

THE *KRATOS* IN *DĒMOKRATIA*

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What did—and did not—*kratos* imply in the classical democratic context? Focusing on the Aristotelian *Athēnaiōn Politeia* (*Constitution of the Athenians*), this article establishes the meaning of *kratos* by exploring its difference from three proximate “power” terms: *archē* (often translated “rule” or “government”), *kuros* (“authority” or “sovereignty”), and *dēmagōgia* (“demagoguery” or more neutrally “*dēmos*-leading”). The results of this comparative lexical analysis are twofold. First, in contrast to Ober (2008, 2017), it is argued that *kratos* implied the prevailing power of one party over another, in this case that of the collective *dēmos* over those who played individual roles in the political community, such as office-holders (*archas*) and political leaders (*dēmagōgoi*). Second, the studies of *kratos*, *kuros*, *archē* and *dēmagōgia* presented here suggest a typology of political power that may illuminate not only ancient but also modern democratic politics. *Kratos*, *archē*, *kuros* and *dēmagōgia* represent four distinct forms of power: dominance, magistracy, authority, and leadership. In Athens, final authority belonged to those who dominated physically, i.e. the mass of ordinary citizens, while magistracy and leadership belonged to individual and thus physically weaker parties. To the extent that, in modern democracies, office-holders and political leaders are typically physically supreme, through their control of military and police power, the Athenian case highlights a severe weakness in democracy today: the *dēmos*’s lack of *kratos* over its political elite.

Dēmokratia is at the same time one of the simplest words in the ancient Greek lexicon to translate and one of the hardest to understand.¹ It suggests “democracy,” but what did that imply two and a half thousand years ago? As is often observed, *dēmos* meant “people,” *kratos* “power” or “rule,” leading to the conventional glosses “rule by the people” and “people-power.”² But “people” defined how? “Ruling” or “exercising power” in what way?

Against the prevailing view that the *dēmos* in *dēmokratia* denoted the entire citizen body, I have recently argued that, first and foremost, *dēmos* indicated a popular assembly; more broadly, it indicated all those who were politically significant only when they constituted a collective political agent, in contradistinction from the political elite, who were politically influential even as individuals. *Demokratia*, on that account, signified rule by the assembly as opposed to rule by an elite few or a single man.³

That reinterpretation invites a parallel reconsideration of the term *kratos*, which I take up in this article. What did—and did not—*kratos* imply in the classical democratic context? I focus here on our single most important source, the

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¹ As emphasized by Lauriola 2017.

² See e.g. Cartledge 2009: 6, 62, 74; Finley 1985: 12; Harrison 1993: 2–3; Larsen 1973: 46; Raaflaub 2007: 106; Rhodes 2003: 18–19; Roberts 1994: 14; Sinclair 1988: 15.

³ Cammack 2019.

Aristotelian *Athēnaiōn Politeia* or *Constitution of the Athenians*.⁴ Establishing the meaning of *kratos* requires distinguishing it from three proximate “power” terms: *archē* (often translated “rule,” “government,” or “empire”), *kuros* (usually translated “authority” or “sovereignty”; adjective *kurios*, “authoritative” or “sovereign”), and *dēmagōgia* (“demagoguery” or more neutrally “*dēmos*-leading”). A significant advantage of dwelling on the *Athēnaiōn Politeia* is that it contains these and cognate terms in abundance; accordingly, the relations among them may be investigated without having to make allowance for different historical or rhetorical contexts. The disadvantage of focusing on a single source is, of course, that its author’s linguistic usages may have been idiosyncratic or biased in some way, whether for political or other reasons. In this article, I try to mitigate that difficulty by drawing on other texts, albeit in an unsystematic manner.⁵

The results of this comparative lexical analysis are twofold. First, in contrast to Josiah Ober, who argues that *kratos* implied the capacity to do things (2008, 2017), I argue that *kratos* specifically denoted the prevailing power of one party over another.⁶ Typically, it denoted the capacity of one party to overpower another by force of arms. In that respect, it differed from *kuros*, which was a more juridical form of authority, sanctioned by either the will of the gods or the agreement of men. Yet as the *Athēnaiōn Politeia* shows, what was gained through *kratos* could easily become *kurios*: it required only general acceptance of the outcome of one party’s superiority. Putting this together with my earlier work on the meaning of *dēmos*, we may say that *dēmokratia* implied the capacity, typically or initially physical but readily enshrined in accepted institutions and decision-making procedures, of the collective common people to dominate its rivals for command of the *politeia*. Who were those rivals? The term *archē* suggests one answer: those who held political office. The role played by *prostatai tou dēmou* and *dēmagōgoi* (champions and leaders of the people) in ancient Greek politics suggests another. Ultimately, it was the *dēmos*’s capacity to control its political elite—both office-holders and influential leaders and speakers—through institutions and (when necessary) physical force that secured its political rule.

Second, the analyses of *kratos*, *kuros*, *archē* and *dēmagōgia* presented here suggest a typology of political power that may help to illuminate not only ancient but also modern democratic politics. *Kratos*, *archē*, *kuros* and *dēmagōgia* imply four distinct forms of political power:⁷ roughly, dominance (particularly physical),⁸ magistracy,⁹ authority,¹⁰ and leadership.¹¹ In Athens, final authority—that is to

⁴ Whether the author of this text was Aristotle or a student (or students) will not affect my argument. For discussion, see Rhodes 1993: 61-63.

⁵ A more chronologically varied treatment is provided in a forthcoming book.

⁶ Ober 2008; Ober 2017.

⁷ I offer the following heavily Latinate selection with some trepidation. Nonetheless, I think these terms are as close to precise equivalents to the ancient Greek terms as modern English usage will allow.

⁸ That is, the state or condition of dominating (exercising the most influence or control), as opposed to domination (the act of dominating).

⁹ That is, the power that belongs to an office-holder by virtue of their office.

¹⁰ That is, the juridical or legal power or right to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience within a certain defined sphere.

¹¹ That is, the state or position of being a leader, self-selected or otherwise.

say, rule (or allowably “sovereignty,” although the early modern and modern connotations of that term may make it misleading)¹²—belonged to those who dominated through sheer force of numbers, i.e. the mass of ordinary citizens, while magistracy and leadership belonged to individual and thus physically weaker parties.

To the extent that, in modern democracies, office-holders and political leaders not only exercise magistracy and leadership but are also, typically, physically supreme through their control of military and police power, we may identify one major contrast between ancient and modern democracy: the *dēmos*’s lack of *kratos* over its political elite. A mass of citizens cannot, by its nature, hold office or perform a leading political role. The political authority of the *dēmos* rests on its capacity to compel, by force if necessary, its political elite to accept its supremacy—that is, it depends ultimately on its *kratos*. The *kratos* of the Athenian *dēmos* was tested and proven militarily in 508/7 and 404/3. And it was tested and proven institutionally every time a political leader or office-holder was convicted in court of a political charge and accepted his punishment. Whether a modern *dēmos* could prove its strength similarly is uncertain. Yet on the ancient Greek view, where the collective common people cannot physically dominate the political elite (that is, where the *kratos* of the *dēmos* is lacking), there is no democracy.

“THE *DĒMOS* IS *HO KRATŌN*” (*ATH. POL.* 41)

As noted above, the *kratos* in *dēmokratia* is normally interpreted “rule” or “power.” Yet exactly what those terms imply is not commonly interrogated. A major exception to that rule is the work of Josiah Ober, who has done more than any other living scholar to explore and illuminate the meaning of ancient Greek *dēmokratia* in both theory and practice, constructively blurring the boundaries of ancient history and political theory in the process.¹³ Since he has subjected the meaning of *kratos* to careful and constructive analysis in two recent works (2008 and 2017), I begin with his account.

According to Ober, the *kratos* implied in *dēmokratia* indicated “power” more than “rule.” Although, as he observes, “Greek linguistic usage of the noun *kratos* and its verbal forms ranges widely across the power spectrum, from ‘domination’ to ‘rule’ to ‘capacity,’” he finds that “*kratos*, when it is used as a regime-type suffix, becomes power in the sense of strength, enablement, or ‘capacity to do things’.”¹⁴ *Dēmokratia* thereby referred to a *dēmos*’s “collective capacity to do things in the public realm, to make things happen,” or, as he put it in his more recent book *Demopolis* (2017), “‘the People’s capacity to do things’—to make history through joint action at scale.”¹⁵

¹² See Hoekstra 2016; Lane 2016.

¹³ See especially Ober 1989; Ober 1996; Ober 1998; Ober 2017.

