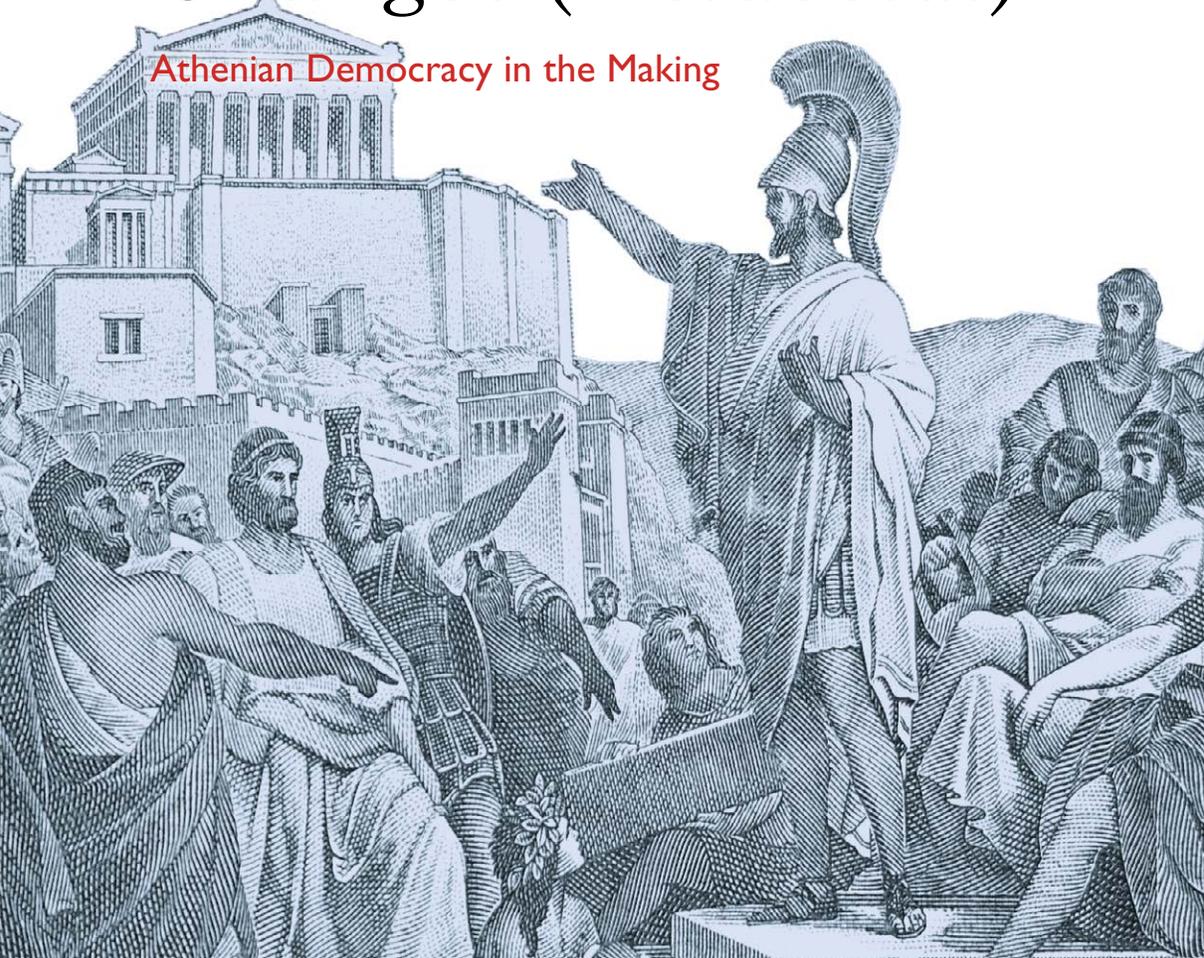


edited by  
Breno Battistin Sebastiani  
Delfim Ferreira Leão

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# ■ Crises (*Staseis*) and Changes (*Metabolai*)

Athenian Democracy in the Making



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# Introduction

Breno Battistin Sebastiani, Delfim Ferreira Leão

This book derives from two research projects developed by researchers from four Brazilian and Portuguese universities, namely: University of São Paulo and Federal University of São Paulo, in Brazil; University of Coimbra and Catholic University in Portugal. The same researchers have been working together since 2015 and have already organized five workshops, two at USP (2016, 2019), three at the University of Coimbra (2017, 2018, 2020). The papers presented and discussed on the first two occasions resulted in the book *A poiesis da democracia* (2018), a collective work comprising 17 researchers from Brazilian and Portuguese universities. The work developed since 2015 is, therefore, a precursor and fundamental step of this book, which aims to continue and expand such a promising initiative.<sup>1</sup>

In a broader scope, this book aims to build a solid and proper contribution to the contemporary global debate on the experience of democracy and its possibilities as the most effective mediator of a series of challenges, a debate that is necessarily rooted in the critical reassessment of its Greek cultural heritage. The book is articulated around the identification of a concrete problem: the need for studies that critically discuss Athenian democracy, seen as a daily problem and

<sup>1</sup> We wish to express our gratitude to Firenze University Press, for having considered the volume for publication, and to the two anonymous referees, for their input and for allowing us to improve the quality of the contributions.

Breno Battistin Sebastiani, University of Sao Paulo, Brazil, [sebastiani@usp.br](mailto:sebastiani@usp.br), 0000-0002-3777-6086  
Delfim Ferreira Leão, University of Coimbra, Portugal, [leo@fl.uc.pt](mailto:leo@fl.uc.pt), 0000-0002-8107-9165

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practice, based on its *staseis* (crises) and *metabolai* (changes), and whose solutions and strategies may still contribute to the reflection on the social, intellectual and ethical-political challenges of contemporary democracy. Analogous critical studies have always been produced such as Vidal-Naquet 2000, Agamben 2009, Pébarthe 2012, Bearzot 2013, Arnason, Raaflaub, and Wagner 2013, and Ober 2015; this volume, though, is particularly focused on the concepts of “crisis” and “change”.

The notions of *staseis* (crises) and *metabolai* (changes) of democracies enunciated in the title refer to the main concern of the book: understanding “democracy” not as an univocal and absolute concept, but as a result of permanencies and historical transformations inherent both in its Greek formulation and to its contemporary uses, that is, as a problem whose answers derive from permanently meditated and mediated negotiation. Such formulation owes much to the reflection of C. Pébarthe, who draws on C. Castoriadis to discuss “democracy as a human creation” (2012, 148). This book’s main problem is the analysis, preferably interdisciplinary and open to multiple theoretical-methodological approaches, of the construction of the concept of Athenian democracy as a conflicting and problematic political-cultural arena (and not as a goal, structure or program) noticeable above all in historiographical, biographical, philosophical, and rhetorical writings of the classical period, as well as in other types of reflections that supplemented them mainly throughout the 5th and 4th centuries BCE.

The book aims therefore to confront approaches that are as critically innovative as, in their times, they were texts centered on problems such as the relationship between public and private justice, between modes of government and the value of its functioning, between rights and duties that configure citizenship and models of identity, between individual autonomy and arbitrary coercion, or between limitations and possibilities of exercising power—among other issues that form the backbone of ancient and maybe also of contemporary concepts of democracy. By using a heuristic strategy similar to the one that Finley (1973), Hansen (1989, 2005), and Mosconi (2021) have put in practice already, for instance, we hope that the confrontation and permanent debate between past and present may shed some light on problems we consider more urgent than ever.

The chapter of Delfim Leão, “Damasias and Thales: *stasis* and *sophia* at the term of Solon’s *apodemia*”, addresses an obscure aspect surrounding Solon’s activity, which occurred after his political and legislative activity and before his opposition to Pisistratus’ moves towards tyranny. It tackles, more specifically, the way in which Solon may have been indirectly involved (as a politician but also as a *sophos*) in a triangle of interests that would include, besides himself, two personalities associated with a period of *stasis* (Damasias) and with the status of *sophos* (Thales).

Denis Correa, “The (not so violent) *staseis* and *metabolai* in the Aristotelian *Athenaion Politeia*”, discusses the way *Ath. Pol.* 41.2 lists eleven changes (*metabolai*) to the Athenian political system from the heroic age to the democratic restoration of Thrasybulus in 403 BCE. It examines patterns in the *metabolai*, involving the innovations ascribed to the first three (or four) and the main role

played by Solon after the dissension (*stasis*) in which he acted as an arbitrator and avoided the establishment of a tyranny, which, according to this Aristotelian work, marked the beginning of democracy. After Solon, each subsequent *metabole* implicated his legacy, except those that involved tyranny. This pattern oversimplifies complex historical events, but the relationship between *staseis* and *metabolai* structures the *Athenaion Politeia*'s original design and constitutional historical approach.

Martinho Soares: "Nature and natural phenomena in Thucydides' *The Peloponnesian War*: *physis* and *kinesis* as factors of political disturbance" debates why the natural phenomena hold an enduring interest for Thucydides, which often links natural problems to political and military decisions and events of the war. Like war, *physis* (nature) also seems to be understood as *kinesis* (movement), a disturbance that affects all aspects of human existence and causes changes (*metabolai*). It analyzes the presence and influence of natural phenomena on the Peloponnesian War development, and draws some literary and philosophical conclusions about the way in which Thucydides understands the interaction between humans and the natural environment.

Breno Battistin Sebastiani and Lucia Sano, "Democracy under the *kothornos*: Thucydides and Xenophon on Theramenes", analyze the political actions of Theramenes as described by Thucydides (during the coup of 411 BCE) and Xenophon (under the Thirty Tyrants' dictatorship, 404–403 BCE) in order to map the features that converged to make him a paradigmatic character in the ancient Greek political imaginary. The analysis aims to highlight the traits of Theramenes that fostered his identification as either the quintessence of the turncoat or as a role-model for moderate politics, as well as the implications of his political stances for the configuration of Athenian democracy in the last quarter of the 5th century and how this, as a *ktema es aei*, may still help us to consider our own democratic system and its flaws.

Maria do Céu Fialho, "Uniting past and present: Sicily as a locus of identity between Greece and Rome", approaches the representation of the proposed expedition to Sicily, as a strategic bridge to advance over Carthage and to define both figures and what they represent. First, old Athens, composed of experienced rulers and devoted, thoughtful citizens, who retreat, aware of the madness and threat of disaster that will lead to the ruinous outcome of the civil war. The threat that constitutes the people in a manipulated uproar in the Assembly intimidates and inhibits the arguments of this Athens. Forced to join the expedition, Nicias, as the embodiment of this polis, will stay until the end, in a campaign with which he does not agree, trying to save his fellow citizens. On the other side, Alcibiades, and what he represents, are fighting fiercely for the realisation of a megalomaniacal dream that will bring fortune and power for their own advantage.

Priscilla Gontijo: "Forms of government and rhetoric: perceptions of democracy and oligarchy in Demosthenes" analyses the role of Demosthenes as a defender of Athenian democracy and freedom, particularly in voicing his concern about the growth of Macedonian power. While the defence of democracy is a recurring theme in his speeches, Demosthenes did not develop a theory

of democracy. Rather, he tended to idealize the Athenian democratic experience prior to the Peloponnesian War. Further, in his defence of democracy and the *ethos* of the democratic citizen, Demosthenes references oligarchy, though again not from a theoretical perspective. The objective of this paper is to analyse Demosthenes's use of the democratic and oligarchical forms of government in his defence of Athens, with a focus on his construction of an antithesis between them and his deployment of the Athenian experiences with oligarchy in 411 and 404 BCE in his oratory.

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# Damasias and Thales: *stasis* and *sophia* at the term of Solon's *apodemia*

Delfim Ferreira Leão

**Abstract:** This paper addresses an obscure aspect surrounding Solon's activity, which occurred after his political and legislative activity and before his opposition to Pisistratus' moves towards tyranny. It tackles, more specifically, the way in which Solon may have been indirectly involved (as a politician but also as a *sophos*) in a triangle of interests that would include, besides himself, two personalities associated with a period of *stasis* (Damasias) and with the status of *sophos* (Thales). In order to achieve this goal, the present study combines two different approaches: it first analyses the historical circumstances that marked Athens during the period immediately after Solon's legislation, until the moment when Damasias held the archonship, and then clung to office for a further year and two months; it then discusses the testimony of Demetrius of Phalerum (quoted by Diogenes Laertius, 1.22), according to whom Thales was named for the first time *sophos* during the archonship of Damasias.

**Keywords:** *stasis*, *sophos*, Solon, Damasias, Thales, Demetrius of Phalerum.

Throughout his life, Solon intervened at different times in the Athenian political scene, usually against a backdrop of great civil instability (*stasis*). His political skills, as well as the image of a serious statesman and the symbolism that went along with some of his gestures, helped to create consistency in the image of the *sophos*—that same image that posterity would use to immortalise him, turning him into one of the most paradigmatic and fascinating personalities of the group of the Seven Sages. It is the intent of this paper to address a lesser-known aspect of Solon's activity, which occurred after his legislative activity and before the opposition he is said to have made to Pisistratus' moves towards autocratic rule. The study approaches, in particular, the way in which Solon may have been indirectly involved (as a politician but also as a *sophos*) in a triangle of interests that would include, besides himself, two personalities associated with a period of *stasis* and with the status of *sophos*, respectively Damasias and Thales.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This paper resumes and expands on a first approach to this topic published originally in Portuguese, in Leão (2010a); Ferreira and Leão (2010, 83–91). In its current version, it is framed within the project “Crises (*staseis*) and changes (*metabolai*). The Athenian democracy in contemporary times”, supported by CAPES (Brazil) and FCT (Portugal) (2019–2022), and also within the “Rome our Home: (Auto)biographical Tradition and the

Delfim Ferreira Leão, University of Coimbra, Portugal, leo@fl.uc.pt, 0000-0002-8107-9165

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1. Historical background: *stasis* after Solon's reforms

According to tradition, Solon would have undertaken a long journey (*apodemia*) after finishing his legislative activity.<sup>2</sup> The accounts of his journeys to the East must be genuine, although not all the meetings recorded by the sources took place. This is the case of the visit to Croesus, in Sardis, and to Amasis, in Egypt, both of which are unlikely in chronological terms.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, it seems fairly certain that the Greek lawgiver passed through Egypt, as his poetry attests (frg. 28 West). Moreover, according to tradition, Solon would have encountered the myth of Atlantis there, and Plutarch (*Sol.* 26.1) even gives the name of the priests who told it to him. However, there are legitimate suspicions that this information, which comes from Plato (cf. *Ti.* 21–7; *Criti.* 108d, 113a–b), is of no historical value. Theoretically, things may have happened as stated, but there are also strong probabilities that Plato invented the whole episode in order to give more dignity to the *Atlantikos logos*.<sup>4</sup> As for another encounter, this time with Philocyprus, it seems plausible that it can have occurred, since the chronological difficulties are not insurmountable and the journey finds support in Solon's poetry (frg. 19 West).

However, for the purposes of the present analysis, rather than identifying the places where the legislator travelled, it is more important to make some considerations about the causes that led to the *apodemia*. Herodotus (1.29), the *Athenaion Politeia* (11.1) and Plutarch (*Sol.* 25.6) agree that the journey took place after the legislative activity had ended and that its real motive was the desire to avoid pressure to change the law code that Solon had just implemented.<sup>5</sup> They also generally

Shaping of Identity(ies)” (PTDC/LLT-OUT/28431/2017), funded by the FCT. I want to thank Hannah Shakespeare, who read an earlier version of this paper, and whose comments helped me to improve it, especially at the linguistic level.

<sup>2</sup> In 593 or at the latest in 591, if one admits Hammond's thesis concerning the time lapse between the implementation of emergency measures and the legislative work itself. This proposal is first made in Hammond (1940) and republished, with additions, in Hammond (1973, 145–69). For an analysis of this question, see Leão (2001, 268–75, esp. 272–3).

<sup>3</sup> For a recent discussion on those traditions, especially the details respecting the (possible) meeting of Solon and Croesus, see Porciani (2016); Gazzano (2016); Wallace (2016). As highlighted by Leão (2020, 273–4), when discussing the chronological problems in question, “the effecting of such a meeting may be more or less credible from a temporal angle, but its cultural impact does not necessarily stem from the greater or lesser historical accuracy that can be conceded to it: its force actually lies in the fact that it became a civilizational paradigm and, in this viewpoint, its significance even overcomes any constraint that could be imposed from a chronological reconstruction”.

<sup>4</sup> So believes Morgan (1998, 108–14), for whom the philosopher's use of the figure of the legislator is part of the dynamics of the *patrios politeia* theme. According to Davies (1971, 325), what Plato really “needed was a bridge-passage which would serve as a natural introduction of the name of Solon and present him as the authority for the myth of Atlantis”. On the tradition, also of Platonic origin (*Ti.* 21c–d), that Solon had begun to compose in verse an account of Atlantis, see the commentary by Manfredini and Piccirilli (1998, 279–80). On the tradition of the Seven Sages and Plato, see Leão (2010b).

<sup>5</sup> Diogenes Laertius' version (1.50), according to which the *apodemia* took place after the instauration of Pisistratus' tyranny, is improbable, because it clearly serves the idea that Solon

accept that the legislator had justified the journey by invoking secondary motivations, sometimes recreational and cultural, sometimes commercial. Finally, they all set the period of absence at ten years and agree that the Athenians had committed themselves, during that time, to respect the recently enacted laws.<sup>6</sup> They differ, however, on the period of validity of the laws: Herodotus points out only ten years, the same as the *apodemia*, which makes one think that he had deduced this number from the period of duration of the journey; the *Athenaion Politeia* and Plutarch coincide by holding that the bond extended for one hundred years, which would probably be equivalent to saying that the laws were destined to an unlimited durability. Despite these positions of principle, it is certain that the years following Solon's archonship would continue to be marked by a climate of strong political unrest (*stasis*). The recognition of this reality does not imply necessarily that the reforms had failed, since Solon's constitution and laws would remain virtually unchanged until the deposition, in 510, of Pisistratus's son (Hippias).<sup>7</sup> Such a scenario shows, however, that social pacification was still far from being achieved and that Athens would not shy away from the experience of autocratic rule.

