial aspect has often led *dēmos* to be translated ‘land’, as in Murray’s description of Odysseus as reared ‘in the land of Ithaca’.³⁹ This rendering is misleading if it causes *dēmos* to be confused with γῆ or γαῖα, ‘earth’ or ‘country’, since the *dēmos* is always a human agent, whereas γῆ alludes more literally to the soil (for example *Hom. Od.* 5.398). Yet, it does usefully highlight another aspect of *dēmos*: its association with agriculture. The phrase Δελφῶν ἐς πτόνα δῆμον (*Hom. Hymn Art.* [27] 13), for example, may be translated either ‘to the rich land of Delphi’ (for example Evelyn-White) or ‘to the rich community of Delphi’ (West). What supports both renderings is the productive function of the *dēmos*.

This function is particularly evident in the *Odyssey*. ‘But come, let’s each give him a great tripod and a cauldron’, urges Alcinous, ‘and we in turn will gather recompense from among the people (κατὰ δῆμον)’ (13.13–15). Similarly, after Odysseus kills Antinous, ringleader of the suitors, another suitor suggests that the rest could ‘go among the people (κατὰ δῆμον) and get you recompense for all that has been drunk and eaten in your halls’ (22.55–60). To be sure, the *dēmos* may be milked too severely: see Achilles’ withering comment to Agamemnon: ‘People-devouring king (δημοβόρος βασιλεύς), since you rule over nobodies!’ (1.231). Yet, the fact that the gods are equally ready to dispose of the *dēmos*’ productive capacities, as Demeter does in one of the hymns addressed to her, suggests that this may not have been regarded as unfair exploitation (*Hom. Hymn Dem.* [2] 270–1).

Another difference concerns relations with leaders. A *dēmos* was a productive object ‘held’ (εἶχον) by its leaders and used by them as a source of wealth and power (*Hom. Il.* 2.546, 2.828, 17.330). This could easily be accompanied by hostility, as in Theognis’ line, ‘[t]rample the empty-headed *dēmos*, jab it with a sharp goad, and place a painful yoke around its neck’ (847–50, transl. Gerber). The relationship between a λαός and its leaders was more solidaristic. When Priam’s people weep with him over Hector’s death, they are repeatedly identified as λαοί and λαός, not *dēmos*.⁴⁰ Similarly, when Telemachus bursts into tears while recounting his plight to the Ithacan assembly, those pitying him are named λαός (*Od.* 2.80–1). The chorus in *Persians*, when it appeals to the ghost of King Darius, identifies itself the same way (787–9).

The fact that λαός has a martial and a personal connotation while *dēmos* is associated with settled agricultural activity and a degree of alienation from its leaders has important implications. A λαός, at war, and especially if fighting away from its own territory, needs its leader to be victorious in order to ensure its own survival. Not so a *dēmos*. The proximity of the *dēmos* to the means of production and de facto control of territory give it a measure of independence. Because of this, one might expect to see *dēmos* associated with greater political voice and agency than λαός, and this is indeed the

³⁸ *Hom. Hymn Dem.* (2) 490, *Hom. Hymn Ap.* (3) 30, 468, *Hom. Hymn Art.* (27) 13; Hes. *Theog.* 477, 970, *Op.* 527; Pind. *Ol.* 3.16; Aesch. *Sept.* 46–8.

³⁹ *Hom. Il.* 3.202; cf. 12.447–8, 16.427, 20.383, 24.481; *Od.* 4.243, 4.530, 4.610, 4.616, 4.691, 6.282, 8.210, 17.525, 23.11.

⁴⁰ *Hom. Il.* 24.21, 37, 658, 665, 712–15, 739, 776, 789.

case. From Homer on, virtually every time the collective people is depicted as taking an active role in the community's affairs—principally judging its leaders, resisting them or egging them on—*dēmos* is used. Its first appearance in the *Iliad* is, as we have seen, during the Achaean army's rush to the ships, while Odysseus claims that there was no way to refuse the journey to Ilion, 'for the voice of the *dēmos* pressed hard upon us' (*Od.* 14.235). Similarly, Telemachus counts the fact that *πᾶς δῆμος* bears him no grudge as an advantage in his struggle against the suitors, while Penelope challenges Antinous, ringleader of the suitors, by reminding him that his father once came to her house 'a fugitive in fear of the *dēmos*' (*Od.* 16.114, 16.425).

The political significance of the *dēmos* is sometimes revealed through passive disapprobation, as suggested by the line 'there can be no good report among the people (*κατὰ δῆμον*) for men who dishonour and consume the house of a prince' (*Od.* 21.331). We must also acknowledge that some of the most insistent concerns about the 'voice of the *dēmos*' come from women, who are themselves politically marginalized.⁴¹ None the less, the judgement of the *dēmos* is often depicted as well founded. The Achaeans' support for the return of Chryses' daughter is vindicated, as is Telemachus' decision to take his case to the assembly. The *dēmos* is even sometimes expected to assert itself. Speaking before the Ithacan assembly, Mentor does not blame the suitors for pursuing Penelope, but he does blame 'the rest of the *dēmos*, in that you all sit there in silence and say nothing to make them stop, though you are many (*πολλοί*) and they but few' (*Od.* 2.239–44). Contrast that with the following, from *Iliad* Book 4: 'Each leader (*ἡγεμόνων*) gave orders to his men, while the rest marched in silence; you would have said that they who followed in such a mass (*τόσσον λαόν*) had no voice in their breast, so silent were they, for fear of their commanders' (428–32).

In later texts, the political agency of the *dēmos* is strikingly reconfirmed. It is always *dēmos*, never *λαός*, that appears in compounds suggesting public actions (*δημόπρακτος*, *δημόκραντος*), public provisions (*δόματ' ... δήμια*, *δημοισπληθῆ*) and public punishments such as stoning (*λευστήρα δήμου*, *δημόλευστος*), banishment for bloodshed (*δημηλασία*) and being driven into exile (*ξὺν φυγῆ δημηλάτω*).⁴² By the second quarter of the fifth century, the capacity of the *dēmos* to make its will felt across the community was an established feature of the Greek language.