¹⁴ Ober 2008: 6. Ober 2017: 25 reads: “Greek linguistic usage of the noun *kratos* and its verbal forms ranges widely across the power spectrum, from ‘strength/power to’ through ‘constraint’ to ‘domination/power over’.” Since I have not found “constraint” attested and Ober does not offer an example, I will not take up this formulation but focus instead on that used his original presentation.

¹⁵ Ober 2008: 7; Ober 2017: 29.

That interpretation allows Ober to make the analytically and politically significant move of distinguishing *dēmokratia* from “majority rule,” or as he also puts it, “majoritarian tyranny.”¹⁶ Yet his argument is, in one significant respect, curious. He begins by presenting all the comparands for *dēmokratia* attested in the classical sources: *aristokratia*, *isokratia*, *timokratia*, and *gunaikokratia* (“best,” “equal,” “honour,” and “women” *-kratia*, respectively). He then infers, reasonably, that *krat-* cannot indicate office-holding, as *arch-* does in *oligarchia* (to be discussed further below), since of the prefixes listed only *hoi aristoi*, “the excellent,” and *hai gunaikes*, “women,” would personally have been able to hold office.¹⁷

Ober’s next step is the precarious one. Ignoring any direct evidence for the meanings of *aristokratia* and *gunaikokratia* and ignoring *timokratia* altogether, he turns his attention to *isokratia*, which he says refers “not to a group of persons but to an abstraction, ‘equality’.” He then proceeds to explicate this equality by way of a comparison with other *iso-* compounds—*isonomia* (“equal-law”), *isēgoria* (“equal-public-address”) and *isomoiria* (“equal-shares”)—arguing that “*iso-* prefix-roots refer to distributive fairness in respect to access in a sense of ‘right to make use of’.” He elaborates: “Equal access in each case is to a public good (law, speech, ‘shares’) that when it is equitably distributed, conduces to the common good.” “By analogy,” he concludes, “*isokratia* is equal access to the public good of *kratos*—to public power that conduces to the common good by enabling good things to happen in the public realm.”¹⁸

Interpreting the *-krat* suffix purely by way of an analogy with terms featuring the *iso-* prefix is an interesting strategy, but the direct evidence pertaining to both *isokratia* and other *krat-* terms points in another direction. Neither *isokratia* nor other *isokrat-* terms are well attested in the classical sources. Herodotus, Hippocrates and the author of the Aristotelian *Problems* provide our only examples.¹⁹ But later examples offer some clues as to its meaning. In Galen, *isokrateia* implied “equilibrium” or “equivalence” (*Hist. Phil.* 126), while Zeno the Stoic used *isokrateō* to suggest “evenly balanced” (1.27).

What seems to be implied in these cases is an *equal balance of opposing forces*, and the classical examples support that interpretation. In Hippocrates, the reference is to wine mixed “half and half,” i.e. wine mixed with an equal quantity of water (*Morb.* 2.42). In *Problems*, the reference is to the equinox, which is defined as an even balance (*isokratēs*) between winter and summer (942b37). In Herodotus, meanwhile, the Issodones are said to eat the flesh of their deceased fathers, but in other respects to be a “law-abiding people and the women to rule equally with the men” (*isokratees de homoiōs hai gunaikes toisi andrasi*, 4.26). The male Issodones do not dominate over the female, that is to say; rather, the powers of the two genders are evenly balanced. In the other example, a contrast is drawn between *isokratia* and tyranny, “a thing more unrighteous and bloodthirsty than anything else on this

¹⁶ Ober 2008: 3; Ober 2018: 22.

¹⁷ Ober 2008: 4-6. See also Lane 2013; Lane 2016.

¹⁸ Ober 2008: 6.

¹⁹ Hdt. 4.26, 5.92; Hipp. *Morb.* 2.42; Aristot., *Problems* 942b37.

earth” (5.92A, tr. Godley). Here, the even balance of forces in one political system is contrasted with another in which one man dominates over the rest.²⁰

The other *-krat* compounds listed by Ober also suggest opposing forces, except that without the *iso-* prefix, what is implied is not an even balance of forces or non-domination but rather an unequal balance, that is, the dominance of one party over another. Aristotle, in the *Politics*, cites *gunaikokratia te peri tas oikias*, “women’s dominance at home,” as something that arises in extreme democracy and tyranny (1313b33). *Krat-* here cannot possibly denote a “capacity to make good things happen in the public realm,” not only because the context is not public but domestic but also and more importantly because Aristotle connects *gunaikokratia* to the “dissemination of reports against men,” or in other words to the dominance of women *over* men. The participle *gunaikokratoumenoi*, which appears in his discussion of Sparta and other military communities, suggests the same thing. Aristotle claims not that Spartan women are able to make things happen in the public realm, but that they actually rule over their male fellow-citizens. This is evident from his conclusion. “In the time of [the Spartan] empire (*epi tēs archēs autōn*) many things were managed (*diōkeito*) by women; yet what difference does it make whether the women rule (*archein*) or whether the rulers (*tous archontas*) are ruled (*archesthai*) by women? The result is the same” (*Pol.* 1269b31-35). The pairing of the active verb *archein* with the passive *archesthai* leaves no doubt that what Aristotle has in mind is the *de facto* rule of women over those who rule *de jure*, that is, the uneven balance of power between two parties.

Similarly, *aristokratia* implied rule by or for the best (*Pol.* 1279a35) while *timokratia* (at least on the usual interpretation of Aristotle’s definition) suggested rule by those who possess a certain property-qualification (*Pol.* 1293b1, *NE* 1160a36, b17).²¹ In each case *krat-* implied not merely power but a *power differential* between two forces. It suggested the existence of two parties, one of whom dominated, or prevailed, over the other.²²

How far does the *Athēnaiōn Politeia* support this interpretation? Leaving aside *dēmokratia* itself, which appears eight times (in chs. 23, 29, 38, 40 and 41), *krat-*terms appear eleven times in that text. Twice, the verb *krateō* is used with the

²⁰ Ober 2017: 26 argues that “Because *isokratia* was employed as a synonym for *dēmokratia*, it is especially important for comparative purposes.” It is worth noting that a) Hdt. 5.92A is the only extant use of this term and b) it is not obvious that it is intended synonymously with *dēmokratia*. In fact the referent is (Ionic) plural—*tas polis*, “cities”—not even Athens alone.

²¹ Plato defined *timokratia* differently, as a regime based on the love of *timē*, “honour” (*Rep.* 8.545b-c). For another interpretation of the Aristotelian definition, see Mulhern 2017.

²² Ober 2017: 27, n. 4, acknowledges that he “cannot positively eliminate the counterposition that in each case, what is being asserted...is the defining characteristic (excellent, female, honorable, equal to one another) of the group that rules by dominance over others. But this seems less likely, in light of the positive connotations of the relevant terms (with the possible exception of *gunaikokratia*) and the general Greek disapproval of brute dominance of rulers over potential rulers (free, native males as opposed to e.g. slaves).” The issue here may be the negative connotations of “dominance” to modern (liberal?) ears. The ancient Greeks may not have regarded that quality, insofar as it inhered in *kratos*, in the same light. One could of course go too far, as in *tyrannis*; but dominance in the sense of one athlete dominating a competition, for example, was perfectly acceptable to the ancient Greeks, and same thing may have applied in the political sphere. Cf. e.g. Fisher and van Wees 2011.

accusative object *tauta*, “these things”: “These deeds (*tauta*) I made prevail...” (a line of Solon’s poetry quoted in ch. 12, tr. Rackham), and the archon’s proclamation that whatever someone holds at the start of the archon’s year in office, these things (*tauta*) he shall *echein* and *kratein*, “have and control,” until the end of the year (ch. 56). In those examples there is no clear reference to a power struggle, although Rackham’s rendering “prevail” certainly implies the existence of pressure on Solon to have things turn out another way.

The other nine cases certainly imply the power of one agent over another. The comparative adverb *engkratesteros*, “more firmly,” appears once (ch. 35) and reveals a central dimension of *krat-* terminology: its connection with “grip,” as Paul Cartledge has rightly emphasized.²³ The *polis*, we are told, was initially delighted with the moderate-seeming measures of the Thirty and believed that they were acting for the best. But once the Thirty *tēn polin engkratesteron eschon*, “held the *polis* more firmly,” they “kept their hands off none of the citizens, but put to death those of outstanding wealth, birth or reputation.” Superior power, that of the Thirty over the rest of the citizen body, is clearly in evidence here. Additionally we must note the sense of physical force suggested by *eschon* and confirmed by the account of the executions carried out by the Thirty.