The sources available for the reconstitution of this period are not very abundant and often raise complex problems of harmonisation of information. It is not within the scope of this study to deal with this complex issue, but only to evoke the circumstances that marked a specific period: the archonship of Damasias and the way in which it can be articulated with the tradition of the Seven Wise Men in general and with the figure of Thales in particular. As a starting point, one can take the moment when the author of the *Athenian Constitution* mentions the social atmosphere in Athens when Solon left Attica (*Ath.* 13.1–2):

τὴν μὲν οὖν ἀποδημίαν ἐποιήσατο διὰ ταύτας τὰς αἰτίας. Σόλωνος δ' ἀποδημήσαντος, ἔτι τῆς πόλεως τεταραγμένης ἐπὶ μὲν ἔτη τέτταρα διήγον ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ. τῷ δὲ πέμπτῳ μετὰ τὴν Σόλωνος ἀρχὴν οὐ κατέστησαν ἄρχοντα διὰ τὴν στάσιν, καὶ πάλιν ἔτει πέμπτῳ διὰ τὴν αὐτὴν αἰτίαν ἀναρχίαν ἐποίησαν. μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα διὰ τῶν αὐτῶν χρόνων Δαμασίας αἰρεθεὶς ἄρχων ἔτη δύο καὶ δύο μῆνας ἤρξεν, ἕως ἐξηλάθη βία τῆς ἀρχῆς. εἴτ' ἔδοξεν αὐτοῖς διὰ τὸ στασιάζειν ἄρχοντας

could not live under an autocratic regime. Moreover, it faces insuperable chronological difficulties by implying too low a dating for the year of the lawgiver's death.

<sup>6</sup> Herodotus is the most peremptory, stating that "they were bound by solemn oaths" (1.29: ὀρκίοισι γὰρ μεγάλοισι κατείχοντο); the Aristotelian treatise uses the visible term "locked" (*Ath.* 7.2: κατέκλεισεν); Plutarch speaks of "attributed validity" (*Sol.* 25.1: ἰσχύον... ἔδωκε).

<sup>7</sup> In fact, the sources agree that, although Pisistratus reserved the most important posts for his supporters, he kept the moderate forms of Solon's constitution, while maintaining the existing laws. Cf. Herodotus, 1.59.6; Thucydides, 6.54.6; Plutarch, *Sol.* 31.3. 31.3. The contrasting statement of *Ath.* 22.1 (καὶ γὰρ συνέβη τοὺς μὲν Σόλωνος νόμους ἀφανίσαι τὴν τυραννίδα διὰ τὸ μὴ χρῆσθαι: "for it happened that the tyranny had consigned Solon's laws to oblivion by not using them") may be a sign that the tyrants used their influence to grant that, while keeping Solon's institutions, they were able to get the results they wanted. Here and elsewhere throughout the paper, the English translation of the *Athenaion Politeia* is that of Rhodes (2017).

ἐλέσθαι δέκα, πέντε μὲν εὐπατριδῶν, τρεῖς δὲ ἀγροίκων, δύο δὲ δημιουργῶν, καὶ οὗτοι τὸν μετὰ Δαμασίαν ἤρξαν ἐνιαυτόν. ὧ καὶ δῆλον ὅτι μεγίστην εἶχεν δύναμιν ὁ ἄρχων· φαίνονται γὰρ αἰεὶ στασιάζοντες περὶ ταύτης τῆς ἀρχῆς.

Solon made his foreign journey (*apodemia*) for that reason. While he was journeying, and the city was still in a state of upheaval, they remained at peace for four years, but in the fifth year after Solon's archonship they did not appoint an archon because of their dissension (*stasis*); and again in the fifth year after that for the same reason they had a year without an archon (*anarchia*). After the same interval of time after that Damasias when appointed archon held office for two years and two months, until he was ejected from his office by force. Then they decided on account of their dissension (*stasiazein*) to appoint ten archons, five from the *eupatridai*, three from the rustics (*agroikoi*) and two from the craftsmen (*demiourgoi*); and these held office for the year after Damasias. From this it is clear that the archon had the greatest power, for it is evident that their dissension (*stasiizontes*) was always focussed on this office.

The atmosphere of unrest recorded in the passage is in line with the idea that Solon—as the legislator himself acknowledges in his poems (e.g. frg. 34 West; cf. *Ath.* 11–2)—had somehow disappointed the expectations that had been placed in him, some because they anticipated more profound changes, others because they felt he had gone too far. After a few years of relative calm, there is a clear sign of instability in the fact that twice the post of eponymous archon was left unfilled. Taking the year of Solon's archonship (594/3) as a reference, these two periods of *anarchia* would have occurred in 590/89 and 586/5. In addition, the author of the *Athenaion Politeia* records the name of a certain Damasias,<sup>8</sup> who had first held the office of archon legitimately, perhaps in 582/1, but was to remain in that post illegally for two years and two months, thus until the first two months of 580/79. This shows that Damasias was quite likely aspiring to tyranny, taking as a starting point the projection achieved through the archonship, which was at that time a magistracy with great influence, as the author of the treatise points out in the final part of the passage under examination (ὧ καὶ δῆλον ὅτι μεγίστην εἶχεν δύναμιν ὁ ἄρχων).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> It must be Damasias the Younger, perhaps a relative of another Damasias, archon in 639/8, and therefore it is to be believed that he was of aristocratic origin. See Cadoux (1948, 91, 94 and 102 n. 162). The use of the term ἀρεθεῖς to indicate the manner in which Damasias was appointed to office has led some scholars to admit the hypothesis that, in post-Solon times, archons were elected in a direct manner, thus contradicting the application of the *klerosis ek prokriton*, a mechanism which would have been instituted by this legislator and which combined the drawing of lots with the pre-selection of a small number of candidates (cf. *Ath.* 8.1). Rhodes (1981, 182) does not however see a contradiction between the two statements, holding that terms such as ἀρεθεῖς (and by extension also ἐλέσθαι) can have a sense close to “appoint”, in contexts where it is not specified how this appointment takes place.

<sup>9</sup> This observation also serves to set the comparison with the loss of political influence that would characterise this magistracy in the mid-fifth century (cf. *Ath.* 22.5).

Although secondary to the topic of this study, it is nonetheless pertinent to underline the way in which the *anarchia* was resolved, through the appointment of ten archons to replace Damasias, according to the following composition: five *eupatridai*, three *agroikoi* and two *demiourgoi*. Apart from the discussion about the significance of this college of magistrates and the exact social nature of the *agroikoi* and *demiourgoi* (who are perhaps to be identified with the occupational classes of “peasants” and “craftsmen” or “merchants”, respectively), one thing at least seems certain: half of the appointed archons did not belong to the *eupatridai* group. It is possible that this corresponded to a momentary concession aimed at calming tempers, but it may also be an indication of the proportion of non-aristocratic citizens who, after Solon’s reform, would at least be among the class of *hippeis*.<sup>10</sup> This being the case, the legislator’s reforms were beginning to bear their first fruit, in terms of the rearrangement of the civic body and access to power, slowly transforming aristocratic exclusivism. The *Athenaion Politeia* is silent as to how the designation of the eponymous archon continued thereafter. From this silence, however, it is not unlikely to deduce that the process prior to Damasias’ attempted coup was resumed. The composition of the ten archons nominated to replace him in power would indicate not that the office of eponymous archon passed to a college of ten members, but rather that the citizens qualified to occupy that magistracy would be divided proportionally among the *eupatridai*, *agroikoi* and *demiourgoi*.

Damasias’ political purposes were not, therefore, successful, since he was not able to establish a long-lasting tyranny, as Pisistratus would begin to do about two decades later. Moreover, according to a widespread tradition, Solon opposed the first attempt of Pisistratus to install the tyranny, which implies that, although he was old, he was still alive in 561/60.<sup>11</sup> There is no major reason to doubt this information, since in his poems the old lawgiver repeatedly warns his fellow citizens against the real threat of tyranny<sup>12</sup>, a fact which shows that he was making a correct reading of Pisistratus’ moves at a time when he would have already returned from his decennial *apodemia*. Moreover, if the genuine character of the tradition is accepted, this political resistance on the part of the

<sup>10</sup> Vide Cadoux (1948, 102–3); Wade-Gery (1958, 100–4); Develin (1979, 464–5); Figueira (1984). In this composition of the ten archons, it is not necessary to see a return to the pre-Solonian classes (the nature of which raises serious doubts), but rather the confirmation of the applicability of the criterion of income to the new census classes, as a way of qualifying access to power.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Ath.* 14.2; Plutarch, *Sol.* 30.6; Diogenes Laertius, 1.49; Valerius Maximus, 5.3. On the ambivalence of the relationship between Solon and Pisistratus, see Leão (2008).

<sup>12</sup> Frgs. 9, 10 and 11 are presented in their testimonies as warnings against the tyranny of Pisistratus, either when it was only a threat or when it was already a reality. Despite this and as Noussia-Fantuzzi (2010, 309–11) rightly states, although the testimonies favour the identification of the threat with Pisistratus, an expression like ἀνδρῶν δ’ ἐκ μεγάλων (frg. 9.3) can designate broadly the aristocrats whom the *demos* has incautiously raised to power. See also Leão (2015, 231–35).

old legislator would have been his last great public gesture, given that Solon would die shortly afterwards.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. Damasias and Thales: the “aspiring” tyrant and the first “formal” *sophos*

It is a well-known fact that, in the tradition of the Seven Wise Men, Solon occupies a central position, with the famous debate between Solon and Croesus about the notion of happiness—which, although improbable from the historical point of view, had a wide ethical use throughout antiquity—standing out in particular from the range of episodes linked to his figure.<sup>14</sup> For the present study, however, of more interest are the reports that sought to link Solon and Thales, especially when these reports also involved the city of Athens. In fact, Plutarch (*Sol.* 6) uses Hermippus as *Mittelquelle* to narrate an episode that would date back to Pataecus. According to the account, Thales would have given the Athenian legislator the false news of the death of his own son to demonstrate—to a Solon overwhelmed by the anguish of loss—the reason that had led Thales not to marry and not to want offspring, since both were sources of disquiet. Although the story is certainly fictional, it has nevertheless enjoyed a certain fortune, as it contributes to the definition of the *ethos* of a wise man.<sup>15</sup> The episode narrated by Plutarch puts Solon in Miletus, visiting Thales, at a time when, in Athens, the legislator already enjoyed the reputation of being a wise man, who distinguished himself by a sense of justice (*Sol.* 6.5: πολὺς λόγος ἦν αὐτοῦ σοφίας καὶ δικαιοσύνης). Therefore, the most obvious implication would be to suppose that the meeting in Miletus would appear placed during the *apodemia* of Solon. Those journeys made after the legislative activity would give, in fact, the most natural framework for the meeting of the Seven Wise Men and also for the attempt to define which of them would be the most important. This is, moreover, the etiological context that lies at the basis of the well-known episode of the tripod, which was destined for the *sophos* who had the supremacy among the Wise, but which circulated among the sages until it was finally dedicated to Apollo. Although Thales is not always the first recipient of the tripod, he still often appears as the great figurehead among the *sophoi*.<sup>16</sup>

It is in this context of the relationship between *sophoi* that the connection to Athens and Damasias finds a somewhat surprising testimony which, for this very reason, is worth discussing in more detail. Diogenes Laertius is responsi-

<sup>13</sup> Between 560 and 559. Cf. Plutarch, *Sol.* 32.3.

<sup>14</sup> On the afterlife of Croesus’ debate with Solon, from the Herodotean paradigm and its reception and reshaping to the time of Diogenes Laertius, see the discussion by Leão (2020).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Diogenes Laertius, 1.63, who quotes Dioscorides on the same subject; Tzetzes, *Chil.* 5.359–75.

<sup>16</sup> The testimonies concerning the circulation of the tripod are collected in Martina (1968, 58–66). Martin (1998, 119–20), calls attention to the fact that the dispute over the tripod confirms the existence of an early tradition of the Seven Sages’ stories as “performers of wisdom”, because a competition (even if only symbolic) always demands other players.

ble for the transmission of the information, whose origin would date back to Demetrius of Phaleron, whom he expressly quotes (1.22):

<ἦν δὲ τῶν ἑπτὰ σοφῶν,> καθὰ καὶ Πλάτων φησί· καὶ πρῶτος σοφὸς ὠνομάσθη ἄρχοντος Ἀθήνησι Δαμασίου, καθ' ὃν καὶ οἱ ἑπτὰ σοφοὶ ἐκλήθησαν, ὡς φησι Δημήτριος ὁ Φαληρεὺς ἐν τῇ τῶν Ἀρχόντων ἀναγραφῇ.

He [Thales] was one of the Seven Wise Men, as Plato says too (*Prot.* 343a); and he was the first to be called “Wise” (*sophos*), during Damasias’ archonship at Athens. At that time the Seven Wise Men too got their name, as Demetrius of Phalerum says in his *List of Archons*.<sup>17</sup>

This testimony is quite significant because it seeks to define a specific date for the formal investiture of Thales as *sophos*, as well as for the delimitation of the group of Seven Wise Men. Demetrius makes both events coincide with the year of the celebration of the first Pythian Games, as can be deduced from the corresponding entry in the *Marmor Parium*.<sup>18</sup> Given the well-known relationship between Delphic morality and the tradition of the Seven Wise Men, the advantages of associating the first Pythian Games—dedicated to Apollo—with the consecration of the figure of the Wise Men as a group become evident. This dating of 582/1 would thus have some interest for understanding the way in which the wisdom literature was enriched with new details. It is precisely in this respect that the reference to Damasias, in a work in which Demetrius is focussed on reconstituting the official list of Athenian archons, stimulates further reflection. In fact, not only would the date of these events coincide with the year of Damasias’ legitimate mandate, but also the consecration of Thales as *sophos* would have taken place specifically “in Athens” (Ἀθήνησι).<sup>19</sup> This interpretation of the passage is decisive for the reflections that follow. If one understands, on the contrary, that the testimony indicates only that Damasias was at that time archon “in Athens”, then it is merely a detail to establish relative chronology, which does not imply a connection between Thales and Athens. However, if Demetrius of Phalerum, who had been ruler in Athens, was making the *List of Archons*, it would not make sense for him to have to specify that Damasias was archon “in Athens”, because it was already implicit. Therefore, the specification Ἀθήνησι would mean that Thales was invested as *sophos* in Athens, an interpretation that may carry a significant political value, and shed some light on the period of *stasis* that was to follow.

Before moving in that direction, it would be advantageous to examine in more detail the information, conveyed in the above quoted passage of Diogenes

<sup>17</sup> The original text and the translation of the passages are provided according to Fortenbaugh and Schütrumpf (2000, 174–75).

<sup>18</sup> See Mosshammer (1976, 165–66); Busine (2002, 40–1).

<sup>19</sup> Schubert and Weiß (2009, 338) maintain that it was Demetrius who fixed in 582/1 an “Inaugurationsdatum” for the chronology of the *sophoi*.

Laertius, according to which Plato had claimed that Thales was one of the Seven Wise Men (1.22: ἦν δὲ τῶν ἑπτὰ σοφῶν, καθὰ καὶ Πλάτων φησί).<sup>20</sup> Diogenes is certainly referring to the passage in which Plato mentions the Sages as a group (*Prt.* 342e–43b):

τοῦτο οὖν αὐτὸ καὶ τῶν νῦν εἰσὶν οἱ κατανεοήκασι καὶ τῶν πάλαι, ὅτι τὸ λακωνίζειν πολὺ μᾶλλον ἐστὶν φιλοσοφεῖν ἢ φιλογυμναστεῖν, εἰδότες ὅτι τοιαῦτα οἷόν τ' εἶναι ῥήματα φθέγγεσθαι τελέως πεπαιδευμένου ἐστὶν ἀνθρώπου. τούτων ἦν καὶ Θαλῆς ὁ Μιλήσιος καὶ Πιττακὸς ὁ Μυτιληναῖος καὶ Βίας ὁ Πριηνεὺς καὶ Σόλων ὁ ἡμέτερος καὶ Κλεόβουλος ὁ Λίνδιος καὶ Μύσων ὁ Χηνεὺς, καὶ ἔβδομος ἐν τούτοις ἔλέγετο Λακεδαιμόνιος Χίλων. οὗτοι πάντες ζηλωταὶ καὶ ἐρασταὶ καὶ μαθηταὶ ἦσαν τῆς Λακεδαιμονίων παιδείας, καὶ καταμάθοι ἂν τις αὐτῶν τὴν σοφίαν τοιαύτην οὖσαν, ῥήματα βραχέα ἀξιομνημόνευτα ἐκάστω εἰρημμένα· οὗτοι καὶ κοινῇ συνελθόντες ἀπαρχὴν τῆς σοφίας ἀνέθεσαν τῷ Ἀπόλλωνι εἰς τὸν νεῶν τὸν ἐν Δελφοῖς, γράψαντες ταῦτα ἃ δὴ πάντες ὑμνοῦσιν, Γνωθὶ σαυτὸν καὶ Μηδὲν ἄγαν. τοῦ δὴ ἔνεκα ταῦτα λέγω; ὅτι οὗτος ὁ τρόπος ἦν τῶν παλαιῶν τῆς φιλοσοφίας, βραχυλογία τις Λακωνική.

Now there are some, both of earlier times and of our own day, who have seen that admiration of Sparta is much more a matter of learning than of gymnastics, and who know that the ability to utter sayings of that kind is the mark of a perfectly educated man. Thales of Miletus was one, Pittacus of Mytilene another, Bias of Priene, our own Solon, Cleobulus of Lindos, Myson of Chen(ae); the Spartan Chilon was counted as the seventh. All of these were admirers, devotees, and students of the Spartan education, and you can see that their own wisdom is of that kind, as each is the author of some brief, memorable sayings. And not only that, but they joined together to make an offering to Apollo at his temple in Delphi of the fruits of their wisdom, and inscribed there those familiar maxims “Know thyself” and “Nothing in excess”. What, then, is the point of all this? The point is that that was the form of expression of the wisdom of former times, a Laconian brevity (translated by Taylor 1976).

The most important thing about this passage is that it provides the first complete list of Seven Wise Men. A possible sign that Plato was innovating in supplying the full *sylloge* in writing is given by the fact that the philosopher presents “l'intégralité des sept noms et leurs ethniques respectifs” (Busine 2002, 33–4). Still according to A. Busine, if this was not the case, it would seem more spontaneous to refer to the Sages by simply using the expression *hepta sophoi*, which would later become the usual designation. This argument has certain pertinence, but is not conclusive by itself: in reality, much later than Plato, Diogenes (1.41–2) provides the name of more than twenty *sophoi* and he sometimes keeps using the ethnic identification and even the patronymic when referring to well-known personalities. Even though, it is an undeniable fact that the earliest surviving

<sup>20</sup> This section resumes part of the arguments used in Leão (2010b, 409–13).

reference to the *sylloge* is the passage under discussion, but this does not imply that Plato was himself creating the legend of the Seven Wise Men, as has already been sustained (especially by Fehling 1985, 9–19). On the contrary, Herodotus already mentions these names, with the exception of Cleobulus and Myson, although he presents them in association with other personalities or events, and not as a group. It is a fact that the number seven is present in many other accounts and cultures, whose origin is lost in time, but even in Greek culture there are several examples of the use of this same symbolic figure before Plato. In Homer, an elder warrior who is well-known for the sagacity of his words—Nestor—forms a kind of intimate council around Agamemnon together with other six elite warriors (*II*. 2.402–9). In 467, Aeschylus produced a trilogy that dealt with the house of the Labdacids, to which belonged the surviving drama *Seven against Thebes*. Although not usually mentioned in the context of the Seven Wise Men, an example can be added that is synchronous with the most important Sages: a poem composed by Solon (frg. 27 West) in which the human life is divided in ten periods of seven years. It is worth noting that the traces of this concept are once again present in Herodotus, in the conversation between Solon and Croesus (1.32.2; cf. also Diogenes Laertius, 1.55). This example has the advantage of suggesting that the idea of a *sylloge* of Seven Sages could have had its origins in the use of the hebdomads' structure by one of the most charismatic *sophoi*.