THE *DĒMOS* WAS A PARTIAL AGENT

A *dēmos* was thus politically significant in a way that a *λαός* was not. It had an independent voice and a measure of power in relation to its leaders. What then distinguished it from *polis*, a similarly 'political' collective agent?

Polis suggested the outermost and hence most inclusive boundary of the political community. It was the *polis*, not the *dēmos*, that interacted with external agents such as the gods. Pindar's entreaties to Zeus are offered on behalf of and in the interests of the *polis*,⁴³ Apollo's advice to the Spartans is given to the *polis*,⁴⁴ divine epithets include *φιλόπολις*, 'city-loving', *πολιάχοχος* and *ῥυσιπολις*, both 'protector of the

⁴¹ Hom. *Od.* 2.101, 6.274, 16.75, 19.146, 24.136; cf. 1.359, 21.333.

⁴² Aesch. *Supp.* 6–7, 612–14, 942–3, 957, *Ag.* 129, 456, 1615, *Sept.* 199; Soph. *Ant.* 36. See further D.M. Carter, 'The demos in Greek tragedy', *CCJ* 55 (2010), 47–94, at 73–83.

⁴³ Pind. *Ol.* 5.20, 8.86, *Pyth.* 1.32. Cf. *Hom. Hymn* 13.3.

⁴⁴ Tyrtaeus, *Rhetra* (see below). Contrast, however, Pind. *Ol.* 3.16.

city',⁴⁵ and when the gods visit human communities those communities are described as *ἀνθρώπων πόλις*.⁴⁶ It was *poleis* that engaged in war⁴⁷ and athletic competitions⁴⁸ and that held festivals.⁴⁹ Most significantly, *polis* was associated with what we would call national identity. The names used to link particular groups to places and ways of life—Locrians, Myrmidons, Athenians and so on—all designate *poleis*.⁵⁰

Polis could thus denote all members of a given community.⁵¹ Crucially, that included its leaders. In archaic texts, there is a special connection between a community's leaders and the *polis*. Narrowly construed, *polis* referred to the physical *acropolis*, the walled citadel inside which the ruling elite lived, as distinct from the land outside the walls, where the working population mostly remained.⁵² This usage appears in Homer and elsewhere,⁵³ but the association between the *polis* and the ruling class is especially clear in Theognis, who holds its leaders directly responsible for the instability of the *polis*.⁵⁴ Nausicaa, in the *Odyssey*, also suggests a close relationship between leader and community. Her father, Alcinous, is one 'whose power (*κάρτος*) and might are held from the Phaeacians' (6.197).

Polis in our earliest texts could thus denote either the community as a whole, including both rulers and ruled, or it could suggest the ruling class alone, who were none the less identified with the rest of the community in some way. The identification of a *polis*' rulers with the *polis* as a whole makes sense, since it was those men who governed the rest of the community and represented it to outsiders. But in this respect, *polis* contrasts sharply with *dēmos*, which in archaic texts denotes exclusively ordinary citizens as opposed to those who ruled.

That *dēmos* and *polis* are not synonymous is suggested in the first instance by their frequent juxtaposition. Hector excoriates Paris for having brought misery to his father, the *polis* and all the *dēmos*, whereas Hector is a 'great joy' to *polis* and *dēmos* alike.⁵⁵ Athena visits the *dēmos* and *polis* of the Phaeacians, Odysseus those of the Cimmerians, and Hesiod writes that the sun 'moves to dark men's *dēmos* and *polis* in winter'.⁵⁶ Such cases may be interpreted as pleonasm. Yet, that seems unlikely in the cases of Paris and Hector, and analogous pairings of *polis* and *γῶα*, 'country' or 'land', are normally interpreted as representing city and country respectively, those inside and those outside the city walls.⁵⁷ Theognis' description of *ἀρετή*, virtue, as 'a common (*ξυνόν*) benefit for the city (*polis*) and all the people (*παντί τε δήμῳ*)', meanwhile, supports the view that *polis* and *dēmos* were distinct (1003–6).

⁴⁵ Pind. *Ol.* 4.16, 5.10; cf. Dem. 19.254–6; Thgn. 757–64, 773–88; Hes. [*Sc.*] 105; Aesch. *Sept.* 130 and cf. 108, 136, 174–9.

⁴⁶ *Hom. Hymn Dem.* (2) 93, *Hom. Hymn Ap.* (3) 175, 278, *Hom. Hymn Aphr.* (5) 20; Hes. [*Sc.*] 270. Cf. Thgn. 757–64; Pind. *Isthm.* 6.65.

⁴⁷ *Hom. Il.* 1.19, 4.290, 8.523, 9.328, 15.77, 15.740, 16.830, *Od.* 9.263; Pind. *Isth.* 5.36.

⁴⁸ Pind. *Nem.* 5.47, *Ol.* 2.7, 2.92, 5.4, 9.21.

⁴⁹ Pind. *Ol.* 7.94.

⁵⁰ Pind. *Ol.* 10; Hes. [*Sc.*] 380; Hansen and Nielsen (n. 17), 31.

⁵¹ *Hom. Il.* 13.815, 15.558, 16.69. Cf. Stob. *Ecl.* 4.10.1.23, quoting Tyrtaeus.

⁵² See Thuc. 2.15.3.

⁵³ *Hom. Il.* 2.29, 5.642, 6.86–8, 6.327, 13.492, 13.625, 15.738, 18.255, 20.52, 21.295; Hes. [*Sc.*] 270; *Hom. Hymn Dem.* 2.271; Thgn. 773–88.

⁵⁴ Thgn. 39–52, 855. Cf. Pind. *Nem.* 10.23, *Ol.* 3.16.

⁵⁵ *Hom. Il.* 3.49, 24.706, 24.527; cf. *Od.* 14.43.