Epikrateō, which appears once (ch. 38), also suggests the association of *krat-* with superior physical power. The context is the civil war of 404 between the Thirty and their supporters on the one hand, and the rebels, the men based in Phyle, on the other. The line reads: “And those holding Phyle and Munichia, now that the whole *dēmos* was standing with them, *epekratoun tō polemō*.” Rackham’s translation is hard to beat: “began to get the upper hand in the war.” *Krat-* again unmistakably indicates not a general capacity to act but the exercise of superior physical force. Also striking, the *dēmos* is invoked as the cause or condition of the superior power of the rebels. With the entire *dēmos* on their side, victory for the rebels soon followed—thus establishing a connection between the *dēmos* and military dominance.

Dēmos appears again in chs. 40 and 41, both times as the grammatical subject of the verb *krateō*. These uses effectively mark the transition from the historical part of the text, when *dēmokratia* was not securely established, to the contemporaneous part, when, according to the author, it was well settled (ch. 41). In ch. 40, the topic is the generosity of the victorious Athenians in paying back the funds that the Thirty had borrowed from the Spartans in order to fight the civil war, even though the peace treaty had called for each side to take responsibility for its own debts. That generosity is all the more remarkable since, the author notes, in other *poleis*, *hoi dēmoi kratēsantes*, “the newly prevailing *dēmoi*,”²⁴ “not only do not pay any more out of their own funds but even make a redistribution of land.” Superior power is certainly indicated here: having defeated their opponents, the victorious *dēmoi* are able to redistribute their property. Physical power may also be implied, if as in Athens the *dēmos*’s political supremacy was the result of its victory in war.

²³ Cartledge 2009: 74.

²⁴ Here I follow Rhodes 1993: 480. The papyri, Kenyon and Blass have *hoi dēmokratēsantes*, “those who have set up democracy.” The alternative reading would not affect my argument.

In ch. 41, both *dēmos* and *krateō* reappear in the author's important assessment of the political system since the return of the pro-democracy rebels from Phyle in 404/3.

ένδεκάτη δ' ἡ μετὰ τὴν ἀπὸ Φυλῆς καὶ ἐκ Πειραιέως κάθοδον, ἀφ' ἧς διαγεγένηται μέχρι τῆς νῦν, ἀεὶ προσεπιλαμβάνουσα τῷ πλήθει τὴν ἐξουσίαν. ἀπάντων γὰρ αὐτὸς αὐτὸν πεποίηκεν ὁ δῆμος κύριον, καὶ πάντα διοικεῖται ψηφίσμασιν καὶ δικαστηρίοις, ἐν οἷς ὁ δῆμός ἐστιν ὁ κρατῶν. καὶ γὰρ αἱ τῆς βουλῆς κρίσεις εἰς τὸν δῆμον ἐληλύθασιν.

Eleventh was [the political system] established after the return from Phyle and the Peiraieos, after which it has continued down to today, constantly taking on additions to the power (*exousia*) of the multitude (*plēthos*). For the *dēmos* has made itself authoritative (*kurion*) over everything, and everything is managed (*dioikeitai*) through decrees and courts in which the *dēmos* is *ho kratōn*, for even the decisions of the Council have come to the *dēmos*.

Once again superior power is in view. The participle *ho kratōn* literally means “the powerful one” or “the prevailing one,” in implicit contradistinction from some other less powerful party. Indeed, it is worth noting that both times that *dēmos* and *krat-* are seen together in this text, *krat-* is a participle: the noun *kratos* does not appear. The *dēmos* does not, in the *Athēnaiōn Politeia*, “have” or “hold” *kratos*, as we might say the people “have” or “hold” power. Rather, the *dēmos* simply *is* “the (more) powerful one.” This suggests that *kratos* was not conceived as a thing possessed by a given political agent, which could be alienated and transferred to from one party to another like a juridical property.²⁵ Rather, *kratos* simply inhered in the dominant agent. In that respect it exactly resembled physical strength. *Ho kratōn* was the mighty one, in relation to which some other was weaker.

The noun *autokratōr*, which appears five times (chs. 31-2, 37-9), may look an exception to this rule, but a little thought shows that that is not the case. Defined in LSJ as “one's own master,” in the *Athēnaiōn Politeia* it usually refers to the power of elected generals, office-holders (in ch. 37, the Thirty), or treaty negotiators to act without further consultation of the body that had empowered them. It also appears in the post-civil war reconciliation agreement of 403 between the oligarchical and democratical factions: those who had supported the defeated oligarchs and wished to leave the city were granted the nearby settlement of Eleusis, where they would be *kurious kai autokratōras heautōn*, “authoritative and masters of themselves,” and enjoy their own revenues (ch. 39). Yet *krat-* can here be understood as signalling the exceptional nature of the independence enjoyed by the possessor, in implicit contradistinction from the rule by another which was the norm. Generals were typically held accountable for their actions in the field, and offering full autonomy to the oligarchs at Eleusis, only a few miles from the city, was an extraordinary move (even if, in the end, the enclave lasted only three years

²⁵ Cf. however Hdt. 3.81, where *to kratos* is “given” (*pherein*) and “invested” (*peritheōmen*).

before being folded back into the Athenian *polis*). In both cases, being *autokratōr* denoted being “one’s own master” in a context where being answerable to another was expected.

The use of *krat-* terminology in the *Athēnaiōn Politeia* thus supports the view that *krat-* implied not a “capacity to do things” but specifically the superior physical capacity of one party over another. As Nicole Loraux put it, *kratos* “designates superiority, and thus victory.”²⁶ And this is in line with other evidence. In Aeschylus’ *Suppliants*, for example, *krateō* represents the power of the sons of Aegyptus over the suppliant maidens (387, 393). In Euripides’ *Suppliants*, it represents those victorious in battle (18, 684). Similarly, in the *Constitution of the Athenians* found among the writings of Xenophon, the Athenians are repeatedly represented as “thalassocrats” owing to their control of the sea (2.2, 14).

Most striking, *krateō* appears some 150 times in Thucydides, and all but a handful of cases indicate military supremacy. We are told, for example, that Minos mastered (*ekratēse*) most of what is now called the Hellenic sea (1.4); that if the Greeks had taken sufficient supplies with them, they would easily have defeated (*kratountes*) the Trojans (1.11); that when the Plateans saw how few the invading Thebans were, they realised they could easily overpower (*kratēsen*) them (2.3); and so on. The few non-military uses also show one force prevailing over another. “As in art, so in politics, improvements ever prevail” (*kratein*, 1.71.3); “human nature, always rebelling against the law and now its master...” (*kratēsasa*, 3.84); “the incalculable element in the future exercises the widest influence” (*kratei*, 4.62); “good counsel, which entitles cities to direct armies” (*kratei*, 8.76, all tr. Crawley). *Krateō* also makes a signally revealing appearance in Thucydides’ account of the second debate on the fate of the Mytilenaeans. Once Kleon and Diodotus had spoken, the Athenians “proceeded to a division, in which the show of hands was almost equal, although the motion of Diodotus carried the day” (*ekratēse*, 3.49, tr. Crawley). *Pace* Ober, *krat-* could indeed indicate majority rule: the power of even a slim majority to determine the course of events, precisely because it outnumbered the minority.²⁷

The association of *krat-* with superior or prevailing power, typically physical, thus seems strong. Yet this interpretation raises an important question. If, in *dēmokratia*, the *dēmos* had prevailing power, who or what did it prevail over? One possibility is the entire *polis* or *politeia*: the object of the Thirty’s “grip” in the example quoted above (*Ath. Pol.* 35). Another possibility is that it prevailed over its rivals for command of the *politeia*, such as the Thirty and their supporters.

Both interpretations have their merits and may, perhaps, ultimately come to the same thing. But the latter is more in line with the uses seen so far. Even when the object of *krateō* is not itself a defeated party—for example, “these things” (*Ath. Pol.* 12 and 56), or the sea (Thuc. 1.4, Ps.-Xenophon *Ath. Pol.* 2.2 and 14)—it is

²⁶ Loraux 2002: 69.

²⁷ On majority voting as a substitute for fighting, see Glotz 1928: 65; Larsen 1949. Other pertinent interpretations of majoritarianism include de Sainte Croix 1972: 348-9; Flaig 2012; Graeber 2013; Schwartzberg 2013; Tuck forthcoming. For a related argument attributing both higher levels of public disorder and the lesser likelihood that violence would escalate into deadly force and *stasis* to democratic political processes, see Simonton 2017.

nonetheless implied that a power struggle has taken place. *Krat-* terminology, that is to say, suggests a power struggle between at least two parties over some object coveted by both, even when only the victorious party is named. By analogy, the *kratos* in *dēmokratia* suggested not that the *dēmos* had defeated or overpowered the *politeia*, but that it had overpowered—and continued to overpower—some unspecified rivals for its command.