Despite these arguments, it remains a fact that Plato's testimony was influential and that it gave, at least, a definitive contribution in order to provide literary visibility to the notion of the *sylloge*. By the beginning of the fourth century BC, the concept was already canonical and led naturally to the idea of synchronism of the Seven Sages, who were thought to have lived around one hundred years before the Persian Wars. This approximation may have been used as a basis for estimating the *akme* of Thales and the date of other personalities and events, like the establishment of the Pythian Games. As mentioned above, this was possibly the reasoning behind the calculation of Demetrius of Phalerum (see Mosshammer 1976, 177–78).

Another aspect that deserves attention is the detail that the *sophoi* are presented in the *Protagoras*' passage as appreciators or as a product—as Chilon—of the Spartan education, whose brevity of speech (*brachylogia*) is an object of admiration and indirectly opposed to the rhetoric ability of the sophists, the so-called new *savants*. This pro-Spartan presentation may in fact justify the reason why Periander was left aside, because he represented the kind of tyrannical government traditionally opposed by the Spartans.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, Pittacus and Cleobulus were included in the group and this option has probably to do with the fact that, unlike Periander, they both were not marked by the excessive and violent behaviour of the typical tyrants.<sup>22</sup> The mistrust towards tyranny is found

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Herodotus (1.59.2–3), who says that Chilon advised the father of Pisistratus not to have any children, in order to prevent tyranny.

<sup>22</sup> The group of *sophoi* assembled by Plutarch in his *Septem Sapientium Convivium* is very similar to the list presented in Plato's *Protagoras*. In fact, although Plato has Anacharsis replaced by

in other parts of Plato's work, the best-known passage being *Republic* 335e–36a, where, to the wisdom of figures like Simonides, Bias and Pittacus, he opposes the image of personalities inebriated by wealth, in a group headed precisely by Periander, but where Perdiccas, Xerxes and Ismenias of Thebes are also present.

Similarly significant is the fact that, in the text under analysis, Plato says that the Sages assembled together in the Delphic temple in order to devote to Apollo the first-fruits of their *sophia*.<sup>23</sup> This detail contributes to support the explanation, suggested already at the beginning of this section, that the development of the tradition of the Seven Wise Men was directly linked with Delphic morality, as is shown by the anecdote of the tripod, the story of Croesus or the connection between the Pythian Games and the synchronism of the Sages. As the passage of the *Protagoras* illustrates, some of the most famous maxims inscribed in the atrium of the temple to Apollo were attributed to the Sages who passed through the court of the Lydian king, and thus the advice for moderation that can be seen, for example, turning up in the conversation between the Herodotean Solon and Croesus, became mixed with the moral principles of the oracle.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, the prominent place given to Solon in the list has probably a symbolic value and demands some further inquiry. In fact, Solon is the only *sophos* whose regional origin is not supplied; rather he is designated by Socrates as “our own Solon” (Σόλων ὁ ἡμέτερος). This detail is in accord with the central position that Solon occupies in the group of the Sages, and suggests that Athenian influence may have played an important role in establishing the main lines of the tradition.<sup>25</sup> This was already quite visible in Herodotus and is again confirmed by Plato, in the *Timaeus*, where a significant reference is made to the ancient legislator, who is considered to be “the wisest of the Seven Sages” (20d: ὡς ὁ τῶν ἑπτὰ σοφώτατος). If one takes into consideration that this dialogue was written after the *Protagoras*, then it could be meaningful that, this time, Plato felt that it was no longer necessary to provide the whole *sylloge*, because it became meanwhile established that they were a group of seven (see Busine 2002, 36).

At any rate, in Plato's time Solon was increasingly becoming an object of ideological dispute. Moreover, at least after the last quarter of the fifth century, the old statesman was considered a paradigmatic figure with growing importance at a propagandistic level. This circumstance had the advantage of attracting to him

Myson, both authors include the names of Pittacus and Cleobulus, leaving Periander aside. On the reasons why Pittacus and Cleobulus were kept as *sophoi* in Plutarch's *Convivium*, see Leão (2009, 512–17).

<sup>23</sup> As Diogenes Laertius remarks (1.40), there were other possible places for the meeting.

<sup>24</sup> E.g. Plato, *Chrm.* 164d–65a; Pausanias, 10.24.1; Diogenes Laertius, 1.63. Stobaeus, *Anth.* 3.1.172 preserved a listing of “Sayings of the Seven Wise Men by Demetrius of Phalerum” (Δημητρίου Φαληρέως τῶν ἑπτὰ σοφῶν ἀποφθέγματα), in which are sayings by Cleobulus, Solon, Chilon, Thales, Pittacus, Bias and Periander. Greek text with translation available at Fortenbaugh and Schütrumpf (2000, 154–65).

<sup>25</sup> A fact still visible in Plutarch's *Convivium*, as shown by the importance attributed in it to the old legislator and to the democratic regime in terms of political discussion.

the attention of many other authors, but conversely it also stimulated legendary amplification. In fact, this propensity to the ideological exploitation of a historical personality was favoured by the ups and downs of the Peloponnesian War, which stimulated the emergence, in the spirit of the Athenians, of a passionate and revivalist vision of their constitutional history, substantiated in the blurred ideology of the *patrios politeia*. Among the personalities (and even institutions) that suffered propagandistic exploitation during the fifth and fourth centuries, the name of the ancient Athenian legislator occurs quite often.<sup>26</sup>

In this context, it is time to return to Demetrius of Phalerum, who was notorious as a student and associate of Theophrastus, and especially as an eminent politician and philosopher of the *Peripatos*, representing as well the last really significant *nomothetes* in Athens, in the line of Draco and Solon, as he apparently liked to be represented, unfolding his legal activity within the frame of the long-lasting debate over the *patrios politeia*.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, if Solon was the most emblematic *sophos* and if there was some kind of “legislative affinity” between Demetrius and him (in the sense of being both representatives of good *nomothetai*), one may wonder why the Phalereus have bothered to maintain that Thales was the first to be considered formally a *sophos*, instead of “our own Solon” (Σόλων ὁ ἡμέτερος), to put in the terms used by Plato.<sup>28</sup> A reason for that is that Demetrius intended to be impartial; another perhaps more plausible is that he may have seen a political motivation for the connection between Damasias and Thales. It is the latter possibility that will be further expanded.

As seen in the first section of this study, Damasias probably aspired to tyranny, as can be perceived from the fact that he remained in power a year and two months beyond the normal duration of his term as archon. This may lead one to speculate why Damasias was not deposed as soon as he showed signs of wanting to prolong his mandate, illegitimately, leading to a situation of *stasis*. The sources say nothing about it, but one can perhaps imagine that this happened because Damasias somehow enjoyed great popularity at the end of his term, an aura which

<sup>26</sup> Fuks (1953, 33–83) launched in systematic terms the discussion of this topic; Cecchin (1969) and Witte (1995) provide useful comprehensive approaches. For the most relevant sources and secondary literature regarding this propagandistic ideal, see Leão (2001, 43–72). On this same topic, see also the contribution of Correa, *infra*, p. 25.

<sup>27</sup> Faraguna (2015, 154) thinks that the possible institution of the *nomophylakes* by Demetrius may be an expression of the discussions motivated by the *patrios politeia*. The *Marmor Parium* (B 15–6, *Ep.* 13) states that Δημήτριος νόμους ἔθηκεν “Demetrius made laws” and Georgius Syncellus (*Ec. Chr.* p. 521) says that Demetrius was the third “lawgiver” (*nomothetes*), implying probably that the other two predecessors were Draco and Solon.

<sup>28</sup> Busine (2002, 66) thinks that “cette mise à l’avant-plan de la figure de Thalès pourrait être attribuée à l’influence d’Aristote sur les autres philosophes péripatéticiens: si Aristote considérait Thalès comme le premier des philosophes, il paraissait logique pour un de ses disciples d’en faire aussi le premier des Sept Sages”. This hypothesis may be considered, but does not explain why the recognition as *sophos* should be made specifically in Athens.

he would later for some reason alienate, forcing his expulsion from power.<sup>29</sup> If this possibility is accepted, there is a certain relevance to the hypothesis that during his first year in office he did something extraordinary that would have made the Athenians particularly proud of his services. The consecration of Thales in Athens as a *sophos* could perhaps correspond to this remarkable achievement. Moreover, there are several accounts that indicate that figures like Epimenides and Anacharsis passed through Athens during the period surrounding Solon's archonship, perhaps to the same effect in terms of public image.<sup>30</sup>

On the other hand, if Solon's absence caused by the *apodemia* lasted for ten years, then he could have been returning to Athens at precisely the same time when these events referred to by Demetrius would have taken place. Expanding the hypothesis a little further, it would not be entirely unlikely to imagine that Solon might somehow "sponsor"<sup>31</sup>, in his own homeland, the formal investiture of Thales as *sophos*, even though the Athenian legislator was equally in a position to claim the same distinction. This kind of abnegation among true *sophoi* is what motivates, as analysed above, that the tripod is successively sent from sage to sage, until it returns to its starting point and is then dedicated to Apollo. Finally, one could also consider the idea that, when Solon finally understood Damasias' real intentions, he withdrew his support, even helping to depose the usurper—a little like he would try to do later with Pisistratus, although without an identical success.

While recognising the speculative aspect of this interpretation, the nexus of events could perhaps have been as follows: the value initially given by Damasias to *sophia*, though genuinely justified by the character and reputation of Thales, would serve above all the political purpose of giving public visibility to Damasias himself, aiming to open the way to tyranny for him, as a means of controlling the risk of *stasis* and *anarchia* that had been experienced prior to his archonship. When his intentions became clearer, a serious situation of *stasis* was once again generated, the complexity of which would require a compromise solution like the one described in the passage from the *Athenaion Politeia* (13.1–2) that motivated this analysis in the first place: a provisional rule of ten *archontes*.

## References

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<sup>29</sup> Figueira (1984, 448 and 466–69) ranks Damasias among a "populist" tradition that was prone to political agitation.

<sup>30</sup> On the problem of dating these visits, see Leão (2001, 265–67 and 272–73). For the ancient testimonies concerning the meetings between Solon, Epimenides and Anacharsis, see Martina (1968, 67–8 and 71–5, respectively).

<sup>31</sup> Rossetti (2010, 35) is prone to accept that "Solone possa aver preso l'iniziativa di proporre che si onorasse il grande Talete e che Atene gli tributasse un riconoscimento pubblico e significativo", and even that the same may have extended to the other *sophoi*, but this latter possibility seems rather unlikely.

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# The (not so violent) *staseis* and *metabolai* in the Aristotelian *Athenaion Politeia*

Denis Correa

**Abstract:** The *Athenaion Politeia* chapter 41.2 lists eleven changes (*metabolai*) to the Athenian political system from the heroic age to the democratic restoration of Thrasybulus in 403 BCE; the city allegedly remained unchanged until as late as the writing of the text, probably around the 330s BCE. This text examines some patterns in the *metabolai*, involving the innovations ascribed to the first three (or four) and the main role played by Solon after the dissension (*stasis*) in which he acted as an arbitrator and avoided the establishment of a tyranny, which, according to the work, marked the beginning of democracy. After Solon, each subsequent *metabole* implicated his legacy, except those that involved tyranny. This pattern oversimplifies complex historical events, but the relationship between *staseis* and *metabolai* structures the *Athenaion Politeia*'s original design and constitutional historical approach. While some of these changes (the fourth, fifth, tenth, and eleventh) entailed the violent seizure of power by or against tyrants, others relate to the Solonian ideal of managing *staseis* without the violence of tyranny, that is, by increasing (or limiting) the power of the people over the constitution.

**Keywords:** *stasis*, *metabole*, *Athenaion Politeia*, Solon, tyranny.

## 1. Introduction

The *Athenaion Politeia* surfaced in an informal way.<sup>1</sup> I refer not only to the discovery of the so-called London papyrus smuggled from Egypt in the late 19th century but also to Del Corso's (2018) papyrological analysis, which concluded that it is an informal copy of an older original that was itself informal, most likely also lacking the proem and initial chapters. By "informal" Del Corso (2018, 43–50) means that it was produced by a collective of "reader-consumers" interested in its "symposean" performance in the context of the local Greek elite that ruled provincial Egypt under the Ptolemies. It was therefore not copied by professionals such as the scribes of Alexandria's *Mouseion*, and, according to Del Corso (2018, 48), those who worked on it probably did not know the name

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Delfim Leão and Breno Sebastiani for their help in reading and improving the text, as well as for the editing of this whole volume. I want also to thank Hannah Shakespeare, who read an earlier version of this paper, helping me to improve it at the linguistic level.

Denis Correa, Federal University of the Bahian Recôncavo, Brazil, tecnocaos@gmail.com, 0000-0002-6558-7709

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of the author of the text they were writing, nor did they have a clear idea as to its original title. This helps us to understand some of the difficulties and awkwardness of the text, but it was undoubtedly originally written in the school of Aristotle around the 330s BCE and revised some years later due to what appear to be later additions.<sup>2</sup>

We know from the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1181b.15–22) that the collecting of many *politeiai*, approximately 158 according to ancient sources (Rhodes 2017, 1–2), was connected to *Politics*, but one needs to be careful when establishing links with the philosophical *corpus* because each text has its own specific aim, scope, and context.<sup>3</sup> There is no reason to expect that such a colossal undertaking of historical research was made only to confirm earlier philosophical theories. Some views on past events could either be stressed or ignored in order to reach a conclusion, while political theories could change after the collection of historical data. Besides this, we do not know for sure which text came first.<sup>4</sup> A more complicated debate concerns the sources and historical thought contained in the work, a subject that I have addressed elsewhere<sup>5</sup> and surrounding which I recall one relevant conclusion: the author made deliberate choices when selecting sources, judging biases, and arranging a new narrative. Therefore, historical errors and biases must be ascribed to the author, not only to his sources.

In sum, the final composition and, let us not forget, some of the ideas and concepts in the *Athenaion Politeia*, were part of its original design. There is no better evidence of this than chapter 41.2 and its list of eleven changes (*metabolai*) that occurred in Athens from the early stages up to 404 BCE. According to Rhodes (2017, 333), this chapter “seems to be *A. P.*’s own compilation” and contains “one of the most Aristotelian passages in the work”. Bertelli (2018, 73–8) showed how the *metabolai* are discussed in *Politics* in an intricate and complex

<sup>2</sup> See Rhodes (1992, 37–63; 2017, 1–6, 27–31) and Keaney (1992, 5–19). I think that Mathieu (1915, II) is correct in thinking that even if most of the *politeiai* were not written by Aristotle himself, one so important as that of the Athenians most likely had some attention from the master. Cf. Hignett (1962, 29–30).

<sup>3</sup> Day and Chambers (1962, 25–71) attempted to identify the key ideas of the *Athenaion Politeia* within *Politics* and *Methaphysics*. Cf. Rhodes (1992, 10–13; 2017, 10–11), and the note below. This criticism applies also to Keaney (1963; 1992), see below.

<sup>4</sup> Huxley (1972, 158–68) raised these points in opposition to Day and Chambers, as well as Rhodes (1992, 51–59; 2017, 2–3). Bertelli (2018, 73–80) also criticized Day and Chambers from a different perspective, showing how the *Athenaion Politeia* related to Aristotelian political theory; see discussion here.

<sup>5</sup> See Correa (2019, 130–36), and Harding’s earlier contribution on the same topic (1974; 1977; 1994, 1–51). I highlight the parallel that one can draw between scholarship of the *Athenaion Politeia* and the observation of Sacks (1996, 213–14) concerning Diodorus’ *Bibliothēke*: “Sensitive to its many factual errors and chronological blunders, scholars continually mined the *Bibliothēke* in the hopes of uncovering individual strata and attributing them to various sources [...] the most part the corresponding narratives of the original sources are no longer extant, so that there are few controls, direct or indirect, over how much thematic material Diodorus has borrowed from his sources. Indeed, once the belief in Diodorus’ incompetence is put aside, it is easy to establish his authorship on important concepts in the *Bibliothēke*”.

way that should not be seen as straightforward progression. According to Bertelli (2018, 84–4), we should not expect full correspondence between the *Athenaion Politeia* and the *Politics*, but rather understand how the theory of *metabole* can be seen in their interpretations of specific events. It is likely that this scope of constitutional history oriented the author’s selection and appraisal of sources; omissions, biases, and his blind eye to historical inaccuracies could be related to the arrangement of *metabolai* that he intended to produce.

With this mind, my aim here is to identify patterns in the *metabolai* listed in the *Athenaion Politeia*, eventually noting some similarities and differences with *Politics*, without expecting total theoretical coherence. I use here Keaney’s (1963, 117–22; 1992, 20–31) idea that the text establishes a pattern between chapters 2 and 41 in which Solon plays a central role. I adopt a different approach, however, since I do not perceive these patterns in a stylistic context or in that of a compositional ring, nor I attempt to discern their teleological consequences on Aristotle’s philosophical works. In my view, the work portrays Solon as a turning point in the understanding of Athenian constitutional history, largely due to its assertion that the statesman avoided a tyranny, and its framing of his constitution and laws as the “beginning of democracy”. First, I will approach the *metabolai* before Solon from the lost chapters; then, I will argue that the work establishes a pattern based on Solon’s constitution; and finally, I will examine how his legacy to the *demos* recurs along subsequent *metabolai*.

## 2. The heroic *metabolai* before Solon

Let us see how the work structures the first *metabolai* (41.2.1–9<sup>6</sup>):

(2) That was the eleventh in number of the changes. For **the first** modification of the original arrangement was that of Ion and those who settled with him: for that was when **they were first distributed through the four tribes**, and they instituted the *phylobasileis*. **The second**, and **first after that<sup>7</sup> involving a structuring of the constitution** (καὶ πρώτη μετὰ ταύτην ἔχουσά τι πολιτείας τάξιν), was that which occurred under Theseus, inclining slightly away from the kingly. After that, the change under Draco, in which **they first wrote up laws**. **The third** was that after the dissension (τὴν στάσιν), under Solon, from which came the **beginning of democracy**.