⁵⁶ *Hom. Od.* 6.3, 11.14; Hes. *Op.* 527.

⁵⁷ *Hom. Od.* 6.177–8, 6.191, 6.195, 7.26, 10.39, 13.233; *Hom. Hymn Ap.* (3) 468; Thgn. 1211–16.

These examples look like cases of *polis* narrowly construed, that is, *polis* suggesting above all the ruling elite. In such instances, *polis* and *dēmos* seem complementary—‘elite’ and ‘mass’. But what about when *polis* suggested the entire community? Here too we find a distinction between *dēmos* and *polis*. In such cases, another group figures as the complement of *dēmos*, in relation to both of which the *polis* is a whole. This complement are the rulers of the *polis*: in Homeric language, the ἡγήτορες καὶ μέδοντες, ‘leaders and counsellors’, of the mass of ordinary men.

A disjunction between the *dēmos* and its leaders is evident from the first appearance of *dēmos* in our sources, in *Iliad* Book 2. Odysseus’ aggression towards a ‘man of the people’ (δῆμου τ’ ἄνδρα) as he attempts to regather the Achaean army is explicitly contrasted with his gentle approach to a ‘king or man of note’ (188–98).⁵⁸ Similarly, the chiefs of the Achaeans are said to be ‘honoured by the *dēmos* as a god’⁵⁹—unlike minstrels and other non-political figures, who are represented as honoured by the λαός.⁶⁰ Such honouring ought to be mutual: according to Pindar, ‘a man who is ruler (ἀγῆτιρ) ... can in honouring his people (*damon*) turn them to harmonious peace’ (*Pyth.* 1.69, transl. Race). Indeed, the *dēmos* and its rulers are often depicted as mutually dependent. Odysseus links the status of the Phaeacian kings to the ‘dues of honour that the *dēmos* has given’, while Polydamas accepts that a *dēmos* ought to increase its leader’s power (κράτος).⁶¹ Accordingly, *dēmoi* are readily implicated in their leaders’ failings. Hesiod claims that Zeus will take vengeance on the *dēmos* for the wickedness of its kings, Theognis that the *dēmos* in his community is ‘in love with tyranny’, and Solon that the Athenian *dēmos* ‘increased the power (κράτος)’ of the Peisistratid tyrants by giving them a bodyguard.⁶² Yet, even a symbiotic relationship is predicated on difference. Tellingly, it was a point of pride for Solon that, following the civil strife in Athens, the distinction between *dēmos* and ἡγεμόνες was maintained, the ‘milk’ kept separate from the ‘cream’ (Solon, fr. 37.8).

The *dēmos* and its leaders were thus typically portrayed as complementary entities, and the community that they made up was the *polis*, broadly construed. That the *dēmos* was regarded as a subset of the *polis* thus conceived, rather than as equivalent to it, is supported by the conventional formula used to identify a *dēmos*. The usual way to refer to (for example) the Athenian *dēmos* was ὁ Ἀθηναίων δῆμος, ‘the *dēmos* of the Athenians’, where ‘Athenians’ is a genitive plural.⁶³ This construction may be identified as a partitive genitive, indicating that the *dēmos* is one part of all the Athenians. Another possible formulation—the one naturally favoured by English speakers—would be ὁ Ἀθηναίως δῆμος, ‘the Athenian *dēmos*’. That formulation, which leaves the relationship between *dēmos* and *polis* obscure, does appear in our sources, but it is both rare and relatively late.⁶⁴

The specific role played by the leaders of the *polis* is indicated by a line in one of the Homeric hymns to Demeter. ‘I will tell you the names of the men who control privilege here, who stand out from the *dēmos* and protect the city’s (πόλεως) ramparts

⁵⁸ Hom. *Il.* 2.275, 10.301, 14.144, 18.295, 22.457, *Od.* 4.63, 7.136, 8.7, 8.26, 13.186. Cf. *Od.* 6.300, 15.534; Dem. 19.254–6; [Arist.] *Ath. pol.* 11–12; Diod. Sic. 9.20; Thgn. 39–52, 233–4.

⁵⁹ Hom. *Il.* 10.32–3, 11.58, 13.218, 16.605, *Od.* 7.11.

⁶⁰ Hom. *Il.* 8.472, *Od.* 13.28, 16.375, 22.132. An exception is *Il.* 5.76–8.

⁶¹ Hom. *Od.* 7.150, *Il.* 12.210.

⁶² Hes. *Op.* 255; Thgn. 849; [Arist.] *Ath. pol.* 12.5.

⁶³ E.g. Thuc. 4.46, 6.54; Ar. *Thesm.* 301; Aeschin. 1.25, 1.85.

⁶⁴ E.g. *IG* I³ 105.

with straight judgements.⁶⁵ The six men listed are distinct from the *dēmos* but part of the *polis*, living within its walls and ensuring its security. The Spartan *Rhētra* (Tyrtaeus, fr. 4) is also useful in this connection. The *polis* is described as being in the care of the kings (βασιλῆας), while the elders (γέροντες) initiate counsel, and certain *damos*-men (δαμότας ἄνδρας) respond. Decision-making power (κράτος) is assigned to the majority of the people (δάμου τε πλῆθει), and the whole text is described as ‘Phoebus’ revelation to the *polis*.⁶⁶ The identities of *dēmos*, *polis* and leading men are here unmistakable. The *polis* is the entire community, comprising kings, elders, men of the *dēmos* and the *dēmos* itself. The *dēmos* is not the whole community but a part of it.