Who, then, were those rivals? In 404/3, during and immediately after the civil war, the answer was obvious: the Thirty and their supporters. But what about in the mature *dēmokratia* of the late fourth century, when the author of the *Athēnaiōn Politeia* wrote? If the *dēmos* was *ho kratōn*, the strong one, who in that context was *ho hēttōn*, the weaker party—or parties?

“IF *TAS ARCHAS...ARCHEIN KALŌS*” (*ATH. POL.* 43)

Although I am not convinced by Ober’s argument that *-krat-* implied a “capacity to make good things happen in the public realm,” the premises from which Ober begins are sound. As he observes, the three most important ancient Greek regime-type terms were *monarchia*, *oligarchia*, and *dēmokratia*, and of these, *dēmokratia* stands out for two reasons. One, because unlike *mon-* (one) and *olig-* (few), *dēmo-* did not represent some number of persons but a collective body; and two, because *-krat-* rather than *-arch-* was used to represent the *dēmos*’s political supremacy.²⁸

As Ober notes, that was not because *dēmarchia* was impossible to conceive. On the contrary, that term is attested, but it indicated not the rule of the “national” *dēmos* but the office or rank of *dēmarchos*, that is, the chief official in a deme (*dēmos*), something like a village mayor.²⁹ Evidently, when *dēmokratia* was coined (some time prior to the mid fifth century),³⁰ *-arch-* was deliberately passed over as an appropriate suffix. Accordingly, we may infer, as Ober does, that *-arch* and *-krat-* meant different things.³¹ Indeed, the *Athēnaiōn Politeia* reveals a sharp difference in their uses. *Arch-* terms are never associated with the “national” *dēmos*, though they appear over 160 times—far more than any comparable “power” referend.³² Particularly striking is the fact that *dēmos* is never the subject of the verb *archō*, “rule” or “hold office,” although other rulers and office-holders, both individual and collective, do appear as the subject of that verb, such as the tyrant Peisistratus, the government of the Four Hundred, and the ten *autokratores* generals (chs. 19 and 32).

So how did *arch-* and *krat-* differ? As Ober notes, *archē* had several meanings. “Beginning” or “origin” is exemplified in ch. 28: “Solon was the original (*ex archēs*) champion of the *dēmos*” (cf. chs. 35, 55). That usage need not detain us

²⁸ Ober 2008: 4.

²⁹ E.g. Dem. 57.63. *Dēmarchos* also appears in a 6th-century inscription from Chios (Meiggs and Lewis 1968, §8) and was later used to refer to a Roman tribune of the plebs (e.g. Polybius 6.16).

³⁰ Fully discussed in Cammack 2019.

³¹ Ober 2008: 5.

³² I have come across two exceptions to this rule: Hdt 3.82.4 and Ps.-Xen. *Ath. Pol.* 3.14. From context, it is not clear whether these uses are intended straightforwardly or as a play on words.

here.³³ Another meaning, “empire” (perhaps the most common in the extant sources), appears in chs. 24, 32 and 41. The first is a reference to the Athenians’ “despotic” treatment of all their allies except the Chians, Lesbians and Samians, whom they kept as “guards of the empire” (*phulakas...tēs archēs*). The others refer to the Athenians’ “empire [or “rule”] of the sea” (*tēs thalattēs archēn*), a usage also found in Thucydides (8.46) and Pseudo-Xenophon (2.4-6, 11, 13-14, 16).

A closely connected set of meanings is “rule,” “government,” and “power.” These meanings, and the overlaps between them, are illustrated by the *Ath. Pol.*’s account of the mid-sixth century tyranny (or “reign,” also *archē*) of Peisistratus and his sons. Peisistratus’ initial seizure of the Acropolis is described as “taking *tēn archēn*,” perhaps “taking the government” or “taking power” (ch. 14). He was then expelled from the city by his opponents “before his *archēs* had taken root” (ch. 14): “rule” may be a good rendering here. He then recovered *tēn archēn* (“rule,” “power”) by force (ch. 15) and proceeded to manage the affairs of the *polis* in a “moderate and statesmanlike” manner—though when his sons succeeded him, *tēn archēn* (the “government” or “regime”) became much harsher (ch. 16). Peisistratus remained *en tē archē* (“in power”) for a long time (ch. 16), even growing old there (ch. 17). After his death his sons *kateichon tēn archēn*, “took over the government” (ch. 17), and the elder, Hippias, *epestatei tēs archēs*, “took the lead in power” (ch. 18).

As those cases show, *archē*, unlike *kratos* in this text, was alienable: it could be possessed and transferred from one agent to another. This alienability seems closely connected with another meaning: “political office.”³⁴ That is in fact *archē*’s first referent in the *Athēnaiōn Politeia*. Before Draco, we are told, *tas men archas*, offices, were determined by birth and wealth. Those offices were three: *basileus*, “king” (the “first and greatest”), *polemarchos*, “war-lord,” and *archōn*, usually rendered simply “archon” (ch. 3). Later six *thesmothetai* (“law-setters”) were added, bringing the total number of *archontes* up to nine (ch. 3). These positions remained part of the Athenian political system down to the author’s time, though the mature democracy included scores of other, more minor offices (*archai*) alongside the nine “historic” archons (chs. 50-5, 60-1).

This range of meanings goes some way to explaining the discontinuity between *dēmos* and *arch-* terms. Where the reference was to office-holding, of course *dēmos* could not be the subject of *archō*: as Ober and Lane have rightly observed, a corporate body cannot hold an office.³⁵ But that does not fully explain the difference between *arch-* and *krat-*. As we have seen, *archē* could also suggest “rule” and “power,” just like *kratos*. Why couldn’t the *dēmos archei*, “rule” or “exercise power,” in that sense?

Closer inspection of the *Athēnaiōn Politeia* suggests that *archō*, at least in within the context of a single *politeia* (that is, leaving aside the meaning “empire”),

³³ Some political theorists, such as Hannah Arendt (1958: 189, 222-25), have made something of the political significance of this usage, but I do not find it as illuminating as others. For a more sympathetic account, see Markell 2006, with citations.

³⁴ See especially Lane 2013 and Lane 2016 (discussed in the next section).

³⁵ Ober 2008: 7; Lane 2016 (though see Ps.-Xen. *Ath. Pol.* 3.14, as noted above, where the reference certainly seems to be to office-holding).

never suggested rule *independent* of office. Rather, where rule was implied—as in the case of the nine seventh-century archons, Peisistratus, or the Four Hundred—it was always as a function of office-holding. In the early history of Athens, “ruling” and “holding office” were indistinguishable. Holding office was simply what rulers did—or, equally, ruling was simply what office-holders did. Rule, that is to say, was personal: rulers performed the functions of government—which were principally religious and judicial (chs. 3 and 4)—themselves. Peisistratus, who “often went about the country himself settling disputes in person,” also followed this model (ch. 16), as did the Four Hundred and the Thirty.

In *dēmokratia*, however, office-holding and rule were discontinuous. That some significant change occurred with respect to the status of office-holders is first signalled in ch. 13, in the discussion of the events of the years after Solon’s intervention. During this time the Athenians twice “did not appoint an *archonta* owing to *stasis*”; then they chose Damasias, who ruled (*ērxen*) for two years and two months before being driven out; then they elected ten men to rule (*ērxan*) jointly. The next line is crucial: “This makes clear that the *archōn* had very great power (*dunamin*), for they were always having *stasis* about this *archēs*.” Evidently, that was no longer the case.

The subordinate status of office-holders in *dēmokratia* is confirmed in the contemporaneous section of the text. Office-holders, of whom there were by then some seven hundred, were a highly varied group ranging from military generals to officials such as the supervisors of the forests and of the water-supply—roles that we would not typically associate with ruling. And the difference between office-holding in an *oligarchia*, where rule was implied, and in *dēmokratia*, where it was not, is revealed by the fact that all *archai* were subject to a vote of confidence every prytany (that is, ten times per year), and only reconfirmed in their positions if it seemed to the *dēmos* that they “*archein*’d *kalōs*” (ch. 43). “Ruled well” would surely be an inappropriate rendering there, since the ruler in this context was evidently the *dēmos*. “Performed their offices well” seems more apposite.