I remark how the text highlights three innovations before arriving at democracy, which could be counted as the fourth. Of course, the fact that Draco’s change is not listed as the third is somewhat awkward, meaning that it is probably a later addition (Rhodes 1992, 84–8; 2017, 183, 192–93). For Rhodes (2017, 334), the expression καὶ πρώτη μετὰ ταύτην ἔχουσά τι πολιτείας τάξιν forms part of this

<sup>6</sup> All quotations are from Rhodes’ translation (2017), but all sections in bold are my own emphasis.

<sup>7</sup> I omit a comma here from Rhodes’ translation to clarify my interpretation.

addition, masking the inconsistency and making some sense of the numbering of the *metabolai*. The second change and first constitution, then, occurred under Theseus, meaning that the Draconian constitution was the second, although this is omitted: the addition is “masked”. But what about the other two “first modifications” referenced in the same passage? Were they also later insertions, or is just a coincidence that 41.2 lists three “first modifications” prior to the “beginning of democracy”? I obviously cannot answer these questions because we do not have access to the lost chapters, but I do argue that the writer (and/or editor) aims to isolate four relevant ancestral innovations because at the time the text was written Athens still had tribes,<sup>8</sup> a constitution,<sup>9</sup> written laws, and democracy.

The lost chapters were probably brief, around five in number (Rhodes 2017, 174), disorderly and rife with inconsistencies, as any other Greek prose text dealing with ancient heroes. They likely intended to provide a structured view on Athenian constitutional history and at the same time avoided the unnecessary contradiction of authoritative traditions, as was common in both ancient historiography and Aristotelian rhetorical reasoning.<sup>10</sup> The fragments we have from the lost section (Rhodes 2017, 40–5, 174–80) seem to deal with genealogical traditions, for example, that the Athenians were called Ionians because of Ion (F1). The recovering of Theseus’ bones after the Persian Wars (F4) only confirms how these traditions remained relevant over the centuries, justifying policy and war<sup>11</sup> in a way that meant that they could not be contradicted without good reason. The work focuses on genealogical tradition within the context of constitution, such as the creation of the four tribes (F2) and Theseus’ distancing from the monarchy, proclaiming equity but granting office only to the *eupatridai* (F3). In this sense, the *Athenaion Politeia* demonstrates an awareness of wider ancient traditions concerning the *patrios politeia*,<sup>12</sup> and highlights which innovation was introduced by each heroic ancestor: tribes were **first formed** during the age of Ion, **the first constitution** was created under Theseus, **the first laws** were written under Draco and **democracy began** under Solon.

The reason behind the somewhat awkward insertion of Draco’s constitution may relate to this: the work did not want to unnecessarily undermine some tradition of Draco’s role as one of the lawgivers of the *patrios politeia*. If the theory of later addition is true, the first version counted the events under Ion as a constitution also, and perhaps the author or editor feared that they might undermine the role of Draco’s laws in favor of Theseus and Ion, ancient heroes about whom

<sup>8</sup> Of course, after Cleisthenes they increased from four to ten; see the use of  $\phi\upsilon\lambda\eta$  in 21.1, 42.2 and 43.2.

<sup>9</sup> In *Politics* (1278b.8–12) one definition of *politeia* relates to disposition and control over offices; see Rhodes (2018, 25–6). Chapter 3 (Theseus’ constitution) addresses the distribution of offices based on aristocratic birth and wealth, see also F3, briefly discussed in the sequence.

<sup>10</sup> See Blank (1984, 279–81) and Correa (2019, 134–6). On ancient historiography dealing with conflicting traditions, see Marincola (1997, 262–3).

<sup>11</sup> See Thomas (1989, 196–237) and Gehrke (2001, 286–313).

<sup>12</sup> For a wider discussion, see Leão (2001, 43–72) and Atack (2010, 1–33; 2014, 330–63).

we have less accurate information available than Draco. I recall again that it is likely that these lost chapters did not exist in the original text on which our version is based (Rhodes 2017, 6–7; Del Corso 2018, 47); maybe the author of the informal copy found it unnecessary, after all, the description of the first constitution begins in chapter 3; or maybe it was omitted because it diverges from the rest of the text, once it mainly deals with ancient traditions.

Furthermore, there is an awkward succession at the beginning of our version of the text: the work addresses the dissension (*stasis*) at the time of Solon (chapter 2) before the pre-Draconian (chapter 3, Theseus' constitution with no mention of him) and Draconian constitutions (the altered chapter 4 which originally could be only about Draco's laws), before returning to a description of Solon's *metabole* (chapters 5 to 13). It has been noted that chapters 2 to 5 form a compositional ring (Keaney 1992, 72–5; Rhodes 2017, 25–6, 183), however I am not convinced that this ring relates to the separation of the *stasis*' "economic" and "political" backgrounds for two reasons: there is no separation of "economic" and "political" backgrounds where further *metabolai* are concerned, and this does not justify the disruption of the timeline.<sup>13</sup> Rather, I see the reason within the *stasis* itself because the fragments from the lost part mention at least two other *staseis*: between the sons of Pandion (F1) and Cylon's attempt to seize power and become a tyrant (F6), precisely where our text begins (chapter 1). The latter is another ancient tradition<sup>14</sup> related to the curse against the Alcmeonid family (briefly mentioned in 20.2), which had repercussions on several later events. It is likely, however, that there were also constitutional reasons for the mention of Cylon's *coup*: it relates a *stasis* and the first (failed) tyranny in Athens. The episode anticipates not only Pisistratus' tyranny, but also Solon, who, according to his own poetry, could have also become a tyrant choosing a side of the *stasis*, but instead rejected this (I will return to this matter later).

Chapter 2, then, could mark the end of the section about heroic ancestors, their *staseis* and contributions to the Athenian constitution until the first champion of the *demos*: Solon. It then goes back in time to describe earlier constitutions, as chapters 3 and 4 appear to reconstruct previous constitutions mirrored by Solon's reforms (Rhodes 2017, 183) in order to bridge the gap between the ancient past and the idealised "Solonian democracy" (chapters 5 to 13). This compositional ring illustrates why Solon's reforms were made, placing him at the center of Athenian constitutional history because his reforms were, according to the work, the beginning of democracy. Solon was a heroic ancestor of the *patrios politeia*, along with Theseus and Cleisthenes, perhaps perceived

<sup>13</sup> There is another disruption to the timeline in chapter 28, when the leaders of the *demos* and the elite, from Solon to Theramenes, are listed, which has precedents in other sources, see Rhodes (2017, 277); the same could apply to chapters 2 to 5, again see Rhodes (2017, 181–83). Even if this is the case, the work selected and arranged its sources as such because it fitted with its own aim and scope.

<sup>14</sup> See Herodotus 5.70–71 and Thucydides 1.126. These distant events are clearly based on earlier oral traditions; see Thomas (1989, 144–54, 238–82).

as the bridge between an ancient/heroic past and the recent one, since he is the only ancestor whose ideas could be gleaned by an Aristotelian writer through his poetry and laws. The ring between chapters 2 and 5, then, could mark a distinction between the ancient/heroic past and the recent, reliable one, analogous to Herodotus (3.122) and Thucydides (1.2–19), although each author had a different scope and aim.<sup>15</sup> The work clearly places Solon in high regard: he is at the center of Athenian constitutional history and is the founder of democracy, which raises the question: why and how was Solon's legacy so central to the events that followed?

### 3. Solon's legacy to the *demos*

There are many discussions about Solon and his role in Athenian history, which only confirms the emphasis placed on him by the text through its original arrangement of the events summarized in chapter 41.2. I will avoid dwelling on the many historical inaccuracies and focus on the aspects of the Solonian reforms that are accepted and endorsed by the text, perhaps because they are relevant to the descriptions and explanations of later *metabolai*.

The author clearly had many sources concerning Solon at his disposal, such as Solon's poetry, which directly addresses his political life and was valued not only by the *Athenaion Politeia* (which cites it extensively in 5.2–3 and 12.1–5) but also *Politics*.<sup>16</sup> There was likely another prose work focusing on Solonian reforms, also known by Plutarch (Rhodes 2017, 181, 183, 195) and used as a source in many unhistorical reforms ascribed to Solon. According to Rhodes (2017, 13, 198), the verses cited could also be related to the same source,<sup>17</sup> however, even if this is the case, the author selected and judged them according to his own constitutional scope and political bias. There is no doubt that a variety of works was consulted: he expresses an awareness of differing opinions in chapter 3.3 and debates controversies surrounding Solon (6.2–4, 7.4, 9.2, 14.2–3, 17.2), in which we can note rhetorical reasonings that would not be unfamiliar to an Aristotelian writer.<sup>18</sup> Even if some of the evidence and arguments were collected from earlier sources, they were arranged in an original design to fit his constitutional history. The same applies to Solon's legacy, which will be discussed shortly: events and themes could be present in previous sources, but there is no evidence that any of these sources structure events around the category of *metabole*, as does this work (Bertelli 2018, 74).

<sup>15</sup> Bertelli (2018, 74) sees in the *Athenaion Politeia* an "archaeological" approach similar to that found in Thucydides (and maybe in the *Atthides*).

<sup>16</sup> For discussion, see Gehrke (2006, 276–88) and Loddo (2018, 175–210). See the *Politics* 1256b33, 1266b14, 1274a12, 1296a18. Loddo also mentions appraisals of Solon in the *Rhetoric* and the two *Ethics*.

<sup>17</sup> On the *Athenaion Politeia* and Plutarch, see Loddo (2018, 184–202).

<sup>18</sup> See Poddighe (2018, 147–74), Loddo (2018, 200–201) and Correa (2019, 133–39).

Among the reasons I give for an Aristotelian writer to accept these views on Solon as the founder of democracy, exemplar of moderate statesmanship, and turning point in Athenian constitutional history, I mention the popular view that Solon attempted to resolve the *stasis* of his time without the violence of tyranny. Solon's refusal to become (or approve) a tyrant<sup>19</sup> is repeatedly highlighted by the work (6.3–4, 11.2, 12.4, 14.2–3) and his own poetry, in which he presents himself as a moderate arbitrator between the people and the elite, opposing the excess of both and rejecting tyranny by choosing a side.<sup>20</sup> This is more astonishing if we consider, as does Bertelli (2018, 80), that according to the criteria in *Politics* we should expect a tyranny from this kind of extreme *stasis* whereby the people are enslaved by an oligarchy, precisely the situation described in chapter 2. With this in mind, Bertelli found the *Athenaion Politeia* to diverge from *Politics* in this passage. The work acknowledges, however, by quoting Solon himself, that, although a tyranny was within his grasp, he refused it. There was a failed attempt at tyranny before him (Cylon), and a successful one after (Pisistratus).<sup>21</sup> But instead of becoming a tyrant, Solon wrote new laws and a new constitution, which, in Aristotle's view, were the beginning of democracy. Solon's rejection of the violence of tyranny is part of the pattern I aim to describe, given that Athens will later (as it was before) be at frequent risk of falling prey to tyranny due to the *stasis* between the people and the elite. The work sees Pisistratus as a "popular" and "moderate" tyrant (14.1 and 28.2) while the Thirty are portrayed as an "oligarchy" (34.3 and 41.2), so each tyranny resulted from opposite sides of the *stasis* (Bertelli 2018, 80–1).

Let us now focus on some of the aspects of Solon's reforms addressed by the *Athenaion Politeia*. He created a new council (of four hundred, 8.4) while maintaining the council of Areopagus, an oligarchical institution consisting of the ex-archons described in chapter 3, with the role of "law-guarding" and watching "over most and the greatest of the city's affairs [...]" and it tried those who combined for the overthrow of the *demos*, since Solon enacted the law of *eisangelia* concerning them" (8.4.2–10). It is likely that the majority of this is unhistorical, especially the *eisangelia*, a later law for charges of treason or against the administration of one official (Rhodes 2017, 208–9, 286). Shortly after, chapter 9.1 lists the three most democratic features of the Solonian constitution, maybe because the perception of Solon as the instigator of democracy was not pervasive, meaning the reader needed to be persuaded. I emphasise here the third: "the point

<sup>19</sup> There is some discussion around how Solon related to the language and imagery of tyranny and his relations with Pisistratus, see Plutarch's *Lives of Solon* (1.3–5, 8.3–4, 29.2–5, 31.2). However, the *Athenaion Politeia* strongly argues against this in 14.2–3 and 17.2. I am not concerned with the accuracy of these events. For further discussion, see Irwin (2005, 205–80), Leão (2003, 54–5; 2008, 157–62), and Loddó (2018, 193–5), suggesting how Plutarch foregrounds Solon's moderate opposition to tyranny with the harsh opposition of the roman Publicola, who was Solon's parallel in *Lives*.

<sup>20</sup> See further discussion in Loddó (2018, 177–80) and Correa (2019, 140–42).

<sup>21</sup> On the possible attempt of Damasias to establish a tyranny as well, see the contribution of Leão to this volume (chapter 1).

by which they say the masses were strengthened most, appeal to the lawcourt (δικαστήριον): for when the *demos* has power over the vote it has power over the political régime” (9.1.5–7<sup>22</sup>). This is not an accurate historical view: even the name of the lawcourt (δικαστήριον) at the time of Solon could be wrong (Rhodes 2017, 211–12), but this reasoning will be reassessed many times in different ways, but with similar wording and vocabulary at the end of 41.2 (see below). These aspects (the council of Areopagus and the popular lawcourts) demonstrate how the Solonian constitution combined oligarchy and democracy, which will have suited an Aristotelian writer (Bertelli 2018, 275–77).

While some aspects of Solon’s constitution could be based on his poetry,<sup>23</sup> the ones mentioned above evidently are not. The reason the work accepts them could be related to its understanding that these were part of Solon’s legacy to the *demos* and his arbitration of the *stasis* whereby he avoided a tyranny. All tyrannies in subsequent *metabolai* ignored or put an end to some elements of Solon’s legacy, while those *metabolai* that were not tyrannies always involved the alteration of some aspects of it, particularly by increasing or limiting the power of the *demos* over the lawcourts. We cannot forget that in the view of the *Athenaion Politeia* it was Solon, not Theseus or Cleisthenes, who was the first champion of the *demos*, granting it the right to appeal to the lawcourts. The work also absolves Solon of responsibility for the later weakening of democracy at the hands of demagogues (9.2<sup>24</sup>) but makes clear that when a new *stasis* occurs there are always two options: (a) the violence of tyranny, or (b) returning to Solon’s legacy by introducing or limiting laws decreeing access and power for the *demos* over the lawcourts, council, offices, and so on. This is the pattern I aim to describe.

#### 4. The subsequent *metabolai*

Let us return to the list of *metabolai* (41.2.10–26):

**Fourth** was the **tyranny under Pisistratus**. **Fifth**, after the **overthrow of the tyrants**, that of Cleisthenes, which was more democratic than that of Solon. **Sixth**, that after the Persian Wars, with the council of the Areopagus presiding. **Seventh** and after that, the one pointed to by Aristides and completed by Ephialtes when he overthrew the Areopagite council: in this what happened was that through the demagogues the city made its worst mistakes on account of its rule of the sea. **Eight**, the establishment of the Four Hundred; and after that, **ninth**, democracy again. **Tenth**, the **tyranny of the Thirty and the Ten**. **Eleventh**, that after the return from Phyle and Piraeus, from which it has persisted until that in force now, continually extending the competence of the masses: for the *demos* has itself made itself master of everything, and

<sup>22</sup> See more in Hansen (1999, 178–224) and Bearzot and Loddo (2015, 99–139).

<sup>23</sup> Especially the *seisachtheia* and Solon’s political moderation; see Correa (2019, 140–42).

<sup>24</sup> For discussion see Leão and Rhodes (2015, 75), and Poddighe (2018, 147–74) in particular for the Aristotelian background to chapter 9.2.

it administers everything through decrees and lawcourts (ψηφίσμασιν<sup>25</sup> καὶ δικαστηρίοις), in which is the *demos* which has the power; for also the judgments of the council have come to the *demos*. And in this they seem to be acting rightly, for the few are more easily corrupted than the many by profit and favours.

First, I will avoid examining in detail the Fourth, Fifth, Tenth and Eleventh changes because they entailed either the establishment or overthrow of tyrannies through violence. Even the rise of Cleisthenes is described by the work as occurring after an attempt to seize power by Isagoras and Cleomenes that was resisted by the *demos*, who then entrusted the new constitution to Cleisthenes (20.1–21.1). He promulgated new laws and a new régime that were more democratic than those of Solon, whose laws were forgotten during the tyranny (22.1) and likely brought back by Cleisthenes. But what about the Sixth, Seventh, Eighth and Ninth? How did these non-tyrannical changes occur without resorting to violence and seizing power? And how did they bring about a non-violent solution to the *staseis* among the Athenians?

Let us consider the Sixth *metabole* (23.1.2–8):

But after the Persian Wars the council of the Areopagus became strong again and administered the city, gaining its leadership not by any formal decision (οὐδενὶ δόγματι) but because it was responsible for the naval battle near Salamis. For, when the generals were unable to cope with the situation and had proclaimed that everybody should save himself, it provided and allocated eight drachmae to each man and embarked them on the ships.

This whole matter of an Areopagite constitution presents many historical difficulties due to a long series of idealisations of the *patrios politeia* that go back to Isocrates' *Areopagiticus*. However, *Politics* (1304a17–24) agrees that after the Persian Wars this council changed the Athenian constitution<sup>26</sup> (Rhodes 2017, 257–58). It was an oligarchic council, but the *Athenaion Politeia* seems to see it as a “moderate” democracy led by the “champions of the *demos* [...] Aristides [...] and Themistocles” (23.3.1–3), maybe in contrast to Cleisthenes, who was “more democratic than Solon” (22.1 and 41.2). The phrasing whereby the council “became strong again” obviously refers to Solon’s constitution, as the work sees it as a democracy in which this council maintained its role of “law-guarding [...]” and watching “over most and the greatest of the city’s affairs” (8.4, see above). As no formal decision (“οὐδενὶ δόγματι”, which refers to public decrees) placed the council in charge, its good relationship with the *demos* relied mainly on the

<sup>25</sup> That is, the Assembly decrees, see Rhodes (2017, 271, 335).

<sup>26</sup> There is a correspondence of language between *Politics*, affirming the council made the constitution “tighter” (“συντονωτέραν”, 1304a21), while the *Athenaion Politeia* describes the subsequent change as “more loosened” (“ἀνιέσθαι”). Both expressions are used for the loosening of the strings of a bow or musical instrument, but Aristotle applies it to political constitutions, see Rhodes (2017, 269). For further discussion about how this change is presented by *Politics*, see Bertelli (2018, 81–2)

prestige of Aristides and Themistocles (23.2), who were both Areopagites and champions of the *demos*. Moreover, this *metabole* clearly was not caused by the violent seizure of power: the extraordinary events of the Persians Wars created a vacuum of power that was filled by the Areopagites, who then governed the city for seventeen years (25.1).