The best synonym for *dēmos* in the archaic period would thus seem to be πλῆθος, ‘mass’ or ‘majority’. Of course, since πλῆθος can suggest ‘majority’ in any context, the terms are not perfectly equivalent. But both πλῆθος and *dēmos* were regularly contrasted with ἡγεμόνες and ἡγήτορες, leaders and rulers, which suggests that they occupied the same position *vis-à-vis* the *polis*.⁶⁷ Both are also identified as collective bodies of unnamed men, that is, men whose personal identities are irrelevant to their political role. The ‘catalogue of ships’ in *Iliad* Book 2 opens with the admission that, though the poet will tell of leaders and lords (ἡγεμόνες ... καὶ κοίρανοι), ‘the πλῆθύν I could not tell or name’ (487). Similarly, when Agamemnon orders the heralds to ‘call each man by name to the place of assembly’, he means ‘leaders and counsellors’ alone (9.10, 9.17). The same pattern appears in Aeschylus’ *Persians*. ‘Which of the leaders of the host (ἄφρχελείων) must we mourn?’ asks Queen Atossa, and the messenger identifies them (297–330). But when the destruction of the mass of men is described, the only names given are λαός and *dēmos* (729–32). Indeed, when otherwise undistinguished men are given individual roles in our texts, they are described simply as emerging ‘out of the *dēmos*’.⁶⁸ No other title was deemed necessary, or perhaps possible.

THE *DĒMOS* WAS THE ASSEMBLY

The *dēmos* before *dēmokratia* was thus the collective political agent constituted by the ordinary men who formed the majority of the citizen population. It was distinct from the same men regarded as separate persons (λαοί) or as a collective military agent (στρατός, λαός); from the community’s leaders (ἡγεμόνες, ἡγήτορες, βασιλεῖς, γέροντες); and from the entire community (*polis*, πάντες πολῖται). I suggest that the familiar English term for a body of this kind is ‘assembly’, in the sense of a mass of people gathered together to pursue some joint purpose. *Dēmos* denoted the singular collective agent formed by the common people meeting for political purposes, whether that involved listening to speeches, making decisions by majority vote, sending people into exile, or acting collectively in some other way. By extension, *dēmos* indicated all those who participated in politics through a collective agent, in contradistinction from those who had personal political significance.

⁶⁵ *Hom. Hymn Dem.* 2.149–53, transl. West.

⁶⁶ On the text, see H.T. Wade-Gery, ‘The Spartan rhetra in Plutarch *Lycurgus* VI’, *CQ* 37 (1943), 62–72 and 38 (1944), 1–9, 115–26; D. Ogden, ‘Crooked speech: the genesis of the Spartan rhetra’, *JHS* 114 (1994), 85–102.

⁶⁷ E.g. *Hom. Il.* 11.304, 15.295, 20.377, 22.458.

⁶⁸ *Hom. Il.* 11.328, 12.210, 16.575, *Od.* 8.35, 8.258–9.

Dēmos thus denoted ‘assembly’ in a different sense from that implied by ἀγορά or ἐκκλησία. From its first appearance in the *Iliad*, when Achilles summons the λαός to the ἀγορή, this term signified primarily the place of assembly.⁶⁹ It could also suggest the assembly as an event or object, as when Hector or other leaders call an assembly (ἀγορὴν ποιήσατο, ‘he made an assembly’) or dismiss one (λύσαν δ’ ἀγορὴν, ‘they dissolved the assembly’).⁷⁰ But ἀγορά never denoted the assembly as an agent, that is, as an acting subject.

Something similar was true of ἐκκλησία, at least until late in the classical period. Since at least the days of George Grote and John Stuart Mill, the Athenian assembly has regularly been referred to as ‘the Ecclesia’, but this practice is misleading.⁷¹ As Hansen also now believes, ἐκκλησία primarily indicated ‘meeting’, in line with its derivation from ἐκκαλέω, ‘call out’ or ‘summon’.⁷² This is its sense, for example, in the opening scene of *Acharnians*, when Dikaiopolis identifies the upcoming meeting as the ἐκκλησία κύρια, the main meeting of the month.⁷³ ἐκκλησία could also connote the place of assembly, as in the claim, in *Knights*, that Paphlagon had ‘one foot in Pylos, the other in the assembly’ (ἐν τῆκεκκλησίᾳ).⁷⁴ But it did not indicate the assembly as an acting subject until well into the fourth century and even then that usage was rare.⁷⁵ Rather, *dēmos* was used.

This is already evident from many of the sources presented so far. *Dēmos* in *Iliad* Books 2 and 18 indicates an assembly, as it does in *Odyssey* Book 2. The *dēmos* in Solon’s question, ‘[b]ut what did I leave unaccomplished, of all the goals for which I brought the *dēmos* together?’, may also be interpreted this way (as Rhodes has suggested), as can *dēmo-* in the various compounds listed above.⁷⁶ The *damos* featured in the Spartan *Rhetra* (Tyrtaeus, fr. 4) is certainly an assembly; that in τὸν Ἀθηναίων δῆμον more than likely is. In other cases, *dēmos* seems to denote the wider group from which particular gatherings were drawn, that is, the common people at large. But that usage plausibly derived from the referent ‘assembly’. It was because the *dēmos* was composed of members of the common people that the same term could be used to represent the common people as a whole.

The earliest direct evidence for this claim appears in inscriptions. In the last quarter of the seventh century, the *damos* of the Corcyraeans announced its responsibility for a memorial to its proxenos Menekrates of Oianthos; a law from Chios, dated 575–550, refers to ‘rhetras of the *dēmos*’, declarations of the *dēmos*, and to two demotic institutions, the δῆμος κεκλημένος or ‘called-out’ *dēmos* and the βουλή δημοσίη or demotic council; and the common prescript ἔδοξε τῶι δήμῳ, ‘decided by the

⁶⁹ Hom. *Il.* 1.53. Cf. *Il.* 1.490, 2.50–2, 2.95, 9.10, 12.210, 18.496, 19.34, 19.42; *Od.* 1.372, 2.7, 3.127, 6.265, 7.44, 8.5, 8.16, 10.114, 16.360, 16.375, 24.412–25; Hom. *Hymn Dem.* (2) 296–300; Hes. *Theog.* 88–92; Thgn. 430; Soph. *Trach.* 639; Eur. *El.* 708.

⁷⁰ Hom. *Il.* 8.489; cf. *Il.* 1.305, 24.1, *Od.* 2.67, 2.257. Cf. *Od.* 1.90, 2.26; Hes. *Op.* 29.