The different status of office-holders in *oligarchia* and *dēmokratia* is also shown by an intriguing change in terminology. In early Athens, as we have seen, an office-holder (or ruler) was called *archōn*, plural *archontes*. That term was not a true noun but—like *ho kratōn*, discussed above—a participle or verbal noun, formed in this case from *archō*. Literally, an *archōn* was “the *archō*-ing one,” which we may translate either “the ruling one” or “the office-holding one.” In the fourth century, however, in the case of all except the nine historic archons—whom the *Ath. Pol.* refers to as “the so-called (*kaloumenoi*) nine *archontes*”—the “*archō*-ing” agent was instead called by the name *archē*, “office” (plural *archai*). Those whom the *dēmos* reconfirmed in office monthly were not *archontes*, after the old fashion, but *tas archas* (ch. 43). In fourth century Athens, then, it was no longer “the one ruling” who performed an office. Instead, curiously, offices were said to be performed by the offices themselves. Human agency had been written out of the office-holder’s title. It is very tempting to connect this to the fact that while earlier *archontes* had enjoyed a form of personal rule, in *dēmokratia* the power associated with office-holding was much less.

One answer to the question of who, in *dēmokratia*, might rival the *dēmos* for command of the *politeia* is thus supplied: *hai archai*, the seven hundred or so office-holders who, with the Council, carried out the day-to-day administration of the *polis*. In *oligarchia* office-holding and ruling had been mutually constitutive, but in *dēmokratia* they were not. Yet that raises another question. How exactly was the relative weakness of office-holders in *dēmokratia* maintained? Certainly the physical strength of the *dēmos* exceeded that of the corps of magistrates and military commanders, but that strength could hardly be marshalled on a daily basis. How then did the *dēmos* maintain its superiority?

“KURIOS OF THE *POLITEIA*” (*ATH. POL.* 9)

In a recent article, Melissa Lane has asked virtually the same question. “If those doing the ruling (in Greek, *archein*) are those who hold the offices (in Greek, *archai*)—call this the ‘standard equation’—how then might the mass of people nevertheless be in charge or in control?” Although, as I have just argued, I do not think that *archein*, in the context of *dēmokratia*, did in fact imply “ruling,” the question is an important one, as is Lane’s answer. She argues that this “equation” was “solved” by some fourth-century thinkers by suggesting “that the popular multitude...should be *kurios*”—which she translates “sovereign”—by electing the highest office-holders and holding them to account.³⁶

As Lane recognizes, to render *kurios* “sovereign” is today to court controversy. Although that translation was once common, Mogens Herman Hansen came in for heavy criticism during the 1980s for using it, and switched to leaving *kurios* untranslated instead.³⁷ Since then it has been difficult to find anyone willing to use the language of sovereignty in the ancient Greek context. Yet leaving key terms untranslated does not always advance understanding, and *kurios* is certainly a key term, as shown by the lines already quoted from *Ath. Pol.* 41: “the *dēmos* has made itself *kurion* over everything, and everything is managed (*dioikeitai*) through decrees and courts in which the *dēmos* is *ho kratōn*...” Being *kurios* and being *ho kratōn* were evidently closely related but distinct. Is Lane then right to identify *kurios* (or more precisely, the noun *kuros*) with sovereignty? And was it indeed manifested by “electing the highest office-holders” and “holding them to account”?

Kurios certainly did not always suggest “sovereign,” if by that we mean ultimate political authority. Evidence of that appears in the discussion of voting practices in the popular courts found in the *Athēnaiōn Politeia* (ch. 68). Each judge, of whom there were often five hundred or more, had two ballots, one pierced, for the prosecutor, and the other unpierced, for the defendant; and the judge put the ballot he wished to count (*tēn men kurian*) into a copper urn (*ton kurion*), and the one he wished to discard (*tēn de akuron*) into a wooden one (*ton akuron*). Translating *kurios* “sovereign” would surely be obscure here. “Decisive” or “authoritative” seems more apt.

As well as inanimate objects, *kurios* could apply to acts. One of the first acts of the Thirty was to allow citizens to bestow property on whomever they wished,

³⁶ Lane 2016: 52.

³⁷ Compare e.g. Hansen 1974 with Hansen 1990. Cf. Mulgan 1970; Ober 1996; Hoekstra 2016.

which the author says they accomplished by “making the act of donation *kurion*,” again, plausibly, “decisive” or “authoritative” (ch. 35). It could also suggest “main” or “principal,” as in *ekklēsia kuria*, the name of the main assembly meeting of each prytany and the one that offered the most pay to attendees (ch. 42).

On the other hand, in many cases, sovereignty does seem to be implied. When the *Ath. Pol.* speaks of Solon, Hippias and Hipparchus, or the *dēmos* being *kurios* over affairs (chs. 9, 20 and 41); of Isagoras and friends, Lysander of Sparta or the Thirty (chs. 20, 34 and 35) becoming *kurios* or *kurioi* over the *polis*; of the emigrants to Eleusis being *kurios kai autokratoras* in their new settlement (ch. 39); or of the *dēmos* being *kurios* over the *politeia* (ch. 9), what is at issue is indeed ultimate authority in the political community, i.e. sovereignty.

How can we reconcile these different usages? Two points seem significant. First, when used of human agents rather than inanimate objects or acts, *kurios* seldom appears by itself, but is accompanied by an object. One was not just *kurios*, but *kurios* over the *polis*, over the *politeia*, over affairs, or—like the fourth-century Athenian *dēmos*—over “everything” (ch. 41). This suggests that *kurios* by itself did not necessarily imply sovereignty. Rather, sovereignty was implied only when it was specified that the subject was *kurios* over the whole community.

Second, this implies that *kurios* could mark out spheres of authority smaller than the whole community, and that is abundantly confirmed by the *Athēnaiōn Politeia*. In the historical section, we learn that the nine seventh-century archons were *kurioi* to give a final decision in trials (ch. 3); that the Areopagos council could fine those who were out of order *kuriōs*, “freely” or “appropriately” (ch. 3); that Solon made the *dēmos* *kurios* over judicial decisions (ch. 9); and that the Five Thousand were *kurios* to make treaties with whomever they wished (ch. 29, cf. 8). In the contemporaneous section, it is said that the nine “chairmen” among the council presidents were *kurioi* over the dismissal of meetings (ch. 44); that the council had previously been *kuria* over fines, imprisonment and death, but at the time of writing the judges’ vote was *kurion* (ch. 45, cf. 48); that the “Receivers” were *kurioi* to decide suits only up to ten drachmas (ch. 52); and so on.

Being *kurios*, accordingly, denoted not sovereignty (unless the appropriate qualifier was added) but more broadly authority or jurisdiction. It indicated the power to make legally recognised and enforceable decisions within a certain defined field, whether the whole *politeia* or another lesser sphere.³⁸ The nature of this power is suggested not only by the contexts already discussed, but also by the verbs in which *-kur-* appears. The political systems sketched out by one hundred delegates during the regime of the Five Thousand were *epikurōthentōn*, “ratified,” by the majority (ch. 32). Similarly, it is said that the fourth-century *thesmothetai kurousi*, “validate” or “ratify,” contracts with other states (ch. 59). In each case, *-kur-* implied the quality of lawfulness imparted to a decision because it was made by the proper agent.

Chapter 37 reveals the association of *kurios* with law particularly clearly. The Thirty had decided to destroy Theramenes, so they introduced two laws into

³⁸ As noted by Hoekstra 2016. An important context I do not pursue here is the household: *kurios* often meant “master” or “guardian,” as in Aeschylus, *Libation-Bearers* 658, 689, and throughout Dem. 59. For details, see Hoekstra 2016.

the Council, with orders to pass them: one making the Thirty *autokratoras* to execute any of the citizens not on the roll of Three Thousand, and the other banning sharing in the current *politeia* for all who had taken part either in the demolition of the fort on Eetonia or in any opposition to the previous oligarchy of Four Hundred. Theramenes, of course, had done both, “so when the laws were ratified (*epikurōthentōn*) he became outside the *politeia* and the Thirty were *kurios* to kill him.” Here, as in the cases above, *-kur-* connoted legitimate jurisdiction and lawfulness—even when the law-giving agent acted under duress, as in the case of the Council.