More importantly, the work sustains that, as a democratic constitution, it maintained the instruments that were fundamental to the *demos*' growth of power, such as the concurrent council (whose creation is also ascribed to Solon in 8.4 and which was then reformed by Cleisthenes in 22.2–3), and the people's right of appeal in the lawcourts. After the death of Aristides, a conflict ignited between Themistocles and other Areopagites, and the former associated with the new champion of the *demos*, Ephialtes.<sup>27</sup> Together they destroyed the powers of the Areopagites, first by judicial processes against the administration of several Areopagites, and then against the council itself, which was forced to cede powers to other deliberative institutions (25.2):

First he [Ephialtes] removed many Areopagites, bringing them to trial in connection with their administration. Then in the archonship of Conon he stripped off from the council all the additions through which it had acquired its guardianship of the constitution, giving some to the Five Hundred and others to the *demos* and the lawcourts (δικαστηρίοις).

The majority of this is either uncertain or blatantly false—it is unlikely that Themistocles, for example, ever associated with Ephialtes. Notwithstanding, the *Athenaion Politeia* clearly describes this Seventh change as non-violent and non-tyrannical, and claims that later the dissension (*stasis*) between the people and the elite was fought through judicial persecution and deliberative institutions whereby the *demos* wielded more power. In the historically incorrect view of the *Athenaion Politeia* these political instruments and institutions are part of Solon's legacy to the *demos* and were used against the oligarchical council of Areopagus, although this was a development that Solon had not anticipated if we remember the reasoning in 9.2 (Bertelli 2018, 77–8). The use of judicial persecution is also relevant to the ascension of Pericles as champion of the *demos*: that was how he eliminated the opposition of Cimon, the leader of the elite (26.1.5–6). Pericles made the constitution even more democratic and stripped more powers from the council of the Areopagus (27.1). So, the on-going dissension (*stasis*) between the people and the elite was far from being settled and the Athenian constitution kept changing in favor of the *demos* through the instruments given to them by Solon.

And then a disaster happened, triggering the Eighth *metabole*, which was destined to be a paradigmatic event in Athenian history (29.2–10):

<sup>27</sup> The accusation of *medism* against Themistocles is probably unrelated to Ephialtes' attacks against the council of Areopagus. For Rhodes (2017, 268) that passage could be also part of a later addition.

But when, after the disaster which occurred in Sicily, the Spartan's position became stronger on account of their alliance with the King, they were compelled to interfere with the democracy and establish the constitution centered on the Four Hundred. The speech introducing the decree (ψηφίσματος) was made by Melobius, the formal proposal was made by Pythodoros of Anaphlystus, and the many were persuaded (συμπεισθέντων) to accept it particularly because they thought that the King would be more likely to fight on their side if they based the constitution on a few men.

The chain of events leading to the *coup* of the Four Hundred is very complex,<sup>28</sup> and the work focuses only on its constitutional aspects, which led to a more favorable account of the oligarchs that was “perhaps not intended” according to Rhodes (2017, 282). In this account the democracy was toppled by decree and by persuading the *demos* that a more oligarchic constitution would be beneficial in an alliance with the Persians, which would be decisive in the war against Sparta. In doing so, the work omits much of the conspirators' violent methods, involving executions without trial and the presence of hidden daggers when they were dissolving the previous council, as eloquently narrated by Thucydides (8.65–70). In some sense, the *Athenaion Politeia* omitted the very existence of a conspiracy, while Thucydides narrates the atmosphere of intimidation and terror in which the events took place, and the conspirators' attempted deceit of the masses by presenting oligarchy as another form of democracy. On the contrary, the *Athenaion Politeia* details only the decrees, the name of the proponents, the ratifications and even the days on which the constitution was implemented (29.2–3, 32.1); it also preserves democratic utterances in the decree, such as “anybody else who wished could make proposals”, and references in the same passage that “Clisthenes' constitution was not so populist but much like that of Solon” (29.3.1<sup>29</sup>).

This level of detail is often ascribed to one of the sources used by the *Athenaion Politeia*, but it could be related to the different scope or to a dispute with Thucydides.<sup>30</sup> *Politics* (1304b) adheres to Thucydides' version and characterises this *metabole* as deceit and violence, although it is rather an omission than a divergence (Rhodes 2017, 4; Bertelli 2018, 82–3). This should not be problematic given that the School of Aristotle clearly had other sources of information that were all considered. However, in some passages about the Four Hundred the work followed Thucydides' text almost word for word;<sup>31</sup> for example, both say that a century passed between the expulsion of the tyrants and the Four Hun-

<sup>28</sup> For further and recent discussion, see Canfora (2011, 235–300), Bearzot (2013, ch. 2), David (2014, 11–38), D'Ajello (2017, 164–86) and Sebastiani (2018a, 71–94; 2018b, 490–515).

<sup>29</sup> See Loddo (2018, 180–81).

<sup>30</sup> There are other differences between them, for example, that concerning the so-called tyrannicide of Hipparchus (*Athenaion Politeia* 15.4–5, 18.4 vs. Thucydides 6.53–9).

<sup>31</sup> Some minor variations could be errors made in the copying process: the *Athenaion Politeia* omits Phrynichus among the leaders of the Four Hundred; Rhodes (2017, 301–2) suggests this is due to a copyist.

dred *coup*, as well as both offering a similar list of its leaders (*Athenaion Politeia* 32.2, 33.1–2 and Thucydides 8.68.4, 96.2–97.1). Omissions, then, are not without reason. Both works had different aims and contexts, and likely some biases,<sup>32</sup> but the *Athenaion Politeia*'s focus on constitutional history is perhaps the main reason why it arranged the events in the way it did. The omission of the violent and deceitful methods involved in the *coup* could relate to the fact that the work did not acknowledge the Four Hundred as an oligarchical tyranny, as no other ancient source seemed to view them as such. Besides some possible bias (especially towards Theramenes, whose role is relevant in the following *metabolai* and praised by the author<sup>33</sup>), the work has no constitutional reason to deny that a decree placed the Four Hundred in charge, just as a later decree overthrew them. Tyrannies, on the other hand, are forcibly implemented, ruled, and overthrown by violence. That was the case of the Thirty, an oligarchical tyranny that the *demos* voted for out of fear and which went on to persecute and kill many citizens (including Theramenes).

There are many aspects (and omissions) within the narrative concerning the short-lived oligarchy of the Four Hundred that I will not discuss here. However, the work emphasises one aspect that relates to Solon's legacy: (29.4.3–9):

Then they suspended the *graphai paranomon*, the *eisangeliai* and the *proskleseis*, so that the Athenians who wanted could deliberate about what was laid before them; if anybody on account of this imposed a penalty or made a *prosklesis* or brought a man before a lawcourt (δικαστήριον), he should be liable to *endeixis* and *apagoge* before the generals, and the generals should hand him over to the Eleven for the death penalty.

The *graphai paranomon*, the *eisangeliai* and the *proskleseis* are legal procedures that are extremely relevant to democratic Athens,<sup>34</sup> but Thucydides mentions only the *graphai paranomon* (8.67.2). In terms of constitutional history, the passage remembers how Ephialtes and Pericles stripped power from the council of Areopagus using legal persecution, meaning that the Four Hundred, as an oligarchical council, needed to neutralise these democratic instruments of power. The presence of the *eisangelia* could be related to Solon as this law was (probably wrongly) ascribed to him in 8.4. And I remark again: Solon was the first champion of the *demos* who gave them right to appeal in the lawcourts (δικαστήριον)

<sup>32</sup> I do not agree with David (2014, 27) that “Thucydides is interested in the historical realities of the revolution, whereas the [*Athenaion Politeia*] echoes its propaganda”.

<sup>33</sup> A pamphlet related to Theramenes is assumed to be one of the *Athenaion Politeia*'s sources, see Rhodes (2017, 12–3) *cf.* Harding (1974, 101–11). For further discussion on Theramenes' negative and positive portrayals in different sources, see Bearzot (1997; 2012, 293–308), Sebastiani and Leão (2020, 35–66), and the contribution of Sebastiani and Sano, *infra*, p. 73.

<sup>34</sup> See Hansen (1999, 205–18) for how these legal procedures had a primary role in 4<sup>th</sup> century Athenian democracy as a way of regulating (and persecuting) political leaders (and enemies).

as a way of avoiding the *stasis* to evolve to a violent tyranny supported by the people or the elite as a result.

The next change occurs again after a military disaster (33.1.4–10):

When the Athenians had been defeated in the battle near Eretria [...] they were dejected at this disaster to a greater extent than at what had gone before [...] and they overthrew the Four Hundred and entrusted their affairs to the Five Thousand based on hoplite qualification, decreeing (*ψηφισάμενοι*) that no office should attract a stipend (*μισθοφόρον*).

Although described in an extremely brief passage, especially in comparison with the previous one, this Ninth constitutional change presents a similar chain of events to the previous *metabole*: after a military defeat, a decree changed the constitution (on the other hand, after the victory at Salamis, the council of the Areopagus rose to power without a decree; see above). However, they avoided the mistake (in the *Athenaion Politeia*'s view, of course) that had previously weakened the democracy, that is, the *misthophoria* that granted power to even the poorest among the masses. The work also notes the role played by Aristocrates and Theramenes' defection from the Four Hundred and praises their constitution (33.2). This is mainly based on Thucydides (8.95–97), except the praise of Theramenes. The omissions of some events could be due to the constitutional scope and arrangement of *metabolai*.

One of the omissions from this period is the fact that the conspirators of the Four Hundred (not the defectors, of course) were legally persecuted, not necessarily for abolishing democracy (as they allegedly had the support of the *demos* and did so by decree), but for the treason of negotiating suspicious peace treaties with Sparta when they oversaw the city's affairs.<sup>35</sup> This included the peculiar case made against Phrynichus's corpse: as he was murdered in the *agora* before the restoration of democracy, his corpse was accused of treason, condemned, and the killers were honoured (Thucydides 8.92). Another omission was Antiphon's trial, whose self-defense was praised by Thucydides (8.68). The *Athenaion Politeia*, then, omits these trials against the leaders of Four Hundred, but later states that the Thirty excluded from the régime anyone who acted *against* the Four Hundred, using this as justification to eliminate Theramenes (37.1), who defected from them. With this in mind, the only death referenced by the work in relation to the Four Hundred *coup* did not result from participating in it, but from betraying it.

The Tenth *metabole* of the Thirty and the Ten, though not established by seizing power as Pisistratus did (14.1), was a tyranny (41.2). It began as an oligarchy that was voted for by the *demos*, but they only did so because were terrified of the Spartan Lysander, who supported the oligarchs (34.3.10–2). While

<sup>35</sup> See further discussion in Canfora (2011, 277–307) and Bearzot (1997, 2013, ch.2–4). For these persecutions we can rely on many sources beyond Thucydides and the *Athenaion Politeia*, particularly those of the 4th century orators Lysias and Lycurgus.

the *Athenaion Politeia*'s omissions seem to accept the Four Hundred as a legitimate oligarchy, created and overthrown by decrees, there are no omissions relating to the Thirty. They "pretended that their goal was the *patrios politeia*" (προσεποιούντο διώκειν τὴν πατριὸν πολιτείαν, 35.2.1–2), and abolished the laws of Ephialtes (and Arcestratus<sup>36</sup>) "about the Areopagites", and "cancelled those laws of Solon which contained scope for disputes, and the power which resided in the jurors, claiming that they were correcting the constitution and rendering it free from dispute" (35.2.5–8<sup>37</sup>). So here again Solon's legacy is relevant: as an oligarchy the Thirty needed to neutralise the laws that had empowered the *demos*. In this way, they eliminated the "malicious prosecutors" (συκοφάντας), and the city was initially glad (35.3). So far, the Thirty have been described as a legal oligarchy, however (35.4):

When they had a stronger grip on the city they held off from none of the citizens, but killed those who were outstanding for their possessions, family and reputation, cunningly removing those they were afraid of and wishing to plunder their possessions; and after a short time had passed they had killed no fewer than one thousand five hundred.

So, abolishing the laws of Ephialtes concerning the council of Areopagus and those of Solon relating to legal persecution was fundamental in eliminating the democracy, but the decisive tyrannical aspect lies in the deceitful way it was achieved and the subsequent violence motivated by greed. Theramenes opposed the Thirty and advocated for the end of brutality, but he never ceased to be an oligarch according to the work, and it was only his opposition against the tyranny that made him a likely champion of the *demos* (36.1–2); it is more ironic still that he was killed by the Thirty for betraying the Four Hundred, the régime that he helped to create and then defected from. For this Aristotelian constitutional history, Theramenes' death is a key event in the distinction between an actual oligarchy (the Four Hundred) and a violent tyranny of oligarchs (The Thirty).

## 5. Conclusions

When Thrasybulus and the Athenian army returned to Attica and conquered Phyle and Munychia, the *demos* defected to their side; the last change listed by the *Athenaion Politeia* was complete and the supporters of the Thirty were exiled in Eleusis. Of course, there were some minor changes to Athenian laws and institutions between 403 BCE and the writing of the work in the 330s BCE (Rhodes 2017, 10–1), but it may be the case that the *Athenaion Politeia* did not identify them as *metabolai* because the *staseis* between the people and the elite never led to a tyranny or a fundamental change in Solon's legacy. Even when Athens was

<sup>36</sup> Arcestratus is not named anywhere by other sources.

<sup>37</sup> See Bearzot and Loddo (2012, 124–31).

under the rule of Demetrius of Phalerum, who was a peripatetic himself, Solon's legacy seems to still bear a lot of relevance (Leão 2018, 251, 258–60).

In sum, we can find some patterns that help us to understand how the *Athenaion Politeia* arranged the *metabolai*. The first ones appear to involve long-term Athenian institutions, like the tribes, the constitution (offices disposition), the laws and “the beginning of democracy”. Where the latter is concerned, part of Solon's legacy when trying to resolve a *stasis* between the people and the elite, the *demos* began to hold some power over the lawcourts, which later would be used to overthrow the oligarchic council of Areopagus. Along the other *staseis* that occurred over the following century, the Athenians always resorted to tyrannies or to the reformation of Solon's legacy under the ideal of *patrios politeia* by increasing or limiting the power of the *demos* over the lawcourts, the councils and so on. Of course, the *Athenaion Politeia* is full of historical inaccuracies and many omissions, including the conspiracy and violence of the Four Hundred oligarchy, but this arrangement of the *staseis* and *metabolai* was most likely an original design based on many different sources, with Solon as the leading protagonist. This arrangement had some appeal in antiquity and interested many later readers, such as those of the Ptolemaic Egypt who informally copied the text, allowing us to read it today.

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# Nature and natural phenomena in Thucydides' *The Peloponnesian War*: *physis* and *kinesis* as factors of political disturbance

Martinho Soares

Any ancient historian who has not immersed himself or herself fully in the problems of ecology can have, at best, only an extremely limited comprehension of the course of history in Classical antiquity (Sallares 1991, 4).

**Abstract:** Thucydides' attention to natural phenomena, such as the plague, volcanoes, earthquakes, eclipses and floods, is well known. These are uncontrollable events that typically cause enormous environmental, political and military disturbance, further heightening the unpredictability and destructiveness of a war that, from the outset, is characterised by Thucydides as a great movement (*kinesis megiste*). But it is not only catastrophic natural phenomena that pique the Athenian historian's interest. Nature in all its forms, as portrayed in *History of the Peloponnesian War*, serves as much more than a setting or backdrop. As we aim to demonstrate in this study, nature and natural phenomena impose themselves as active forces that are superior to man, interfering in the Peloponnesian War with significant political consequences. On the other hand, the belligerent actions of man impose themselves upon nature with grave environmental consequences that we here seek to address. Ultimately, from the role played by nature in Thucydides' work, it is possible to draw several historical and philosophical considerations regarding the connection and interaction between man and his environment in Greece during the 5th century BC.

**Keywords:** Thucydides, Environment, War, Nature, Ecocriticism.

## 1. Introduction

Several recent studies have explored natural phenomena in the work of Thucydides (Demandt 1970; Proietti 1992;<sup>1</sup> Keyser 2006; Foster 2009; Es-

<sup>1</sup> Despite our concerted efforts it was not possible to obtain direct access to the studies of Demandt and Proietti.

Martinho Soares, University of Coimbra, Portugal, martinhosoes@gmail.com, 0000-0001-8153-2014

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posito 2011; Munson 2015; Dobski 2017; Cusumano 2018). These studies have primarily focussed on natural catastrophes rather than nature as a whole or human interaction with the environment, neglecting important factors such as territory, climate, woodland, storms and ecological disasters. And, although not a work of science, Thucydides' war narrative is an extraordinary example of how political and active history (in the sense that Hannah Arendt attributes to the concept of action in *The Human Condition*) are inseparable from environmental history. This is proven by the fact that Thucydides has become an important literary source for authors who have dedicated themselves to this strand of history (Meiggs 1982; Sallares 1991; Morton 2001; Hughes 2006; Thommen 2012). The narrative and ideological dimensions of the events related by the Athenian historian are of little interest to these writers. Above all, they are concerned with historical-environmental testimony. While earlier studies tend to emphasise the narrative function (the meaning behind the text) of natural phenomena, scientific rigour, and the author's underlying subjectivity, ideology and mentality, the aim of the present study is to combine these two approaches to produce a more complete and comprehensive appraisal of the subject.<sup>2</sup> To use the words of Sallares referenced above, a solid and extensive understanding of classical historiography cannot ignore ecological analysis. Similarly, Hughes (2006, 17) states that: "History that fails to take the natural environment into account is partial and incomplete," further arguing that:

Environmental history is useful because it can add grounding and perspective to more traditional concerns of historians: war, diplomacy, politics, law, economics, technology, science, philosophy, art and literature. It is also useful because it can reveal relationships between these concerns and underlying processes of the physical and living world (Hughes 2006, 17).

Environmental history, as a relatively new scientific discipline, studies past relationships between humans and their environment. Modern science casts a new perspective on themes from the Classical era. Questions such as the influence of natural phenomena on human societies, the ecological changes brought about by human action, the effects of these changes on human history and the evolution of environmental thought are of great importance in the works of ancient authors such as Herodotus, Thucydides, Hippocrates, Xenophon and Plato among others (Hughes 2006, 18–20; 2014, 3–7).