⁷¹ J.S. Mill, ‘Grote’s History of Greece (II)’, *Edinburgh Review* 98 (October 1853), 425–47.

⁷² Hansen (n. 1), 507.

⁷³ Ar. *Ach.* 19, 169; cf. *Ach.* 746–51, *Thesm.* 84, 301, 329, 375, *Vesp.* 31, *Eccl.* 20, 84, *Av.* 1027; Thuc. 6.8, 6.9.

⁷⁴ Ar. *Eq.* 76. Cf. *Eccl.* 249, *Pax* 667, 931; Aeschin. 1.26, 1.178, 1.180.

⁷⁵ Hansen (n. 1), 507 says that *ekklēsia* never denotes the assembly as an acting subject in Athenian speeches and inscriptions, only in Plato and Aristotle (e.g. *Alc.* 1.114b, *Pol.* 1282a29). The usage is however found in ML 5, a fourth-century reproduction of what purports to be a seventh-century inscription on the founding of Cyrene; cf. A.J. Graham, ‘The authenticity of the ὄρκιον πῶν οἰκιστῆρων of Cyrene’, *JHS* 80 (1960), 94–111, especially 104–5.

⁷⁶ CAAP 175.

dēmos', also seen in the formulation ἔδοξε τῆι βουλῆι καὶ τῶι δήμῳ, 'decided by the council and the *dēmos*', appears for the first time in an Athenian inscription of the late sixth century.⁷⁷ A reference to the δᾶμος πληθὺν in an early fifth-century inscription from Elis directly associates the assembly with the masses.⁷⁸ And this usage is found in scores of later inscriptions and speeches.⁷⁹

Other sources are also useful. Aeschylus' *Suppliants* (c.463) has long been recognized as including a likely reference to *dēmokratia* in the phrase δήμου κρατοῦσα χεὶρ, 'the ruling hand of the *dēmos*' (604; cf. 699).⁸⁰ What is less often emphasized is that *dēmos* both here and elsewhere in the play represents an assembly (398, 488, 601, 624).⁸¹ Each of the five uses of *dēmos* in Euripides' *Suppliants* (c.423) also indicates an assembly (351, 406, 418, 425, 442). πανδημία, in the report that the πανδημία approves of the proposal to give the refugees right of residence, may be interpreted in the same way (Aesch. *Supp.* 607). Though that word is usually translated 'entire people', 'entire assembly' is equally possible.

Another significant passage is Herodotus' description of the Athenian revolution of 508/7, identified by Herodotus himself as marking the birth of *dēmokratia* (6.131). Cleisthenes, we are told, 'took the *dēmos* into his ἐταρεία' (perhaps best translated 'fraternity') and 'drew the *dēmos* to his side', thus gaining the advantage over his rival Isagoras (5.66, 5.69). Ober has argued that 'it seems a reasonable guess that it was in the Assembly (although not necessarily uniquely there) that [Cleisthenes] allied himself to the *dēmos*, by proposing (and perhaps actually passing) constitutional reforms.'⁸² I agree, though I would alter Ober's wording. Herodotus tells us not that it was 'in the Assembly' that Cleisthenes allied himself to the *dēmos* but simply that Cleisthenes allied himself to the *dēmos*, that is, to the assembly—and thence, by extension, to the common people at large. Though *dēmos* does not reappear, I suspect that an assembly is also implied in Herodotus' report that, Cleomenes and his men having tried to dissolve the council, it resisted and 'the rest of the Athenians, being of one mind (τὰ αὐτὰ φρονήσαντες), besieged them on the acropolis for two days' (5.72). Ober interprets this action as a 'riot' originating in 'the piecemeal word-of-mouth operations typical of an oral society'.⁸³ But the Athenians' unity of purpose and subsequent aggressive action (an organized siege, not a riot, on my reading) may have emerged from a mass meeting summoned by the council in more or less the normal way. The fact that *dēmos* appears in the account of these events given in the Aristotelian *Athēnaiōn Politeia* lends some support to this interpretation (20.3).

Further examples of *dēmos* meaning assembly could be multiplied ad taedium: I will consider just two more authors, Aristophanes and Aristotle. The main character in *Knights* is 'Mr Demos of Pnyx Hill', the Pnyx being the meeting-place of the

⁷⁷ ML 4, 8, 14. Cf. Aesch. *Sept.* 1011.

⁷⁸ *IVO* 7, discussed by E. Robinson, *The First Democracies* (Stuttgart, 1997), 108–9. An Athenian parallel is *IG* I³ 105 (c.409), which seemingly quotes from a much earlier text of the bouleutic oath.

⁷⁹ M.H. Hansen, 'Demos, ecclesia and dicasterion in classical Athens', *GRBS* 19 (1978), 130–1 provides what he describes as a conservative catalogue of c.300 examples. I suspect there are many more.

⁸⁰ Ehrenberg (n. 20), 522.

⁸¹ Though see M. West, 'King and *dēmos* in Aeschylus', in D. Cairns and V. Liapis (edd.), *Dionysalexandros: Essays on Aeschylus and his Fellow Tragedians in Honour of Alexander F. Garvie* (Swansea, 2006), 31–40, at 35–6.

⁸² Ober (n. 12), 38.

⁸³ Ober (n. 12), 43–4.