To *kuros* thus indicated lawful authority, however acquired. The will of the gods was one possible source. In Aeschylus’s *Agamemnon*, Zeus’s ordinances (*thenta*) are established *kuriōs*, “authoritatively” (178), while in the *Eumenides*, the Furies seek a “proper” (*kurion*) expiation for Clytaemnestra’s blood (327). In Herodotus, *kurios* appears four times, each time referring to the “proper” day, that is the day appointed by the gods.³⁹ But the agreements of men were almost as powerful, as the appearance of *kurios* in treaties implies: “the decision of the majority of the allies should be binding (*kurion*), unless the gods or heroes stood in the way” (Thuc. 5.30, cf. 5.47.12). Such agreements did not need to be formal. In the *Athēnaiōn Politeia*, the *dēmos* “making itself *kurion* over everything” is defended both because it had “seemed just,” since the *dēmos* had achieved its return by its own efforts, and because “the few are more easily corrupted by profit and by favours than the many” (ch. 41). “Might” and “right” are here intermingled, though not indistinguishable. What was gained through *kratos*—victory over one’s opponents—only required general acceptance in order to become *kurios*. The Athenian *dēmos* took the *politeia* through its physical strength, but the fact that its victory was judged to be a “just” basis of continuing political authority played a part in making it *kurios*.⁴⁰

How then was the *kuros* of the Athenian *dēmos* manifested institutionally? As noted, Lane (drawing on many more sources than I do here) associates the *dēmos*’s *kurios* status with the fact that it elected high office-holders—in Athens, principally military offices and some treasurers—and held them to account. In the *Athēnaiōn Politeia*, elections do not come in for special attention in this context, but the accountability of office-holders certainly does. The key process was the *euthuna*, the routine post-tenure audit. The *dokimasia*, “scrutiny,” was the pre-tenure equivalent, while any infractions mid-tenure were dealt with by *eisangelia*, “impeachment” (chs. 45, 54-5).

To some extent, the necessity of those procedures is implied by the concept of *kuros* itself. As discussed above, *tas archas* were *kurioi* in their respective fields. But inasmuch as *kur-* terminology delineated a specific jurisdiction, being *kurios*

³⁹ Hdt. 1.48.2, 5.50, 5.93, 6.129. Cf. Aesch. *Supp.* 733.

⁴⁰ Daniel Schillinger has suggested to me that the arrow may sometimes have run the other way. For example, the *Ath. Pol.* author’s account of the amnesty and reconciliation following the 404/3 civil war implies that the *dēmos* “prudently cultivated its juridical authority as a central element of its power”: the *dēmos* may have self-consciously pursued “being seen as *kurios*” in order to “entrench its *kratos*” (personal communication). I thank him very much for this interesting interpretation.

implied limits on power as much as scope.⁴¹ Most *kurios* agents mentioned in the *Athēnaiōn Politeia* were *kurios* over a relatively small domain, and both the limits of this domain and proper behaviour within it had to be controlled—by the agent that was *kurios* over the whole *politeia*.⁴²

An interesting twist appears here, in that these processes were judged not by the *dēmos* itself—that is, the *dēmos qua* assembly—but by the *dikastēria* or popular courts.⁴³ It was the courts, staffed by ordinary citizens randomly selected in a lengthy process described in the final seven chapters of the *Athēnaiōn Politeia*, that policed the activities of office-holders within the political system and thus maintained the supremacy of the *dēmos qua* collective common people overall.

The significance of the courts rather than the assembly as the linchpin of demotic power first appears in the discussion of Solon’s reforms in ch. 9: the one that most strengthened the multitude or majority (*plēthos*), the author claims, was the appeal to the *dikastērion*, “for the *dēmos* being *kurios* of the vote becomes *kurios* of the *politeia*.” It is suggested next by the Thirty’s early move to dissolve the *kuros* lodged in the *dikastais*, the authority lodged in the judges (ch. 35). And it is confirmed and elaborated in ch. 41, in the crucial line already quoted: “the *dēmos* has made itself *kurion* over everything, and everything is managed by decrees and by *dikastēriois* in which the *dēmos* is *ho kratōn*...” In Athens, the final political authority of the *dēmos* rested on popular judicial power. The *kuros* of the *dēmos* had been gained through *kratos*, but it was maintained through judicial procedures in which the *dēmos* (or more precisely, some of its members) continued to have the upper hand.

“THE EAGER *DĒMAGŌGOUNTAS*” (*ATH. POL.* 26)

Office-holders were thus one threat to the supremacy of the Athenian *dēmos*. Yet they were not the biggest. In some circumstances office-holders could certainly prove dangerous, as Aristotle, discussing the various ways in which democracy might end, recognized: “at Miletus a tyranny arose out of the *prutaneia*, for the *prutanis* was *kurios* over many important matters” (*Pol.* 1305a15). But that had been “in former times” (1305a12). In an advanced (*teleutaia*) democracy, where less authority was invested in offices and they were more tightly controlled, the most serious threat to the rule of the *dēmos* came from another source, one closer to home—one that, lacking formal or constitutional power, owed its influence to the strength of the *dēmos* itself: the *dēmagōgoi*, “demagogues” or leaders of the *dēmos*.

Although in modern parlance “demagogue” is always pejorative, *dēmagōgos* (from *dēmos* and *agō*, “lead”) was not.⁴⁴ Some sources, such as Aesop’s fables (dating to the sixth century) may seem to suggest otherwise: the tale of the

⁴¹ As noted above, Ober 2017 suggests that *krat-* implies these limits. I have not been able to find textual support for that claim.

⁴² Again, as noted by Hoekstra 2016.

⁴³ The relationship of the courts to the assembly, and particularly the extent to which the courts represented the assembly, has been the subject of considerable controversy. See Blanshard 2004; Hansen 2010; Ober 1996; and two forthcoming articles of my own.

⁴⁴ As emphatically argued by Finley 1985: 38-75; Lane 2012; and before them, Grote 1856: iii.25.

fisherman represents *dēmagōgoi* as invariably creating discord in *poleis*, while that of the serpent, the weasel and the mice recommends letting them pursue their quarrels among themselves. Aristophanes was also scathing, characterizing a *dēmagōgos* as “an ignoramus and a rogue” with “a screeching, horrible voice, a perverse, crossgrained nature and the language of the market-place.”⁴⁵

The *Athēnaiōn Politeia*, however, presents a more complex picture. There, *dēmagōgeō* is used neutrally or even positively to refer to a run of men of noble birth and high esteem among both *dēmos* and elite: Solon, Peisistratus, Cleisthenes, Xanthippus, Themistocles, Ephialtes and Pericles (ch. 28). Of these, perhaps the most admired was Pericles, who “advanced to the position of leader of the *dēmos*” (*pros to dēmagōgein elthontos*) eleven years after Ephialtes’ death (ch. 27). “So long as Pericles stood first with the *dēmos* (*proeistēkei tou dēmos*) politics went better,” the author claims, but when he died, things took a turn for the worse, “for the *dēmos* now for the first time took a champion (*prostatēn*) who was not in good repute with the respectable, whereas in former times those had always *dēmagōgountes*” (ch. 28). Isocrates, too, picked out Pericles as a “good demagogue” (*dēmagōgos agathos*). Reaching further back, he suggested that Theseus had retained the goodwill of his subjects through his demagogic benefactions (*tais d’euergesiais dēmagōgōn*); and looking to the future, he wrote to Nicocles offering advice on how to *dēmagōgeis kalōs*, “practice popular leadership well.”⁴⁶

What did it mean to be a “good demagogue”? According to Isocrates, Nicocles should “neither allow the mob (*ton ochlon*) to do or to suffer outrage, but see to it that the best of them have honours while the rest suffer no derogation of their rights: for these are the first and most important elements of good government” (*chrēstēs politeias*).⁴⁷ Theseus’ *dēmagōgia* he associated with administering the *polis* “lawfully and well” (*nomimōs kai kalōs*), while that of Pericles he tied more closely to material prosperity: “Pericles, because he was both a good leader of the people (*dēmagōgos ōn agathos*) and an excellent orator (*rhētōr aristos*), so adorned the *polis* with temples, monuments, and other objects of beauty that even today visitors who come to Athens think her worthy of ruling (*archein*) not only the Greeks but the rest of the world; moreover, he stored away in the Acropolis not less than ten thousand talents.”⁴⁸

Other writers suggested other desirable attributes. Lysias, in *Against Epicrates*, argued before a popular judicial panel that it was the duty of good *dēmagōgoi* “not to take your property in the stress of your misfortunes, but to give their own property to you.”⁴⁹ Aeschines emphasized an appropriate level of fellow-feeling: “for the man who hates his child and is a bad father could never be a worthy leader (*dēmagōgos chrēstos*); the man who does not cherish those nearest and dearest to him will never care much about you, who are no relation to him.”⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Aristoph. *Knights* 191, 217, tr. O’Neill.

⁴⁶ Isoc. *Helen* 37, *Antidosis* 234, *On the Peace* 126, *To Nicocles* 16.4.

⁴⁷ Isoc. *To Nicocles* 16.4.

⁴⁸ *Helen* 37.5, *Antidosis* 234 tr. Norlin.

⁴⁹ Lys. 27.10.