The present study will provide a broad, although not exhaustive or systematic, analysis of human/environment interaction in the work of Thucydides. It is

<sup>2</sup> The intersection of history and ecology entails a methodology based on the entanglement of a storied ecology with an ecologized history. The former is linked both to the interrelationship between culture and nature, made visible in human meaning-making systems of environmental imagination, and to a history of ideas and its ecological implications. The latter takes its main impetus from ecological models, and increasingly from scientific analysis, in order to gain a clearer picture of the overall material frameworks of human–animal interactions in antiquity and how they evolved (see Schliephake 2020).

structured in two parts. In the first section we offer a general overview of the key textual occurrences of natural elements in the work of the Athenian historian, highlighting several narrative and ideological connections. In the second part we undertake a more detailed and concrete analysis of two significant episodes that are representative of the interaction between man and the natural world: the Battle of Pylos and the expedition to Sicily. This naturally leads to a series of final conclusions drawn from the hermeneutic process.

## 2. Natural elements in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*

### 2.1 Seasons of the year

Nature, in the work of Thucydides, is both theme and narrative instrument, serving as chronological marker. Indeed, at the beginning we are informed that the war narrative will be told according to summers and winters (*kata theros kai keimona* II.1), and so the author proceeds. The twenty-seven years of war recorded by Thucydides unfold along these significant seasonal axes. In V.20 and V.26, this unusual method of dating is justified, as it satisfies a need for precision (*akribeia*) that is apparent from the prologue (I.22). More conventional forms of dating, such as the name of the ruling archon or other figures of social and political prominence, are excluded due to lack of rigour (*ou gar akribes estin* V. 20).<sup>3</sup> In this way, books I to IV conclude with a refrain (reminiscent of Homeric poetry) that encompasses the end of a narrative block, the end of a year and the end of a season, always winter:<sup>4</sup> “So ended this winter, and with it the third year of this war chronicled by Thucydides” (II.103).<sup>5</sup> The following book begins with another chronological formula that is repeated on numerous occasions throughout the work: “In the following summer” (III.1). Thucydides is, at times, even more specific, referencing spring as the beginning of summer. For example, the catalyst of the conflict, the invasion of Plataea by the Thebans, takes place “at the beginning of spring” (*eri archomeno* II.2). Moreover, during the expedition to Sicily, it is common to find expressions such as “at the beginning of spring in the following summer” (VI.8 e VI.94) or simply “at the very beginning of the following spring” (VII.19). As well as chronological markers, natural cycles are used to separate narratives, signalling the end of a military

<sup>3</sup> Smart (1986) states that Thucydides' chronological model, resting on the poles of summer/winter instead of traditional political calendars, serves to accentuate *physis* in detriment of *nomos*. For more on the origin of Thucydides' dating method see Pritchett and Van Der Waerden 1961 and Hornblower 1991, 235–36, who suggest it stems from an ancient form of military record. See also Dewald, 2005, 193.

<sup>4</sup> The end of Book V does not coincide with the end of a year of war. This instead corresponds to the beginning of the following book, which retains the formula used up to this point: “So the winter ended, and with it the sixteenth year of this war chronicled by Thucydides” (VI.7). For more on this subject see Esposito, 2011, 6–8.

<sup>5</sup> All English quotations from Thucydides are taken from Hammond's 2009 edition. The Greek text has as its reference Romilly's *Les Belles Lettres* edition (2009).

intervention in one given setting and the beginning of another elsewhere. As demonstrated by Dewald (2007), Thucydides uses seasonal markers to displace action and change topic. Furthermore, the historian achieves a greater level of precision by referring to natural events, typically related to agriculture, in addition to the changing of seasons. The invasion of Attica, under the command of Archidamus, happened “in summer when the corn was ripe” (II.19). The seventh year of war began in summer, “about the time when the corn was coming into ear” (IV.1). A new narrative unit is subsequently introduced in the following way: “all about the same time in the spring, before the corn was ripe” (IV.2).<sup>6</sup> The rhythm of war follows the rhythm of agricultural labour: more intense in the spring/summer and halted in the winter. On the other hand, it is not uncommon to find agricultural labour conditioning military action. In III.15, the Spartans’ allies delay battle due to the harvest of crops and in IV.84 an important military event is impeded by the grape harvest.

## 2.2 Natural resources and relationship with the earth. The plague

This information is not irrelevant. As highlighted by Rosado Fernandes in the introduction to the Portuguese edition, “agricultural production is considered in its true political and economic sense, whether to end abundance or promote poverty and hunger” (2010, 16). Hughes (2014, 152) corroborates this: “Armies typically targeted cities, but war also exacted toll from agriculture, as campaigns devastated the countryside, slaughtered farmers and their families, and requisitioned or destroyed crops and buildings. Armed conflict had direct effects on the environment”. E Thommen (2012, 2) is of the same opinion: “The most conspicuous interventions of the Greeks in nature were first of all forest clearing and mining, as well as the common wartime tactic of devastating the enemy’s farmland to rob him of his sustenance, at least temporarily”.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, we see this happen repeatedly throughout the entire conflict. Expressions such as “they ravaged the territory” (II. 19), “ravage the land” (II.47), “devastated the territory” (II.56), “ravage the fields” (III.78) or similar are commonplace. Generally, the first action carried out by the invading army entails the destruction of territory. This is the case during the first invasion of Attica by Archidamus’ troops, and from then on until the end of the war, whenever an army seeks to cause damage to its opponent. Even before any military conflict, the destruction of land functions as the first line of attack, a blow with extremely adverse economic, psychological and environmental effects (Kagan 2003, 75, 106, 299). The impact would be even more harmful if, instead of a quick raid, the in-

<sup>6</sup> Fernandes (2010, 16) understands these chronological formulae and their poetic contours as an element of contrast and attraction: “connecting the reader to the calm cycle of Nature is one way in which the historian draws them in, as this pastoral tranquillity counters violent scenes of warfare, with the unforeseen obstacles of battle that are to be described within this same calm setting marking times of clamour and bloodshed”.

<sup>7</sup> See too Hanson 1998, 4, 55ff and again Thommen 2012, 36ff.

vading army decided to install themselves permanently on the territory to prevent peasants from farming. This is what happens in Athens with its army away in Sicily. (VII.27).

Although Thucydides does not specify, it is possible to deduce what this destruction of land entails. The verbs used by the writer in most cases are *temno* (τέμνω) and *deioo* (δηϊόω), normally followed by the direct object *ten gen* (τὴν γῆν, 'the land'), *ten choron* (τὴν χώραν, 'the country') or *tous agrous* (τοὺς ἀγρούς, 'the fields'). The verb *deioo* means "to kill with a spear", "to wound", but also "to devastate" and "to destroy", including with fire. The verb *temno* translates as "to cut down". Thucydides uses it in II.75 and II.98 to refer to the felling of trees. In this way, according to Bailly's dictionary, the verb also means to devastate or destroy through the cutting down of trees or harvests. Be it through felling or fire or any other destructive measure, the first aim of such an act is to rob the enemy of food and drive them to poverty, bringing about a quicker surrender and defeat. On the other hand, an act of this nature also has a tremendous psychological effect. We have already seen the reluctance with which men abandon their fields to go to battle. To see their harvests in flames or trampled would necessarily provoke enormous dismay and anguish among those who laboured and suffered so to cultivate them, and upon which they depend for sustenance.

From this perspective, the first invasion of Attica is particularly illustrative. It was at great cost that the Athenian peasants obeyed Pericles' orders to abandon their land and *demoi* to take refuge in the walls of Athens (II.13). Thucydides says that "this upheaval was hard for them, as most had always been accustomed to living in the country" (II.14). He then dedicates a lengthy passage of text to explain the (mythical) reasons for this pain (II.15–6). The Athenians, more than any other people, had a long tradition of country life which gave them freedom and independence. Until the reign of Theseus each city was independent, with its own council and ruler. The synoecism initiated by the legendary hero sought to put an end to these autonomous governments and concentrate all political bodies in one united Athens (Hornblower 1991, 259–69). However, Theseus' centralism was not enough to stop Athenian families from continuing to reside in the countryside. Thucydides goes on to state that they did not readily accept this change ordered by Pericles (*ou radios tas metanastaseis epoionto*) because they had only just finished rebuilding their houses after the Greco-Persian Wars, and because it would mean abandoning the temples and institutions of their ancestors which gave them rights and citizenship (II.16). Archidamus is aware of the psychological and emotional impact of the destruction of fields, and so employs this strategy in Acharnae as a means of coaxing the Athenians to battle. The peasants contained themselves at great cost. When they saw their land destroyed, they were furious, and wanted to abandon the city walls to defend what was theirs. Stopped from doing so by Pericles, they turned against the statesman, blaming him for their suffering (II.21).

The following summer, at the beginning of the second year of conflict, the Athenians will suffer the consequences of this government within the over-

populated space of the city.<sup>8</sup> The impressive and much-discussed episode of the plague (II.47–54, III.87) is shocking not only in the vivid nature (*enargeia*) of its descriptions, but in its similarity to modern times. The pandemic has a catastrophic effect on the Athenians from physical, moral and political standpoints, causing a true social *metabole* (II.53) which can be understood metaphorically as a biopolitical disease (Munson 2015, 52; Fialho 2018). It is estimated that it reached 50% of Athenians, killing between 25 and 30% of the population (Hughes 2014, 203). The author himself classifies the plague as “one of the most destructive causes of widespread death” (I.23). He claims that the causes and origin of this terrible calamity, which fell so suddenly upon Athens, were unknown. Some even accused the Peloponnesians of poisoning the wells. (II.48). The historian highlights the excessive concentration of people in Athens and their unsanitary living conditions (“forced to live in huts which at that time of year were stifling”) as one of the key reasons behind rapid spread and high mortality rate of the disease (II. 52). Within this causal nexus of disease and habitat it is possible to discern the influence of the Hippocratic treatise *Airs, Waters, Places*, which establishes a relationship between human health and environmental conditions.<sup>9</sup> Living conditions and political constitutions were understood as being determined by the location, soil composition, climate, atmospheric conditions, water quality, sun exposure and cosmic influences. (Thommen 2012, 29–30; Dueck 2012, 84–90; Hughes 2014, 62; Kennedy 2016). Interestingly, the fact that the Athenians were isolated within the city walls meant that the disease did not spread the Spartans, sparing them from the epidemic.

One thing we can take from this episode is that the displacement of the peasants provokes a traumatic fracture in Athenians’ historical and mythological relationship with the earth, as a space of labour, memory, identity and autochthony.<sup>10</sup> It is not for nothing that Thucydides opens the work with an archaeological preface in which he develops a theory of the environment’s influence on history, reminiscent of the environmental determinism of Hippocrates, his con-

<sup>8</sup> The arrival of the peasants would have doubled the population of Athens (Hughes 2014, 201).

<sup>9</sup> The possible influence of Hippocrates on Thucydides has been the subject of great controversy. This is almost always centred on the repercussions of the method of analysis (*autopsia*), and the Hippocratic medical language in the physical descriptions of the plague rather than environmental determinism. Studies that make a case for the direct influence of the Hippocratic school include Cochrane 1929 and Page 1953; some of the first to argue the contrary include Parry 1969 and Grant 1974. This complex and controversial issue remains unresolved but has found a middle ground in the work of Craik 2001 and Thomas 2006. For a bibliographic overview of the subject see Hornblower 1991, 316–18. For the *status quaestionis*, see Foster 2009, 1–2.

<sup>10</sup> On Thucydides’ use of the autochthony *topos* see Pelling 2009. On the concept of autochthony in ancient Greece see Leão 2012 and Clements 2016. On the subject of nomadism and displacement (*metanastaseis*) in Ancient Greece see Kellogg 2016 and Kaplan 2016. In this study, Kaplan argues that the Greeks’ relationship with land and the environment is dependent on a process of diachronic evolution and adaptation rather than primordial autochthony. The case of Athens is an exception. See Clements 2016, 316ff.

temporary. It was the poor soil that defended Attica from war and depopulation (I.2). Other regions of ancient Greece were constant targets of attack due to their rich soils. This generated instability and forced their inhabitants into continual displacement, meaning that they did not cultivate permanent crops or accumulate any wealth. In Attica, immobility gave rise to stability, peace and wealth as it became a refuge for those who had fled war, leading to an exponential population increase that exceeded the earth's capacity to feed its inhabitants, and consequently to a movement of colonisation. This supports the idea that the wealth of some contributes to the poverty of others and vice-versa.

The plague episode concludes with the dramatic and moving image of half-dead bodies (*emithnetes*) roaming the streets in search of water fountains (II.52). Water is, in fact, one of the natural elements that features most in the war, putting aside the obvious fact of sea water constituting the backdrop for countless battles. If salt water abounds in a territory made up of hundreds of islands, fresh water appears to be a scarce and precious commodity throughout much of Ancient Greece. Thucydides makes some reference to fountains, essential in the supply of water (II.15, IV.31). Even winter was not enough to impede combat when, following the first invasion of Sicily, the Athenians were obliged to attack the Islands of Aeolus during the cold months due to the demands of the climate, such a manoeuvre being impossible in summer due to lack of water. (III.88). Furthermore, the Athenian occupation of Pylos became difficult due to lack of drinking water. With only one broken water fountain in that place, soldiers had to resort to digging in the sand to satisfy their thirst (IV.26). In the deserted island of Sphacteria, there was only brackish water. However, the historian informs us that when the Athenians attacked it, most troops were concentrated "in the middle and most level part of the Island, round the source of water" (IV.31). Excess of water can also prove problematic and lead to conflict between neighbouring peoples (5.65). In Sicily, a system of underground pipes supplying drinking water to the city was destroyed by the Athenians, wanting to cause damage to the enemy (VI.100). This act does, however, come back to haunt the Athenians, as it they who suffer from water shortages during their disastrous expedition to Sicily (VII.4, 13, 78, 87).

### 2.3 Climate

In a general sense, we can say that climate is the factor with the greatest impact on the actions of war, thwarting expectations and changing the course of events in the tradition of the tragic *metabole*, of which Aristotle speaks in *Poetics* (1451a, 12–5).<sup>11</sup> Among the many examples that we could cite, we have selected some that are particularly representative. From the very beginning of the conflict, we are made aware that the Thebans were twice affected by bad

<sup>11</sup> Important information about climate and geography in the Peloponnesian War can be found in Meigs 1961.

weather and that this contributed greatly to the disastrous outcome of their failed attack on Plataea. When surrounded and trying to flee Plataea, rain, darkness and mud acted against them (II.4). Those who came to their rescue were delayed by overnight rain that strengthened the current of the river Asopus, hampering their efforts to cross (II.5).

Later, the palisade used by the Spartans against Plataea becomes a notable case of skill in attack and defence as materials taken from nature are used to create it. It is at once a significant example of Spartan *hybris* (pride) and *ate* (blindness) that they expect to easily defeat the Plataeans by means of nature. The excavation of the ground for the palisade (like an open wound in the ground, an offense against nature) and the enormous effort expended in doing so, transforming soldiers into bearers of earth, is revealed to be insufficient, as observed by Foster (2009, 373): “the Spartans have overestimated their power over nature and are paying the penalty”. He further states that: “the Spartans’ attempts to be as powerful as nature are costing them enormous struggles and will fail at the end” (375). Nature’s lack of cooperation with the Spartans is particularly evident in their desperate attempt to set fire to Plataea. Intense rain and thunderstorms put out the great fire lit by the Peloponnesians, who had been relying on the help of a wind that never came, saving the city from imminent destruction (II.77).<sup>12</sup>

This episode is also memorable due to the comparison drawn by Thucydides, referencing a rare atmospheric phenomenon. When describing the magnitude of the fire lit by the besiegers, the historian compares it to the fire that blazes spontaneously in the mountains when one tree brushes against another. (II.77). Moreover, we are made aware that the vulnerability of the Greek territory to natural fires goes back many years. Indeed, according to the writer, these can be sparked by the simple friction of wood.<sup>13</sup> The climate, the forest and the terrain generate favourable conditions for these sorts of natural disasters, which to this day are frequently recorded in the Mediterranean region.

Finally, the epic flight of the Plataeans narrated from III.20 to III.24 is remarkable due to the daring and intelligence of the escapees, not least in their ability to use weather conditions in their favour. The same conditions that impeded the Thebans’ escape, a rainy winter’s night (*nykta cheimerion hydati*), wind (*anemo*) and darkness (*aselenon* ‘without moonlight’), and disappoint the Spar-

<sup>12</sup> This episode is noteworthy in its proximity pre-Socratic philosophical culture (Foster 2009). For example, the story of the palisade entails the four famous natural elements that Empedocles identifies as the constituent parts of the world (earth, air, fire and water), which are at times in conflict with one another.

<sup>13</sup> “Thucydides is the first known to us to have offered this explanation, but he was followed by others, including the architect Vitruvius, down to Quintus of Smyrna in the late Roman Empire, and it is very doubtful whether the authority of Thucydides alone was responsible for the wide acceptance of this explanation. I have tried persistently to save Thucydides’ reputation, but have not yet found any forester or timber merchant who is prepared to believe that a forest fire could possibly arise in this way. Presumably, it is an early inference from the fact that the normal way of producing fire in Greece was by rubbing two pieces of selected woods together” (Meiggs 1982, 375).

tans, are those that make the flight possible (III.22). The account is thorough and impressive, full of *enargeia*. The luck and success of the Plataeans depended on their intelligent (*gnome*) response to the challenges of *physis*.<sup>14</sup> The gusts of wind drowned out the sound as they scaled the city walls on ladders, which were positioned away from each other to avoid the clash of weapons; the darkness hid them from the guards, and they climbed in areas they knew to be un-surveilled due to lack of rain cover. They were lightly armed and shod only their left feet to avoid slipping in the mud. The Plataeans even knew that the dark and stormy conditions (*skoteines nyktos kai cheimonos* III.22) would interfere with the guards' fire signals. The escape would not be complete without the successful overcoming of one more natural obstacle, leaving us without doubt as to the Athenian historian's knowledge of and attention to climatic concerns:

So even the last of the Plataeans managed to cross the ditch in time, though it was a difficult struggle. Ice had formed there, not firm enough to walk on, but more the watery slush which comes from an east or north wind, and during the night the snow driven by this wind had raised the water level in the ditch so they could hardly keep their heads above it as they crossed. Their escape was in fact largely due to the violence of the storm (III.23).

The success of the Plataeans, according to Thucydides, is largely due to the storm. This was, however, part of the plan. The storm did not take them by surprise. Rather, human intelligence made the best of it. Interestingly yet tragically, the Plataeans did not fall victim of *physis*, which was in fact their ally, but later to the merciless *nomos* of the Spartans (III.68).

In the majority of cases in Thucydides' work, storms break out unexpectedly, ruining forecasts and sabotaging plans, harming some and helping others. They change the course of ships and attack strategies (III.69, IV.6, VI.104, VIII.99); favour those who make use of them (IV.103); cause significant material damage (IV.75, VIII.34); cause suffering and panic among soldiers (VI.70, VI.74); and demoralise troops (VII.79).