Athenian assembly (42; cf. 751). It is the *dēmos* whose mind is changed in debates (*Ach.* 626), which is addressed by politicians and which yells right back at them,⁸⁴ which authorizes decrees and is held responsible for the results (*Vesp.* 594, *Eccl.* 204), which works in tandem with the council (*Vesp.* 395, 590), and a female version of which is constituted by a large meeting of women (*Thesm.* 1145). In the *Politics*, meanwhile, the governing officials in Hippodamus' ideal state are elected by an assembly (ὕπὸ τοῦ δήμου, 1268a10), while in Carthage, the kings (βασιλεῖς) and elders (γέροντες) decide which matters to refer to that body (πρὸς τὸν δήμον, 1273a5–9). Most striking is Aristotle's comment that, while his definition of a citizen as one who takes part in deliberating and judging is well adapted to *dēmokratiai*, it will not necessarily hold in other regimes, 'for in some there is no *dēmos*, nor do they hold an ἐκκλησία but only συγκλήτους' (1275b5–12). Neither 'entire citizenry' nor 'common people' will do as a translation here: 'assembly' is surely required, yet significantly Aristotle does not bother to clarify this. The opposition of ἐκκλησία to συγκλήτους adds valuable context. A σύγκλητος was an *ad hoc* or extraordinary meeting.⁸⁵ *Dēmos* accordingly appears to have been associated with the custom of *regular* rather than one-off gatherings, just as Hobbes supposed. This makes sense, for without regularly scheduled meetings a collective political agent cannot easily endure.

THE ASSEMBLY BECOMES THE *POLIS*

Dēmos meaning 'assembly' thus looks both more common and more significant than is generally supposed. But what of the meaning 'entire citizen body', which appears in some classical sources? The polyvalence of *dēmos* in the classical period actually offers further support for the claim that its original meaning was 'assembly', defined in the way I have argued. As Hansen has shown, *dēmos* could also denote 'common people', 'democratic faction', 'deme', 'democratic political system', 'entire citizen body' and 'all citizens'.⁸⁶ If 'entire citizen body' came first, the derivation of some of the other meanings, such as 'common people', 'democratic faction' and 'deme', is opaque. But if 'assembly', defined as 'collective political agent', was the primary referent, these extensions begin to make sense.

The first three extensions are the most straightforward. 'Common people' may be explained by the fact that in all times and places in the ancient Greek world those who participated in politics through collective action were none other than the common people; the institution they composed could thus easily be conceived as standing in for the common people as a whole. 'Democratic faction', which typically appears in descriptions of civil war, is justified by the plausible claim that the common people will have been more interested in preserving and extending the political power of the common people than were the elite. And 'deme', the local political unit in Attica, reflects the fact that a collective political agent could be a local entity rather than a 'national' one.

There is more to say about *dēmos* signifying the democratic political system, as in Aristotle's reference to δήμος καὶ ὀλιγαρχία (*Pol.* 1301b40) and the phrase

⁸⁴ *Ar. Eq.* 211–15, *Nub.* 1093, *Vesp.* 31, *Lys.* 514, *Eccl.* 399.

⁸⁵ *Soph. Ant.* 155–61; *Aesch. Supp.* 517–19.

⁸⁶ Hansen (n. 1), 502–3.

(κατα)λύσαι τὸν δῆμον, usually translated ‘overthrow the democracy’.⁸⁷ At first sight this usage may seem a simple shorthand: *dēmos* short for *dēmokratia*. Yet, it may instead be explained by the primacy of the assembly in ancient Greek democracies, in that what the assembly wanted was, in general, what *dēmokratia* delivered.⁸⁸ The referent ‘assembly’ offers a particularly satisfying explanation of (κατα)λύσαι τὸν δῆμον. The choice of verb is striking: λύω meant ‘unbind’ or ‘dissolve’, καταλύω ‘dissolve’ or ‘break down’ completely. It is not immediately obvious why these verbs should have developed the meaning ‘overthrow’, but if their object is interpreted as ‘assembly’, the puzzle clears up. What is imagined is the dissolution of the ties that bind the *dēmos* together, such as the practice of meeting together. A parallel example appears in Herodotus’ report that Cleomenes attempted to dissolve the Athenian council, that is, τὴν βουλὴν καταλύειν (5.72). Here the interpretation ‘dissolve’ is undisputed, and this should arguably be the case when *dēmos* appears in the same position. The exclamation of Xanthias in the opening scene of Aristophanes’ *Wasps* provides further support for this reading: ‘He means to divide (δυστάναί) our *dēmos*!’ (41). When the *dēmos* is divided, that is, dissolved back into the multitudinous λαοί, *dēmokratia* is impossible—hence overthrown.

Finally, the primary identification of *dēmos* with ‘assembly’ suggests an attractive explanation of its occasional synonymy with *polis*, ‘entire citizen body’, and πάντες πολῖται, ‘all citizens’. This sense is implied by Thucydides, voicing Athenagoras of Syracuse: ‘I say *dēmos* names the whole (ξύμπαν), oligarchy only a part’ (6.39). Other possible examples include Pseudo-Xenophon’s description of Athens’ allies as ‘slaves of the *dēmos* of the Athenians’ (1.18), Demosthenes’ lines ‘the allies crowned the *dēmos* for courage and righteousness’ (24.180) and ‘there are honours among the Lacedaemonians that the *dēmos* to a man (ἅπας ὁ δῆμος) would shrink from introducing here’ (20.106), and Dinarchus’ claim that ‘you and the entire *dēmos* risk losing the foundations of the *polis*, the temples of your fathers, and your wives and children’ (1.99).⁸⁹

Aside from Pseudo-Xenophon and Thucydides, these examples are all fourth-century. *Dēmos* and *polis* are also sometimes equivalent in Sophocles and Euripides, but we do not find these terms used synonymously in any earlier text. In other words, as far as we can tell, the use of *dēmos* to refer to the entire citizen body *post-dated* the existence of the term *dēmokratia*, and we can now see why this may have been. Consider the double meaning of *polis* in the context of elite rule. As argued above, *polis* could indicate either the entire community or more specifically its rulers, and this seemed appropriate since the elite governed the rest of the community and represented it to outsiders. Inasmuch as they ruled it, the ruling class could be conceived as standing in for the community as a whole. The same thing held true in *dēmokratiai*,

⁸⁷ Ar. *Eccl.* 453; Thuc. 1.107, 5.76, 8.64–5; Aeschin. 1.173, 1.191; Arist. *Pol.* 1304a27, 1304b30–4, 1307b24; *IG* II³ 1.320. Cf. G. Vlastos, ‘Isonomia’, *AJPh* 74 (1953), 337–66, at 337–8; Hansen (n. 1), 504.