⁵⁰ Aeschin. 3.78.

Hypereides, addressing Demosthenes during his trial for accepting a massive bribe, “A true (*dikaion*) *dēmagōgon* should be the saviour (*sōtera*) of his country, not a deserter.”⁵¹

Putting these claims together, we may say that a good popular leader was expected to act reliably in the interest of the *dēmos* and to cause it to flourish by securing both its material prosperity and political significance relative to other agents in the *politeia*. Aristotle, in the only extended discussion of Athens in the *Politics*, particularly emphasized the latter. Ephialtes and Pericles had docked the power of the Areopagos Council, Pericles had established payment for serving in the courts, “and in this manner eventually the successive leaders of the people (*tōn dēmagōgōn*) led them on (*proâgagen*) by growing stages to the present democracy” (1274a).

The *dēmos*’s leaders, that is to say, had played a crucial role in extending the power of the Athenian *dēmos*.⁵² How had they been able to do that? According to Aristotle: through the *dēmos*’s pre-existing power to bestow favours and make fortunes, especially via its control of the courts. “For as this institution [the *dikastēria*] grew strong, men courted favour (*charizomenoi*) with the *dēmos* as with a tyrant and so brought the constitution to the present democracy” (1274a). The *dēmos* and its leaders enjoyed a symbiotic relationship: the *dēmagōgoi* were influential because the *dēmos* was strong, especially with respect to judicial authority—and the *dēmos* grew yet stronger under the *dēmagōgoi*’s influence. As the author of the *Athēnaiōn Politeia* put it, “the *dēmos* being *kurios* of the vote becomes *kurios* of the *politeia*” (ch. 9). The vote referred to here was that of the court (*dikastērion*); the party responsible for establishing the right of appeal to the *dikastērion* was the *dēmagōgos* Solon; and the power that this gave the *dēmos* made the *dēmos*’s leaders powerful in turn.

The source of the *dēmagōgoi*’s power was thus the *dēmos* itself, as opposed to the possession of large properties, the traditional foundation of political power.⁵³ More specifically, it lay in the capacity of the *dēmagōgoi* to *persuade* the *dēmos* to put its might—its *kratos*—behind them and their proposals, even to the extent of overriding the established laws.⁵⁴ As Aeschines put it, a *dēmagōgos* “has the power to cajole the people” (*ton men dēmon thōpeusai dunaito*).⁵⁵ Crawley, in his translation of Thucydides, made the nature of this relationship plain when he described Kleon as “a popular leader (*anēr dēmagōgos*)...and very powerful with the multitude,” where “very powerful” translates *pithanōtatos*, literally “most persuasive” (3.36). He repeated that wording in relation to Athenagoras of

⁵¹ Hyp. “Against Demosthenes,” Fr. 4, col. 16b line 26.

⁵² Aristotle argued that something similar had happened at Sparta, where the kings had been forced to *dēmagōgein* on account of the power of the elected Ephorate thus converting an *aristokratia* to a *dēmokratia* (1270b). *Dēmagōgountes* also played a role in converting some old-fashioned elective democracies to the “ultimate” (*teleutaia*) kind, since “men ambitious of popular office...bring things to the point of the *dēmos*’s being *kurion* even over the laws” (*Pol.* 1305a30).

⁵³ A contrast that appears, for example, in the *Athēnaiōn Politeia*’s representation the *dēmagōgoi* are counterposed with the *prostatai*, “champions,” of the *euporōn*, “well-to-do” (ch. 28).

⁵⁴ Aristot. *Pol.* 1292a, 1305a30, 1310a.

⁵⁵ Aeschin. 3.226.2.

Syracuse, describing him as “the leader of the people (*dēmou te prostatēs*) and very powerful (*pithanōtatos*)...with the masses (*tois pollois*)” (6.35).

Yet *peithō*, “persuade,” the verb from which *pithanos* derives, is essentially ambiguous. In the passive voice, it can equally mean “obey,” and this ambiguity indicates the danger of this relationship from the point of view of the *dēmos*.⁵⁶ Through winning votes in the assembly, the *dēmos*’s leaders could achieve many things on its behalf. Yet their power to bring about actions in the *dēmos*’s interests was predicated on a form of power over the *dēmos*: rhetorical influence. Demosthenes complained that “by playing the demagogue (*dēmagōgountes*) and seeking favour (*charizomenoi*),” Athens’ political speakers had “brought you to such a frame of mind that in your assemblies you are elated by their flattery and have no ear but for compliments.”⁵⁷ Wrongly deployed, this power could undermine rule by the *dēmos* itself.

In the *Politics*, Aristotle outlined two ways that that might happen. One was that *dēmagōgoi* might successfully carry actions that provoked too much opposition from landed property-owners, leading eventually to counter-revolution and oligarchy. According to Aristotle, this was the single most common reason that democracies fell. The “insolence” (*aselgeia*) of *dēmagōgoi* “cause the owners of property to band together, partly by malicious prosecutions...and partly by setting the *plēthos* against them as a class”—and he listed Kos, Rhodes, Heraclea, Megara, and Kyme as places where such overreaching had provoked a counter-revolution, leading to oligarchy. Elaborating, he added, “Sometimes they make the notables combine by wronging them in order to curry favour (*charizōntai*) [with the *dēmos*], causing either their estates to be divided up or their revenues by imposing public services, and sometimes by so slandering them that they may have the property of the wealthy to confiscate,” by getting judgments against them in the courts (1304b22-1305a10).⁵⁸

The other way that, according to Aristotle, *demokratia* might come to an end was more direct and arguably more alarming from the perspective of the *dēmos*. Rather than provoke resistance from the *dēmos*’s traditional opponents, that is, the landed elite, popular leaders could simply take the *politeia* into their own hands, converting themselves from leaders to rulers and the constitution from *dēmokratia* to *turannis*. The iconic example was the 6th-century Athenian tyrant Peisistratus. Isocrates described the situation crisply. After he had made himself head of the people (*hos dēmagōgos genomenos*), Peisistratus “brought an end to the rule of the people and set himself up as their master” (*teleutōn ton te dēmon kateluse kai turannon auton katestēsen*).⁵⁹ The *Athēnaiōn Politeia* explained how this had happened. Peisistratus first came to prominence as the leader of the pro-*dēmos* “hill-men,” being reputed to be an extreme advocate of the *dēmos* (ch. 13); he then persuaded (*sunepēise*) the *dēmos* to give him a bodyguard by making out that he

⁵⁶ As highlighted by Garver 2012.

⁵⁷ Dem. 8.34.

⁵⁸ Cf. Xen. *Hell.* 5.2.7.8: After Mantinea was divided into four separate villages, “the owners of the landed property, since they...enjoyed an aristocratic government and were rid of the troublesome demagogues (*tōn bareōn dēmagōgōn*), were pleased with what had been done.”

⁵⁹ Isoc. *Panath.* 148.7, trans. Norlin.

had been wounded by the pro-oligarchic opposition, and with the help of these retainers rose against the *dēmos* and took the acropolis (ch. 14). Despite being expelled by the pro-oligarchy factions, he regained his position by tricking the *dēmos* into thinking that he had Athena herself on his side (ch. 14), and then after another break in his rule, won back control of the *politeia* by first hiring mercenaries and defeating the government forces in battle, and then disarming the *dēmos* by asking it to shift locations during an armed muster, which enabled his followers to carry off its weapons (ch. 15). This potent combination of persuasion, deceit and force completely overpowered the Athenian *dēmos*, and the Peisistratids remained in power until 510, when they were driven out by the Spartans, following which the *dēmos* under the leadership of Cleisthenes fought its way back to control of the *politeia* (ch. 20).

Though Peisistratus was a famous example of a demagogue-turned-tyrant, he was not alone. Aristotle put Theagenes of Megara, Dionysius of Syracuse, Panaetius of Leontini, Cypselus of Corinth and others in the same category.⁶⁰ Indeed, he claimed that “almost the greatest number of tyrants have risen...from being demagogues (*ek dēmagōgōn*), having won the people’s confidence (*pisteuthentes*) by slandering the notables.”⁶¹ Yet he also believed that this situation was not likely to recur.

ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν ἀρχαίων, ὅτε γένοιτο ὁ αὐτὸς δημαγωγὸς καὶ στρατηγός, εἰς τυραννίδα μετέβαλλον: σχεδὸν γὰρ οἱ πλεῖστοι τῶν ἀρχαίων τυράννων ἐκ δημαγωγῶν γεγόνασιν. αἴτιον δὲ τοῦ τότε μὲν γίνεσθαι νῦν δὲ μὴ, ὅτι τότε μὲν οἱ δημαγωγοὶ ἦσαν ἐκ τῶν στρατηγούντων (οὐ γὰρ πω δεινοὶ ἦσαν λέγειν), νῦν δὲ τῆς ῥητορικῆς ἠϋξημένης οἱ δυνάμενοι λέγειν δημαγωγοῦσι μὲν, δι’ ἀπειρίαν δὲ τῶν πολεμικῶν οὐκ ἐπιτίθενται...