Storms rarely appear without wind, the latter being one of the natural elements mentioned most frequently by the author. Wind features from the outset, alongside the first image of death resulting from the terrible naval battle between Corinth and Corcyra "the Corcyraens for their part salvaged the wrecks of their ships and took up their own dead, all that were carried towards them by the current and a wind which got up in the night and scattered everything far and wide" (I.54). The Athenians' experience at sea and Phormio's astuteness in foreseeing and harnessing the wind on the Corinthian fleet explains the success of the small Athenian armada against their enemy in the battle of Patras, which, while su-

<sup>14</sup> "The appropriateness or inappropriateness of human responses to the weather signifies to Thucydides' audience whether the humans responding are acting intelligently or not. This semiosis can (among other things) characterize the individuals and groups acting precisely as acting: cities' and individuals'" (Esposito 2011, 17).

perior in number, was lacking in experience (II.84).<sup>15</sup> Following this, however, we are told that the same commander, by virtue of “winds and seas too rough”, is detained in Crete after attacking and destroying Cydonian territory (II.85). After their first defeat, caused, as we have seen, by inexperience (*apeiria*) and by the wind itself (*pneuma*), Cnemus and Brasidas, Peloponnesian strategists, try to energise their traumatised troops for another naval battle (II.87). Aware of the wind’s adverse effect on previous combat, the strategists attribute their failure to chance (*tyche*) on several occasions.<sup>16</sup> As such, they implore their soldiers to conquer their fear (*fobos*) of chance (*tyche*) with courage (*andreia*) and the lessons they have learnt thus far (*ha emathen*). They themselves will change their strategy of attack to avoid succumbing to the *tyche* of the wind and other external conditions, seeking to bring combat to favourable terrain. When this is achieved, the battle is won. When forced out of their comfort zone they lose much of what they had previously won. The wind’s association with *tyche* is even more explicit in III.49: “By good fortune there was no contrary wind”. In this way, the wind saved the lives of the inhabitants of Mytilene. In most cases, the wind diverts boats from their courses, overturns military strategies, or, alongside storms, destroys ships (II.25, III.69, IV.3, VI.104, VIII.31, VIII.34, VIII.99).<sup>17</sup>

## 2.4 Night

The night also features as a destabilising factor. The memorable scene of the nocturnal battle is particularly revealing in this respect:

The Athenians were now thrown into such helpless confusion that it has not been easy to establish from either side a detailed account of what exactly happened. Events are clearer in daytime operations, but even then the participants have no overall picture, but only a vague knowledge of what was going on in their own particular area. In a night battle—and this was the only one fought between large armies in the whole of the war—how could anyone be certain of anything? There was a bright moon, and as happens in moonlight they could see each other as human shapes from some distance, but without any confident recognition of friend or foe (VII.44).

Other equally compelling examples could be of note here. We have already seen how the darkness and lack of moonlight negatively contributed the de-

<sup>15</sup> Esposito (2011, 9) elaborates an interesting series of reflections on the Athenians’ relationship with the sea, linking their maritime *techne* with the skill (*gnome*) of overcoming the unpredictability (*tyche*) of the wind, concluding that: “Athens has made the sea useful, therefore they have done so by overcoming the *tyche* that is the wind”. Morton (2001, 91–7) undertakes a detailed analysis of this passage, discussing Thucydides’ knowledge of Phormio’s expertise in dealing with the wind.

<sup>16</sup> On the role of *tyche* in Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War*, see Edmunds 1975, 143–204 and Hornblower 1996, 149–50.

<sup>17</sup> On the impact of the wind on other battles, see Meigs 1961.

feat of the Thebans in Plataea, and positively to the Plataeans' flight when they found themselves surrounded by the Peloponnesians. It can be surmised that, as a rule, night-time combat is to be avoided (I.51). The lack of light makes military action extremely dangerous, generating great confusion and disorientation among soldiers. On the other hand, night-time is conducive to escape, stealth and surprise attacks (II.93, III.30, IV.103, 134, V.115, etc.).

## 2.5 Ecological damage: human life, animals, trees

Finally, we would like to draw attention to the environmental and ecological costs of a war of this scale. Costs that must be acknowledged and that primarily centre on the huge number of human lives lost in what was a long-lasting and lethal conflict. Men, women and children are the first victims of this bloody civil war; through combat, execution, imprisonment and slavery, disease, starvation, thirst and natural disasters. The numbers are devastating and are indicative of atrocious violence (Hanson 2005). Thucydides does not hold back on descriptions of the barbarity and bloodshed, at the hands of Thrace (7.29), for example, or the Corcyraens against their own people (III. 81, 84).

Animals, horses, pack mules and other domestic creatures also figure among the victims of this war (7.27). At the time of the first invasion of Attica, the Athenian peasants were forced to send their animals to Euboea and other nearby islands (II.14). Although Thucydides rarely gives indications of the exact number of horses killed (VII.51), it is not difficult to imagine the enormous scale of equine sacrifice during this conflict judging by how often they were used and their strategic importance in combat (VI.21, VI.98). Animals, furthermore, confirm the exceptional nature of the Athenian plague. Quadrupeds and birds that typically ingest human flesh refused to touch the plague-infested cadavers. The historian further states that "the dogs, being domestic animals, allowed more immediate observation of this consequence" (II.50).

Perhaps the most visible and extreme environmental impact of this war concerns deforestation. Data to this effect is not explicitly recorded, and it may not have been possible to do so, but based on Thucydides' narrative it is not difficult to estimate that thousands and thousands of trees were felled over the course of the conflict. It is understood that entire forests disappeared and that many Grecian settlements were left without trees.<sup>18</sup> Even though other natural resources such as stone, iron and mortar were used by warring factions, wood is by far the raw material mentioned most frequently by the historian. Its status as a precious commodity is attested to by the Athenian peasants when they abandon their homes: "The Athenians were persuaded by what they heard and began to bring in from the country their children, their wives, and all their domestic goods,

<sup>18</sup> We cannot establish a direct causal relationship because the motive there is the construction of buildings, but it is worth remembering here Plato's famous comment in the *Critias* (111a-c) on the consequences of deforestation in Mount Parnes in Attica.

even removing the woodwork from their houses” (II.14).<sup>19</sup> It was the raw material for hundreds of boats (triremes, ships and smaller vessels for the transport of people, animals and goods), weaponry, war machines, as well as countless fortresses, shelters and palisades that were erected during each battle.<sup>20</sup> It was thanks to wood that Athens became a naval power. In this respect, the occupation of Amphipolis was significant for the Athenians because, according to the historian, “this city was a valuable source both of timber for shipbuilding and of financial revenue” (IV.108). The occupation of Sicily was also undertaken with a view to obtain wood for shipbuilding (VI.90). Thucydides goes on to inform us of fires started accidentally, and deliberately as part of battle strategies, and their impact on cities and forests (III.98, IV.29–30, VI.102, VII.80). Furthermore, as we have already mentioned, each new invasion brought with it more destruction of land, which in most cases consisted of setting fire to crops and fields, presumably destroying huge areas of orchards and woodland (VI.94).<sup>21</sup>

Beyond fire, the felling of trees was also used as a form of violence against the enemy. In the historical digression in which Thucydides recounts the fifty years prior to the Peloponnesian War, the author tells of the Lacedaemonians’ invasion of Megara, stating that they cut down trees upon entering the territory (*dendrotomesantes* I.108). The necessity of wood in warfare is more than evident in the episode of the Plataeans’ palisade. (II.75–7). As this is just one of many barricades referenced by Thucydides, we can appreciate that vast quantities of this natural resource were used. The palisade was “built with the trees they had cut down” surrounding the city (II:75). Then, “they cut timber from Cithaeron to shore the ramp on either side”. The ramp too was made of wood. On their part, the Plataeans responded with another palisade. The Peloponnesians attacked the Plataean palisade with battering rams made of wood. To defend themselves, the Plataeans used “huge beams attached at each end by long iron chains”. Finally, with piles of firewood, the invaders set fire to the wall in an attempt to burn down the city (II.77).

The Sicilian campaign was costly on all levels, in human, financial and natural resources. Aside from the countless palisades built with wood that was collected or sent for from elsewhere (VI.66, 74, 75, 97, 99–103, etc.), there was great investment in the construction of triremes and other boats (VI.22, VI.44, VI.90, VIII.4). The shortage of wood even led to the felling of trees in sacred spaces, such as when the Syracusan Hermocrates ordered olive trees from the sanctuary to be cut down in order to erect a wall against his enemies. (VI.99). The Athenians, confronted with the same lack of wood, destroyed the Syracusan palisade and made use of the stakes for their own purposes. (VI.100). This allows us to

<sup>19</sup> “Of the woodwork the door was the most valuable part and the most vulnerable” (Meiggs 1982, 208).

<sup>20</sup> On the importance of wood in the Ancient Mediterranean and the Peloponnesian War see Meiggs 1982, 117ff.; Thommen 2012, 37–41; Hughes 2014, 155–58.

<sup>21</sup> Thommen (2012, 39) believes that these acts of destruction had a greater effect on fruit trees than forests.

conclude that this war, like any other, represented an attack against nature and the environment as a whole. (Hughes 2014, 150–62).

## 2.6 Natural phenomena

As we mentioned at the beginning of this study, the recurrent descriptions of natural disasters in the work of Thucydides have attracted much scholarly attention. The aforementioned plague is by far the most studied phenomenon. However, extraordinary events such as eclipses, volcanoes, earthquakes and floods occupy a significant position in Thucydides' work: earthquakes appear most frequently (I.128, I.101, II.8, II.27, III.54, III.87, III.89, IV.52, IV.56, V.45, V.50, VI.95, VIII.6, VIII. 41);<sup>22</sup> there are two solar (II.28, 4.52) and one lunar (VII.50) eclipse; two volcanoes erupt (III.88, III.116); and a tsunami hits (III.89). The recurrence of these natural phenomena in the work seems, in the first instance, to have a narrative and ideological function. Indeed, soon after enumerating the suffering caused by the war, the historian makes the following declaration:

The phenomena in the old stories, more often told than attested, now became credible fact: earthquakes, which affected large areas with particular intensity; eclipses of the sun, occurring more frequently than in previous memory; major droughts in some parts, followed by famine; and, one of the most destructive causes of widespread death, the infectious plague. All these had their impact along with this war (I.23).

In semantic articulation alongside the human and political *pathemata* mentioned prior, these declarations attest to the author's conviction that this war was, without doubt, the most violent to take place on Greek soil. In such a way that even nature itself behaved in ways that had never been witnessed before; what used to be deemed rare and verging on the impossible became commonplace. We might say, then, that the recurrence of natural phenomena in the work serves to emphasise, on one hand, the agitating (*kinesis megiste* I.1) and extraordinary character of the conflict, the greatest and most noteworthy of its kind (*megan te kai axiologotaton* I.1, cf. I.21, 23; II.8). On the other hand, it places the political and natural domains side by side on an equal footing, both subject to a driving force (a combination of *kinesis* and *hesyche*) that shakes the world and brings about change (*metabolai*).

The second wave of the plague in Athens, along with a succession of natural disasters—"this too was the time of the many earthquakes—in Athens, Euboea, and Boeotia, and specially at Orchomenus in Boeotia" (III.87)—, hit in the wake of the chaotic and violent spread of civil dissention (*stasis*) throughout Greek lands, resulting in unthinkable turmoil and fratricide, as well as

<sup>22</sup> It is known that the Mediterranean region is particularly prone to natural phenomena such as earthquakes and volcanoes as it lies on the convergence of several tectonic plates (Hughes 2014, 196–97).

the Athenians' first attack on Sicily (III.82–3).<sup>23</sup> The convergence of politics and nature here suggests that the narrator wants to amplify the destructive effect of the *staseis* that had broken out across Ancient Greece and heighten the Athenian disaster in Sicily, as if the repercussions of human unrest extended to the environment or vice-versa.<sup>24</sup> Mount Etna erupted following yet more Athenian involvement in civil conflict in the island (III.116), corroborating the idea that these catastrophic events are narratively linked to other disasters (Keyser 2006, 326):

At the very beginning of this next spring there was an eruption of liquid fire from Aetna, as had happened before. It destroyed some part of the land of the people of Catana, who lived under Mount Aetna, the largest mountain in Sicily. It is said that the last eruption was fifty years earlier, and that there have been three eruptions in all since the Greeks first settled in Sicily (III.116).<sup>25</sup>

The historical marker *post quam* used by the historian when recording the eruptions and the establishment of the Greek colonies in Sicily appears to support this idea. With the eruption of the volcano Thucydides indirectly foresees another sort of catastrophe, which will lead Athens to a devastating historical defeat. This narrative process seems to gesture towards a rational and providentialist concept of nature, premises that adhere to animist philosophies and the belief that intervening gods and goddesses (Foster 2006) manipulate nature to praise or punish humanity, an idea that is rejected by philosophical currents such as Epicurism yet maintained by Christianity until the dawn of the modern age.

Whatever belief or superstition is at play, metaphysics should form the basis of human reaction to these phenomena that, typically, interfere with the course

<sup>23</sup> As noted by Keyser (2009, 326) the plague, earthquakes and *stasis* are “dramatically syn-tonised”, just like the earlier earthquake alongside the Peloponnesian revolt (I.101). Hornblower (1991, 495) comments on this passage stating that “[it] seems, disturbingly, to suggest that there was some causal connection between the plague and the earthquakes.” The same causal relationship is inferred in IV.52 between the solar eclipse and an earth tremor that happened in the same month.

<sup>24</sup> Keyser (2009, 325): “Thucydides seems to say that Nature combined with mankind to produce extraordinary suffering”. Furley (2006, 423) does not argue for this *sympatheia* of nature with human suffering, which would explain Thucydides' initial remarks that natural catastrophes became more frequent and intense during the period of the war. An interpretation of this kind would lead us to an animist and holistic view of the world, that of Ancient Hellenist historiography and Senecan tragedy, but perhaps not that of the Athenian historian. In fact, the description of the plague, due to its scientific nature devoid of any theodicy, suggests otherwise. See too Bakker 2017, 240 and Cusumano 2018, 255–58.

<sup>25</sup> Pindar records the eruption fifty years prior (*Pyth.* 1.21–8), attested to by other witnesses (*Marmor Parium*: FGtH239A52) that place it between 479/478 BC. In Thucydides' history, the fact that the eruption occurred fifty years before the sixth year of war, corresponding to III.116, places it closer to 476/475 BC. His omission of the eruption of 396/5 BC (Diod. Sic. 14.59.3) does not prove that he had died or stopped work by this time, although it is probable that this is the case (Hammond 2009, 540).

of events, provoking great *metabolai* in plans for war.<sup>26</sup> Following the earthquakes, the Athenians (V.45) and Corinthians (V.50) postpone assemblies, but the Spartans are those who are most affected, withdrawing their troops from combat (III.89, VI.95, VIII.6) and reducing their contingent (VIII.6). When they were about to invade Attica, earth tremors forced them to retreat and abort the operation:

In the following summer the Peloponnesians and their allies, under the command of Agis, the son of Archidamus and king of Sparta, went as far as the Isthmus with the intention of invading Attica, but the occurrence of several earthquakes turned them back and no invasion took place (III.89).

It is legitimate to ask if this reaction was provoked by physical or religious fear. It is Thucydides, in contrast to Diodorus Siculus (XII.59.1), who points towards religious superstition, which may be inferred despite not featuring explicitly in the motive for retreat. Indeed, on several occasions, the historian evokes the supernatural dimension that common sense attributed to these extraordinary events. The Spartans understood the great earthquake of 465/4 BC (I.101, I.128) as a divine punishment, giving rise to the Great Helot Revolt. Furthermore, when describing the circumstances that lead to the Peloponnesian War, the historian refers to earth tremors alongside oracles, such as signs (*semenai*) of what was to come (II.8). Nicias, for example, when met with a lunar eclipse, delays the withdrawal of his troops from Sicily, exacerbating an already difficult situation (VII.50). Thucydides himself is ambiguous in terms of these beliefs. If, on one hand, he appears to condemn Nicias for his superstitious and pernicious attitude, on the other he confers a supernatural quality to these events, questioning the image of the rational and scientific historian.<sup>27</sup>

As has already been demonstrated (Keyser 2006) in the context of eclipses and earthquakes, the author does not demonstrate scientific rigour or offer natu-

<sup>26</sup> Dobski (2017, 34) argues that setting nature, with its fixed and intelligible laws, against a cosmos governed by vigilante gods and goddesses creates a false dichotomy given that “Thucydides understands events like earthquakes, plagues, volcanoes, famines, and droughts to be the product neither of vengeful gods nor of a nature independent of human making, but of the interplay between what some, following Thucydides’ initial characterization of the war as a ‘*megiste kinesis*’ (1.1), have called the ‘forces of motion’ and the ‘forces of rest’”. On religion and deities in Thucydides’ *History* see Jordan 1986; Munson 2015; Furley 2006. The latter recalls that the superstitious interpretation of natural phenomena was very common in Antiquity and that it was based on a belief in a nature that was manipulated by invisible gods in response to human behaviour: “the gods ‘communicate’ their favor or disfavor to humans through the language of natural signs” (422). There is, however, nothing in the text to indicate that this is Thucydides’ position (see Cusumano 2018, 272–76).

<sup>27</sup> The question of rationality and scientific spirit in Thucydides is one of the most discussed across Thucydidean scholarship. A balance of the key theses and bibliographic references can be found in Pires, 2006 and Keyser 2006, 323–25. Keyser opposes the idea of a rational, impartial and scientific Thucydides due to traces of irrationality, exaggeration and lack of precision in his descriptions of natural phenomena. Cf. Edmunds 1975, 169–72.

ral explanations for such events, limiting himself to suggest causal relationships between the former and the latter (IV.52).<sup>28</sup> This is apparent in descriptions of other natural phenomena, such as the causal relationship established between earthquakes and gigantic waves, now known by the Japanese name *tsunami*:

At around this time when the earthquakes were prevalent, the sea at Orobiae in Euboea retreated from what was then the coastline and returned in a tidal wave which hit one part of the town, and as a result of flooding combined with subsidence what was once land is now sea: the tidal wave killed the people who could not escape to higher ground in time. There was a similar inundation at Atalante, the island off Opuntian Locris, which carried away part of the Athenian fort and smashed one of the two ships laid up there. At Peparethus there was also a withdrawal of the sea, but not in this case followed by a surge: and an earthquake demolished part of the wall, the town hall, and a few other buildings. I believe the cause of this phenomenon to be that of the sea retires at the point where the seismic shock is strongest, and is then suddenly flung back with all the greater violence, creating the inundation. I do not think that tidal waves could occur without earthquake.