⁸⁸ In fourth-century Athens this was tempered by the political powers of the popular courts: see M.H. Hansen, *The Sovereignty of the People’s Court in Athens* (Odense, 1974). For an argument that Athens’ popular courts could in the fourth century be regarded as even more favourable to the common people than the assembly, see D. Cammack, ‘The democratic significance of the classical Athenian courts’, in W. O’Reilly (ed.), *Decline: Decay, Decadence and Decline in History and Society* (Central European University Press, forthcoming).

⁸⁹ Hansen ([n. 1], 502–3) adds *IG* II² 26.8–9 (394–387) with *IG* I³ 110.6–9 (408/7), and *IG* II² 97.6–8 with 116.27–8 (375/4). It seems possible, however, that in many cases the intended referent may actually have been the assembly.

mutatis mutandis. In ancient Greek democracies it was the *dēmos*, that is, the assembly, that made decisions on behalf of the *polis*, not a council or a leading man; the *dēmos* thus ‘stood in for’ the whole community in an entirely literal sense.

Ober was therefore exactly right to use the concept of synecdoche to illuminate the relationships between the parts and the whole of the Athenian political system, but the figure should be differently specified. It was not that the assembly (part) came to be called *dēmos* (whole) because the entire community (*polis*) was imagined to meet on the Pnyx, but that the *dēmos* (part) came to be called *polis* (whole) because it acted on behalf of, or in other words ruled, the *polis*. Another way to put this is to say that *dēmos* and *polis* became used interchangeably when the *dēmos* gained the upper hand over the political elite. It was the shift in the balance of power towards the assembly expressed in the term *dēmokratia* that caused *dēmos*, the name of the institution representing the majority of the citizenry, to be treated synonymously with *polis*, the name of the community as a whole—and thence too with πάντες πολῖται, ‘all citizens’ conceived as numerous separate individuals.

Something of this shift may be perceived in fifth-century tragedy, which as a mass public forum was a plausible venue for the exploration and promotion of changes in political terminology, ideology and practice.⁹⁰ The central question posed by Aeschylus’ *Suppliants* (c.463) is precisely ‘who speaks for the *polis*, king or *dēmos*?’ or more simply ‘who holds κράτος?’ Claims are made on both sides: the refugees plead with Pelasgus, ‘You are the *polis*, I tell you—you are the public (τὸ δάμιον)’ (370), while the chorus refers to the δήμου κρατοῦσα χεὶρ, the ‘ruling hand of the *dēmos*’, and asserts that τὸ δάμιον, which they do *not* identify with the king, rules (κρατύνει) the *polis* (604, 699). Yet, there is also ambiguity.⁹¹ The *dēmos* votes with the king, but εὐπιθής leaves open whether it was ‘well persuaded’ by him, or simply ‘obeyed’ his words (623). Still more significant is how Pelasgus frames his initial decision to call the λαοί together: οὐκ ἄνευ δήμου τάδε πράξαιμι ἄν, οὐδέ περ κρατῶν (398–9). ‘I will not put this action into effect without the *dēmos*, even though I have power’ or ‘I would not put this action into effect without the *dēmos*, even if I had power?’ Both interpretations are possible. The *dēmos* may speak for the *polis*—or it may not.

In Aeschylus, the relationship between *dēmos* and *polis* is thus left open. But in later texts it becomes increasingly close. In the opening speech of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, an announcement is said to have been made to the πανδήμῳ πόλει, the ‘all-*dēmos polis*’, presumably denoting an assembly (7–8). The same phrase appears in Sophocles’ *Electra* (981). Particularly noteworthy is the question of Creon, which certainly refers to an assembly: ‘Is the *polis* to tell me what orders I shall give?’ (734). In this case, the assembly is identified with the *polis*, while the king plays a complementary role. In other words, this is an example of *polis* narrowly construed to refer to a part rather than the whole of the political community, just as we saw above, in the context of aristocratic government. The crucial difference is that in this case, the institution representing the majority rather than the minority of the citizenry is represented as the dominant partner.

⁹⁰ See e.g. A.H. Sommerstein, ‘The theatre audience, the *demos*, and the suppliants of Aeschylus’, in C. Pelling (ed.), *Greek Tragedy and the Historian* (Oxford, 1997), 63–79.

⁹¹ Cf. A.J. Podlecki, ‘Κατ’ ἀρχῆς γὰρ φιλαίτιος λεώς: the concept of leadership in Aeschylus’, in A.H. Sommerstein et al. (edd.), *Tragedy, Comedy and the Polis* (Bari, 1993), 55–79, at 72: ‘Aeschylus appears to have gone out of his way to emphasize inconsistencies in [Pelasgus’] position as ruler of his city.’

The relationship between *dēmos* and *polis* appears more harmonious in Euripides' *Suppliants* (c.423). Again, *polis* is used to indicate the assembly, while King Theseus is its complement: 'Was it you alone or the whole *polis* that decided this?' (129), 'I want the entire *polis* to ratify this decision' (346), 'the *polis* gladly and willingly took up this task when they heard that I wished them to do so' (394), and 'freedom consists in this: who has a good proposal and wants to set it before the *polis*?' (429, transl. Kovacs). Most significant is Theseus' claim that he has 'established the *dēmos* as a monarch' (κατέστησ' αὐτὸν ἐξ μοναρχίας) by 'freeing the *polis* and giving it equal votes' (352–3)—referring, of course, to votes taken in the assembly. This is the first time in our sources that the synonymy of assembly and *polis* is confidently asserted. More simply, Theseus adds that 'the *dēmos* rules' (ἀνάσσει, 406).