In the old days, whenever the same man became *dēmagōgos* and general, they used to change the system to a tyranny; for practically a majority of ancient tyrants came up from the *dēmagōgoi*. And the reason that used to happen, but doesn’t any more, is that then the *dēmagōgoi* were drawn from those who held the office of general (for they were not yet impressive speakers), but now that rhetoric has developed, able speakers lead the people (*hoi dunamenoι legein dēmagōgousi*), but owing to their inexperience in military matters they are not put in control of these...⁶²

Since modern would-be tyrants lacked military ability, they would not be able to gain *kratos*. They had rhetorical influence, but would not be able to win in battle.

In the 340s, this claim may have seemed plausible, but it did not entirely match the experience of the Athenian *dēmos* in the late fifth century. By the 420s, if Aristophanes is to be believed, fear of tyranny had again become widespread: “Tyranny! I have not heard the word mentioned once in fifty years, and now it is

⁶⁰ Aristot. *Pol.* 1305a25-30, 1310b25-30.

⁶¹ Aristot. *Pol.* 1310b15, cf. 30.

⁶² Aristot. *Pol.* 1305a5-15. Cf. Androtion frag. 5.6.

more common than salt-fish...’⁶³ The author of the speech “Against Alcibiades” suggested that the transition from demagoguery to tyranny had already occurred: Alcibiades’ behaviour “shows the democracy to be nothing but a sham, by talking like a champion of the people (*dēmagōgou*) and acting like a tyrant, since he has found out that while the word ‘tyranny’ fills you with concern, the thing itself leaves you undisturbed.”⁶⁴

Most significant, of course, were the oligarchical coups of the Four Hundred in 411 and the Thirty in 404. To be sure, the “tyranny” represented by these cases was collective rather than singular, i.e. oligarchy rather than *turannis* proper. But the association with popular leadership and persuasion remained intact. Lysias, in “Against Epicrates,” described Phrynichos, Peisander and the other architects of the rule of the Four Hundred as *dēmagōgoi*, and the Thirty had also been prominent politicians. Indeed, they had originally been elected by the assembly to the task of producing a new constitution, prior to taking control of the *politeia* themselves, backed by both the Spartan money and military support and by a campaign of terror against those genuinely committed to the rule of the *dēmos*, such as the *dēmagōgos* Androcles.⁶⁵

Some of those men were formal office-holders—elected generals; but many were not. They had risen to prominence, at least in part, through rhetorical influence capable of harnessing the *kratos* of the *dēmos*. But they could as easily undermine it, and it took victory in the 404/3 civil war for the *dēmos* to secure its supremacy in the the *politeia* again.

How was the threat such men posed to be controlled in peacetime? Again, the *dēmos*’s control of the courts proved key. While office-holders were held accountable through the *euthuna*, the regular votes of confidence, and the possibility of impeachment, political leaders were targeted by other charges, such as lying to the *dēmos* or aiming to overturn the democracy. Most important was the indictment for making a proposal outside the laws (*graphē paranomōn*) and, after 403, a parallel indictment for proposing a law disadvantageous to the *polis*.

These indictments, which like all political charges in Athens were judged by a minimum of five hundred ordinary citizens, have been interpreted as a way of limiting the powers of the assembly do to as it pleased.⁶⁶ But it is more plausible to read them as aimed at limiting the power of political leaders by providing an *ex post* way of rescinding resolutions that undermined the rule of the *dēmos* and punishing those responsible for advancing them. Peisistratus’ bodyguard had, after all, been supplied via a properly advanced and approved proposal, that of a certain Aristophon (ch. 14). The Four Hundred had been established as the result of two proposals, one drafted by Pythodorus of the deme Anaphylstus asking for thirty elected “preliminary councillors” to draft new measures for the public safety, and another presented by the preliminary councillors requiring that a) all new proposals be put to the vote, b) that the *graphē paranomōn* and impeachment processes be repealed, and c) that anyone who attempted to indict or impeach proposers should

⁶³ Aristoph. *Wasps* 490-91, trans. O’Neill.

⁶⁴ [Andoc.] 4.27.7.

⁶⁵ Lys. 25.9.3; *Ath. Pol.* chs. 34-5; Thuc. 8.65.2.6, Xen. *Hell.* 2.3.27.5.

⁶⁶ See my forthcoming article on this topic, with citations.

be summarily arrested and executed (ch. 25). The Thirty, too, were—as we saw above—ushered in via a procedurally correct motion, proposed by Dracontides of Aphidna (ch. 32).

Though the *dēmos* was responsible for authorizing each of these resolutions, it was not held accountable for them.⁶⁷ That honor, or rather liability, went to the original proposer, who was always named. But as the author of the *Athēnaiōn Politeia* observed, “usually when the *plēthos* has been deceived, subsequently it hates those who led (*proagagontas*) it to act poorly” (ch. 28). The *graphē paranomōn* and other political charges were the peacetime weapons that—since in the courts the *dēmos*, which supplied the judges, was *ho kratōn*—helped the *dēmos* to stay *kurios* over the *politeia* even when its own agents acted against its interests. As Demosthenes argued, “penalties for private citizens (*idiōtais*) should be slow, but for office-holders (*tais d’archais*) and political leaders (*tois dēmagōgois*) swift, assuming that one can get satisfaction from the former even after some delay, but that one cannot wait for the latter, because there will be no possibility of punishment if the *politeia* is dissolved.”⁶⁸

CONCLUSION

Kratos, *archē* and *kuros* were each associated with rule, but it is *krat-* that is twinned with *dēmos* in one of the best known derivations from ancient Greek in use today. Why? The foregoing studies suggest an answer. The defining power of the *dēmos*—what ultimately secured its political supremacy—was its power to prevail physically over other parts of the *politeia*, whether office-holders (*archai*), political leaders (*dēmagōgoi*), or others. As the author of the *Athēnaiōn Politeia* observed, it seemed just for the *dēmos* to take over the *politeia* after its return from Phyle, for it had achieved its return through its own agency (ch. 41). The collective body of common people could not, itself, hold office, prosecute office-holders, or make or argue for proposals. Those tasks could, by their nature, only be performed by single men, who—if they were effective—posed, in their own way, a threat to the supremacy of the *dēmos*. What the *dēmos* consistently had in its favour was its physical capacity: the sheer force of large numbers of people engaged in collective action, a force made visible in peacetime in the form of regular assemblies and in wartime when drawn up under arms. That dominance underpinned *dēmokratia*. In line with that, office-holding and addressing the *dēmos* ceased to imply rulership and became simply magistracy and leadership respectively, both of which were subject to demotic control. This balance of power was maintained by the popular courts—themselves dominated by members of the *dēmos*—which delimited the juridical or legal authority (*kuros*) of all the other offices.

Physical dominance (*kratos*), magistracy (*archē*), authority (*kuros*) and popular leadership (*dēmagōgia*): each of these forms of power had its place in the Athenian *politeia*. Indeed, *dēmokratia* may be understood as a certain configuration of those forms. The final authority of the *dēmos* was underpinned by its power to prevail physically, while magistracy and leadership functions were performed by

⁶⁷ As discussed by Hoekstra 2016; Landauer 2014; Landauer 2019.

⁶⁸ Dem. 26.4.

others, distinct from both physical might and from each other—boundaries which, like all political jurisdictions, were patrolled by the courts, the supreme peacetime guarantor of the *dēmos*'s supremacy.

Three features of modern democracy are illuminated by comparison. Lacking the opportunity to meet and decide issues *en masse*, the collective physical power of the common people is normally nil. Hence the ultimate basis of demotic rule is lacking. There is accordingly scant distinction between final authority (sovereignty) and magistracy (government);⁶⁹ rather, elected office-holders hold final authority, and are not routinely held accountable for their actions either during or after their tenure. And far from securing their power via the courts, most men and women of the *dēmos* are today locked out of the judicial system, except as objects of discipline. An ancient Greek observer would identify this system not as a *dēmokratia* but an *oligarchia*—and a very successful species of *oligarchia* at that.

⁶⁹ On the sovereignty-government distinction in modern political thought, which I think overlaps significantly but not perfectly with the distinction I have sketched between final authority and magistracy, see Tuck 2016.

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