Both μοναρχία and ἀνάσσει connote nobility. Such language may seem deliberately ironic or paradoxical in a speech that transparently celebrates *dēmokratia*, but it may have also been meant quite seriously. Euripides was not alone in ascribing monarchical power to the *dēmos*. Aeschines argued that 'in *dēmokratia*, through law and vote, the ordinary citizen is king (βασιλεύει)' (3.233), while Aristotle described the kind of *dēmokratia* that existed in Hellas in his day as a system in which 'the *dēmos* becomes a monarch' (*Pol.* 1292a12).⁹² Such claims were perfectly plausible. Whereas previously a single man or a small group of men had made decisions on behalf of the *polis*, in classical democracies that role was played by the *dēmos*. From being ruled, the *dēmos* had become the ruler. Yet, an identifiable political elite had not ceased to exist; it just had a more limited function, leading instead of ruling, as the term δημαγωγός, 'demagogue' or *dēmos*-leader, implied. The *polis* still consisted of both *dēmos* and leading men. All that had changed was the balance of power between them.

CONCLUSION

Two quotations, from two great classicists, may be used to illustrate the difference between my argument and previous accounts. First, Moses Finley: 'A deep horizontal cleavage marked the world of the Homeric poems. Above the line were the *aristoi*, literally the "best people", the hereditary nobles who held most of the wealth and all the power, in peace as in war. Below were all the others, for whom there was no collective technical term, the multitude.'⁹³ This seems right, except for the claim that there was no 'collective technical term' for what Finley called 'the multitude'. The term was *dēmos*, referring most narrowly to the assembly, more broadly to all those who participated in politics through collective rather than through individual action.

Next, J.A.O. Larsen. 'The greatest victory for the common people in the development of democracy at Athens was that the name for their group became the word used to designate the sovereign people in the records of votes in the assembly.'⁹⁴ Again, there is much to this assessment, but by framing the process purely in terms of a 'name' and a 'word' Larsen obscures the underlying institutional dynamic. More

⁹² See further M. Landauer, 'The *idiōtēs* and the tyrant: two faces of unaccountability in democratic Athens', *Political Theory* 42 (2014), 139–66; K. Hoekstra, 'Athenian democracy and popular tyranny', in R. Bourke and Q. Skinner (edd.), *Popular Sovereignty in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, 2016), 15–51.

⁹³ M.I. Finley, *World of Odysseus* (rev. ed.; New York, 1978), 53; cf. 107.

⁹⁴ Larsen (n. 1), 45.

accurately, the greatest victory for the common people was that their institution, the assembly, became the supreme political body. Put more simply, the greatest victory of the *dēmos* was that it achieved κρᾶτος.

Exactly when this came to pass in any given *polis* may remain unclear, but the foregoing at least suggests a new way of identifying what we are looking for. Historians' accounts of the origins of *dēmokratia* (whether or not it was known by that name)⁹⁵ have varied significantly depending on their interpretations of the term. Ruschenbusch, for example, defined it as 'any system in which the people in assembly are involved in communal decision making', in which case we first find it in the Homeric epics, while Raaflaub pinpoints 'when active citizenship and full political participation were extended to all adult male citizens ... and when this (exceptionally broadly defined) citizen body through assembly, council and law courts assumed full control over the entire political process, from the conception of policies to their realization and the oversight of those involved in executing them', in which case Athens became a democracy only after the reforms of Ephialtes in 462/1.⁹⁶

The argument advanced here suggests an alternative criterion. *Dēmokratia* was born when the balance of power tipped towards the assembly, away from those who (among other things) addressed it. *Pace* Ruschenbusch, the defining feature of *dēmokratia* was not the assembly's mere 'involvement' in decision-making but its final decision-making power; and *pace* Raaflaub, this need not have extended to 'full control over the entire political process', though it surely implied control over policy decisions and, probably, over those who took leading political roles.

Interpreting *dēmos* this way will not necessarily alter the significance of familiar historical landmarks such as (in the Athenian context) the reforms of Solon, Cleisthenes or Ephialtes. But it may change what we infer from them. *Pace* Forrest, we need not posit the development of a new concept of 'individual human autonomy'—there is little evidence that the ancient Greeks were thinking in individual terms at all in this context. Nor need we posit any underlying sociological change. Rather, the same two groups, *dēmos* and leading men, dominated the political scene all the way from Homer to Aristotle and beyond. What changed was the balance of power between them.

This may seem a disappointingly subtle shift. *Pace* Wolin and Ober, the *dēmos* in *dēmokratia* was not a pre-constitutional multitude, forging a political identity for the first time.⁹⁷ That is to say, *dēmokratia* was not originally λαοί-*kratia*. Rather, the assembly, an institution that already had a long history, simply gained the upper hand over the kind of men who had, in earlier times, called it into being and dominated it. But if the advent of *dēmokratia* was gradual, its arrival was none the less revolutionary. The conversion of the political elite from rulers to leaders was a radical transformation, all the more striking when examined against the backdrop of democracy today. The basic political distinction has not changed, after all: either a given citizen is personally politically significant, in which case she is a member of the political elite, or she is personally insignificant but can none the less exercise power as part of a collective

⁹⁵ Alternative candidates are *isonomia* and *isēgoria*. See Ehrenberg (n. 20); M. Ostwald, *Nomos and the Beginning of Athenian Democracy* (Oxford, 1969), 97–121; Vlastos (n. 87).

⁹⁶ K.A. Raaflaub, 'Introduction', in K.A. Raaflaub, J. Ober and R.W. Wallace, *Origins of Democracy in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley, 2007), 14; E. Ruschenbusch, 'Zur Verfassungsgeschichte Griechenlands', in K. Kinzl (ed.), *Demokratia* (Darmstadt, 1995), 432–45.

⁹⁷ Wolin (n. 2 [1994]); Ober (n. 2).

agent, in which case she belongs to the common people. The goal of democrats also remains the same: to secure decision-making power in the hands of those who act collectively. But modern democrats face a problem their ancient counterparts lacked, namely how to achieve this in political communities where, as both Aristotle and Hobbes would surely have spotted, there is no *dēmos* in the original sense of the word.

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