Moving away from the religious or mythological explanations that, as a rule, attributed the origin of these phenomena to the god Poseidon, Thucydides seeks to establish natural causes for the *epiklusis* (flood), revealing a more rational and scientific perspective beyond that of the attentive and curious observer of nature, in accordance with Ionian natural philosophy. In this regard, Thucydides shows himself to be a man of his time, operating in line with new horizons of thought, working on the boundary between the rational and irrational, the profane and the divine, the physical and the metaphysical (Furley 2006, 421–23; Janko 2020).

### 3. Interactions between man and nature: Demosthenes and Nicias' failure

Through the analysis of the episodes that follow we can extrapolate much of these environmental issues in a narrative way. In this sense, these episodes can be seen as extended case-studies of human/nature interactions.

#### 3.1 Demosthenes in Pylos<sup>29</sup>

Dobski defends a triangular relationship between politics, nature and historiography, considering the chapters dedicated to Demosthenes' military campaign in Aetolia, during the sixth year of war, as the best practical demonstration of this. The author also shares the opinion that Thucydides uses natural catastrophes to reflect and amplify the events of war and vice-versa.

<sup>28</sup> Hornblower (1996, 211): "Th. juxtaposes, but does not connect, the two phenomena, but the juxtaposition tempts his readers to make a connection".

<sup>29</sup> Hornblower 1996, 149–50 presents a bibliographic selection of the key studies on the Pylos campaign.

Thucydides's account of Demosthenes's failure recalls his account of that retreating and advancing flood which killed all those incapable of making it to higher ground (3.89). Demosthenes' successes at Naupactus, Olpae and Idomene, on the other hand, not only mirror the destructive power of nature, they amplify it. By framing Demosthenes's campaign in Aetolia in terms of natural disasters, Thucydides invites his reader to consider the possibility that military failure and success hinges on one's capacity to account for and imitate the powerful motions of nature (Dobski, 2017, 41).

Dobski here suggests that natural disasters are used by Thucydides as a backdrop for war, heightening its catastrophic impact, or, owing to their random and uncontrollable nature, as the antithesis of a planned and ordered battle strategy, the effects of which are magnified:

Demosthenes's defeat and success in Aetolia and earthquakes and tsunamis (or even volcanic activity, 3.89) suggests that nature provides a useful guide or template for the creation and expansion of military power insofar as the destructive motions at work in one can also be used to great effect in the other (Dobski 2017, 42).

Without questioning Dobski's interpretation, we would like to highlight other natural considerations whose implications are evident in Demosthenes' campaign in Aetolia, namely the pedagogical dimension that operates alongside nature. After a disastrous defeat at the hands of the apparently defenceless Aetolian army (III.97–8), who used the inclines of hills in their favour during a gruelling succession of attacks and retaliations against the Athenians, Demosthenes learns lessons that he will put into practice in future battles. The key factors contributing to their defeat (a degree of arrogance, unfamiliarity with the enemy and their terrain, lack of preparation and patience to wait for backup) will determine the strategies adopted in Acarnania, where these failures will not only be corrected, but transformed into successful battle tactics. A good example of this is the occupation of favourable locations such as high wooded hills chosen for their gradient and thick vegetation (III.107–8, 110). These characteristics allow for surprise attacks, forcing the enemy into a disorganised and aimless retreat down slopes and gorges as if they had been the target of a natural disaster. (III.112). In Aetolia, the Athenians had been subject to this during their disorderly retreat in alien territory, covered with thick forest and paths that led nowhere. Many soldiers died trapped in ravines or surrounded by fire (III.98).

The resounding and historic victory of Demosthenes and the Athenians in Pylos and the island of Sphacteria in 425 BC is the strongest proof of the power and impact of nature, and of adapting to natural conditions, in military conflict. It also foregrounds the importance of learning from the past (Hunter, 1982, 291–93). Having learnt in Aetolia that haste is not advisable, Demosthenes urges his comrades Eurymedon and Sophocles to dock in Pylos instead of hurriedly continuing to Corcyra (IV.3). Thucydides informs us that "they objected, but as it happened a storm arose which forced the ships into Pylos" (IV.3). Held up in Pylos by a storm, Demosthenes implores them to take advantage of the abundance of natural resources in the region, wood and stone, to fortify the area, as well the fact that it was protected by nature (*physei karteron*) and unoccupied, allowing them to better defend them-

selves (IV.3). Demosthenes, who had not performed an official role since his return from Acarnania and who now sailed with a fleet of forty ships around the Peloponnese, is an experienced leader who learned from his mistakes in past battles and is well-positioned to give good advice to others, helping them to avoid the same errors setbacks that he himself suffered. His comrades, however, disregard this advice, ignoring the strategic importance of the location. Demosthenes, on the other hand, reads the space differently, seeing in it the geographical and geomorphological potential to launch a military operation base. Having convinced neither the strategists nor the soldiers, it is instead bad weather that keeps them there: “[...] was forced to remain inactive while the weather continued unfit for sailing” (IV.4). To overcome the tedium, the soldiers set about constructing the fortifications that Demosthenes had recommended. Thucydides describes the construction process in detail: the collection and laying of stones, the transport and application of mortar, all carried out with nature’s bounty (IV.4). The study of Pylos’ landscape and the privileged position of the island of Sphacteria (IV.8), the fortification and distribution of soldiers according to the terrain, and the ability to foresee the movement and limitations of enemy attacks are determining factors in the unexpected victory of the Athenian infantry against the Spartan naval fleet. (IV.12). The plan set in motion by Demosthenes depends not only on good knowledge of the natural conditions of the land and surrounding sea, but of the psychology and habits of the enemy. When narrating this episode, Thucydides takes care to mention the influences of natural factors on the conflict on several occasions. Such is the case in IV.8, when he describes the island of Sphacteria, “being uninhabited, [...] wooded and pathless”, as well as the landscape of Aigio in Aetolia. On one hand, the island “was no store of food”. As an area lacking in resources, Demosthenes equips his soldiers with wicker shields that been used before by other troops: “poor-quality shields, most of them made of wicker” (IV.9). Demosthenes and his soldiers find themselves in a difficult position before enemy forces, recalling that of the Aetolians when first attacked by Demosthenes’ army. They wore light armour in a land comprising scattered, unwallled villages (III.94). However, just as the Aetolians knew how to harness their geographical surroundings, taking refuge in the hills and attacking the Athenians from above, obliging the latter to expend great physical force, Demosthenes’ Athenian army will use the characteristics of the landscape to compensate for their inferiority in number. When addressing his troops, the Athenian strategist frames precisely the inaccessibility of the region and its difficult terrain as advantages:

This is a hard place for a landing—a potential advantage for us, I think, which will favour our side if we stand firm. [...] And we should not be too fearful of their numbers. They may be a large force, but the difficulty of coming in to land will mean that only a few of them can fight at any one time. [...] So I think their difficulties counterbalance our lack of numbers (IV.9).<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> On the terrain and supposed lack of rigour in the topographical description of Pylos see Sears 2011. The same author provides in note 3 a bibliographic overview dealing with the question of topography in Thucydides, namely during the Pylos campaign.

Demosthenes' predictions come to pass, and, against all expectations, the Athenian general leads his troops to a monumental victory over the Spartans, leaving the Lacedaemonians temporarily at the mercy of the Athenians. The Spartans are obliged to plead for a peace treaty with their enemies, with the aim of rescuing their men who were left trapped on the island of Sphacteria. The victors refuse, influenced by the demagogue Cleon. However, the Athenians who laid siege to the region begin to despair at the impasse in negotiations as they suffer from the lack of water supply. Thucydides tells us: "there were no springs other than one inadequate source on the acropolis of Pylos, and most had to scabble in the shingle on the shore to find some sort of drinkable water" (IV.26). The Spartans, although surrounded, survive on what they can find on the island, "a store of grain and other foodstuffs" (IV.39) according to Thucydides, and obtain the help of the Helots, who send them external supplies. The historian makes a point of informing us that this smuggling would not have been possible without the wind. Indeed,

the Helots sailed by night to the seaward side of the island, watching particularly for a wind to carry them in. It was easier for them to evade the triremes' guard when the wind was blowing from the sea, as a full blockade was impossible under those conditions, and they themselves would sail in quite recklessly (IV.26).

The lack of resources in the region (IV.27), particularly the lack of water and food, make Demosthenes' soldiers feel as if they were the besieged rather than the besiegers (IV.29). This situation leads the Athenians to send a fleet in search of help from their countrymen. Cleon is placed in charge of the dangerous expedition as he was largely responsible for the failure to negotiate a peace treaty. Cleon feigns willing acceptance of the mission and chooses Demosthenes as his travel companion, who is prepared to risk anything to leave the island, unable to withstand the hardships that came with the lack of resources (IV.29). Once again, the Athenian general will spot another opportunity created by a natural phenomenon. A fire broke out on the island. The space was covered in dense woodland, with no roads due to its being unoccupied, and Demosthenes was shocked to find that these circumstances favoured the enemy, who could easily camouflage themselves among the trees and launch a surprise attack. The historian then states: "if he were compelled to close quarters in a wooded area, he thought that the smaller force with a knowledge of the ground would have the advantage over the larger force without that knowledge" (IV.29). Thucydides then comments that this rationale is the result of what he had learnt from the disaster in Aetolia, where he encountered a similar situation (IV.31). Demosthenes clearly perceived the influence that the environmental conditions created by the forest could have on battle and seeks to avoid the mistakes of the past. In this way, the fire that before acted against him generates the perfect conditions for attack. The fire broke out accidentally, lit by a Spartan guard, but the wind spread it quickly. With a large part of the forest consumed by the flames, the Spartan army loses its camouflage and hiding place. Demosthenes now sees that the Lacedaemonians were many in number, when he had previously thought they were few. He also saw that it was possible to disembark on

the island and organise the attack. Entering the island in the early morning, he launched a surprise attack on the soldiers as they slept and, having immediately occupied the highest points of the island, quickly surrounded the enemy army who were largely concentrated in the central plane next to the spring supplying water. Once again, Demosthenes takes advantage of the difficult and steep terrain, until then uninhabited, and of his experience in Aetolia, resorting to the same military tactic of advancing and retreating lightly armoured troops as the Aetolians had done, thus defeating the Spartans who, were unable to flee easily in their heavy armour (IV.32–3). Another unexpected natural event will contribute to the Athenian victory. With the forest burnt down, they could clearly see that the number of enemy troops was inferior to their own. In light of this, they give out a cry of attack and run in the direction of the enemy. As the ground was covered in ash, a cloud of dust rises that prevents the Spartans from seeing the enemy and their arrows, rocks and darts (IV.34). The battle did not end there because what was left of the Spartans took refuge in the fort at the northern-most tip of the island. The characteristics of the location prevented the Athenians from surrounding the fort, forcing them to attack it head on. The battle drags on and becomes difficult for both sides due to thirst and the sun (IV.35). Only when they discover an un surveilled location in the dangerous chasms to the rear of the fort, ideal for attack, do the invaders deliver the final blow to the Spartans, who, attacked from both sides, find themselves in a situation identical to that of their compatriots who courageously fought to the death against the Persian army in Thermopylae. Upon seeing the desperate situation of their enemies, however, Demosthenes and Cleon decide to halt the battle to avoid a massacre and take live prisoners to Athens. The Spartans surrender and an armistice is signed (IV.37–8).

### 3.2 Nicias' failure in Sicily<sup>31</sup>

After having imposed the law of *physis* upon *nomos* against the Melians (V.84–116), it is the Athenians who will experience the unstoppable law of *physis* in their disastrous expedition to Sicily. The narration of the military campaign begins with the island's history (VI.1–5). The first fact delivered by Thucydides to accentuate the thoughtlessness and unbridled ambition of the Athenians is their lack of knowledge of the inhabitants and territory that they intended to invade. Later, we will see how this contributed the defeat of the invading army.

The clairvoyant and experienced Nicias is chosen against his will as one of the commanders of the expedition, as he thought that the Athenians were ill-advised to help their allies the Egestaeans against the Selinuntines in Sicily. He attempts to dissuade his countrymen from advancing to a faraway and hostile land with a series of convincing arguments, in which he recalls the advantages of

<sup>31</sup> On the figure of Nicias see Sebastiani (2018), particularly chapter II. On the expedition to Sicily see Greenwood 2017.

the Barbarians and the need for preparations such as troops and supplies, which would incur enormous costs and require extensive planning. He knows that if they are held up by bad weather (VI.22) they will need many provisions to survive. And he knows that they will need luck (*tyche*), but unwilling to depend on this alone, he only accepts to take on the mission if it is meticulously planned (VI.28). Having listed many difficulties, he believes he has dissuaded the Assembly, but he in fact had the opposite effect. The Athenians are even more determined, thinking only of the potential profits of the risky expedition. Defied, Nicias departs for Sicily with Alcibiades and Lamachus. Initially, the superiority and organisation of the Athenian forces prevails over the inexperience and inefficiency of the Syracusans. The arrival of Spartan reinforcements commanded by Gylippus, however puts an end to the Athenian advantage, and marks the start of disaster for Nicias and his army. The beginning of the deterioration in the Ionian crews' wellbeing is attributed by Thucydides to natural causes: "water was scarce, and no supply close at hand. And when the sailors went out for firewood too they suffered casualties from the Syracusan cavalry who dominated the area" (VII.4). In a letter sent to Athens, Nicias mentions the same causes (VII.13). The fight for control of the territory, consisting of the construction of an enormous wall to surround and block off Syracuse, is compromised with the help of Gylippus, who arrives in time to attack the Athenian fortification and help the Syracusans finish their own wall before the enemy traps them. This places Nicias in a position similar to that of Demosthenes in Pylos, which Thucydides describes in the same terms: "the result is that we, who are supposed to be the besiegers, are rather the besieged ourselves" (VII.11).

Demosthenes finally arrives at Sicily bringing with him considerable reinforcements from Athens, leaving the enemy apprehensive and alarmed (VII.42). The Athenian general decides to attack immediately so as not to make the same mistake as Nicias, who had remained inactive while waiting for winter to pass. The Syracusans had an advantage during that time as they were able to send for Gylippus from the Peloponnese. Demosthenes tries to attack the highest part of the city, Epipolae, a strategic point of the enemy's defence. After several attempts, Demosthenes' troops are defeated in the night. Thucydides describes what happened in detail as well as the fatal damage caused by lack of natural light to an army that did not know the terrain (VII.44). The moon shone bright but was insufficient to discern forms. Enormous confusion and disorientation are generated among the Athenian army, with members of the same army killing themselves and jumping off the cliffs. This was the only battle to take place at night over the course of the war and it had terrible consequences for the Ionians.

After the failed attack of Epipolae, the Athenians lose morale and begin to fall prey to physical illness. Thucydides identifies two causes for the outbreak: on one hand, men were more prone to disease at that time of year; on the other, the marshy and unhealthy climate of their location had a role to play. The historian adds dependency to these factors (VII.47). The Athenians' bad luck will get worse firstly due to Nicias' stubbornness, who insists on maintaining the wall around the Syracusans, and later, with the lunar eclipse, at the precise moment they were about

to sail away and abandon the wall due to tiredness and physical weakness. Nicias, “who was rather too much inclined to divination and the like” (VII.50) opts again for inactivity, ordering the army to wait “thrice nine days” in that unhealthy place.

On the sea, where the Athenians considered themselves unbeatable, Eurymedon’s fleet will meet a harsh defeat, causing immense confusion and sorrow among the troops (VII.55). Hunger forces them into a decisive, last-ditch attempt at battle. After a gruelling fight, the defeated Athenians are forced to dock, and Thucydides compares their emotions with those they inflicted on the Lacedaemonians in Pylos when they trapped them on the island of Sphacteria (VII.71). The Athenians too felt trapped, without hope of salvation. Obligated to make their retreat by land, the entire Athenian military contingent sets off through enemy land, with little food and water because, according to the historian “there was no ready supply of water for several miles along their intended route” (VII.78). A change in the weather makes things worse for the Athenians, at a time when they were trying to make an escape corridor through the enemy army. Thunder and rain, normal at the end of autumn, alarm and demoralise Nicias’ soldiers further, who interpret these atmospheric signs as bad omens (VII.79).<sup>32</sup> With the aid of several fires lit, Nicias and Demosthenes try to guide their troops through the night to a safe place. With their instinct of following the water’s course to the interior of the island of Sicily, they reach the river Cacyparis. As this is guarded by enemy troops they cross at a ford and continue to the river Erineus. The Syracusans pursue them and surround Demosthenes’ army in a field of olive trees, attacking them from all sides (VII.81). Demosthenes and his army surrender. Nicias, after a failed attempt at a truce, is obliged to flee with his troops. They search for the banks of the river, seeking water and protection. Some men hurry, however, and are taken by the current. Others thirstily drink from the river in a disorderly fashion, becoming easy targets for the Syracusans, who descend on them and slaughter them in the water. Thucydides’ description is vivid: “the water quickly turned foul, blood mingling with mud, but the Athenians drank on, and most fought among themselves to reach it” (VII.84). What is left of the Athenian army is imprisoned. Demosthenes and Nicias are executed. The former to exact revenge for what had happened in Pylos and Sphacteria. The latter, despite having won the sympathy of the Lacedaemonians is killed due to the threat posed by his wealth and power, which he could use to negotiate his release. For Nicias, Thucydides writes the famous eulogy: “off all the Greeks in my time he was the least deserving of this depth of misfortune, since he conducted his whole life as a man of principle” (VII.86).

#### 4. Final considerations

The cases of Demosthenes and Nicias function as inverted mirrors in terms of their interactions with nature, but also in terms of the roles played each char-

<sup>32</sup> “It so happened (*etychon*) that the battle was accompanied by a storm of thunder and rain, as is not unusual at this time of year, with autumn coming on”.

acter. In Pylos, Demosthenes is the protagonist and Nicias is a secondary character; in Sicily, the opposite is true. In the context of relationships with the natural world, Demosthenes, in Pylos, was successful as he was knowledgeable, knowing how to harness nature and have *tyche* work in his favour. Nicias, in Sicily, had neither *tyche* on his side, nor did his poor knowledge of the combat terrain allow him to take advantage of nature. Both end up on the losing side as victims of war, disadvantaged by strategic errors but also by natural conditions, which seem to punish them in atonement for Athens' *hybris*.

Furthermore, during the episode of the palisade in Plataea, nature follows its own law and punishes the Spartans for their audacity. Those who before attacking had invoked Plataean gods and heroes to justify their actions were defeated by rain and thunder that came from above. In the tradition of Classical tragedy, the gods of that land (*epichoricos*) appear to have avenged themselves from the *hybris* and blindness of the Spartans. Given that Thucydides' religious beliefs are unknown and the conspicuous absence of deities in his work, it would be reasonable to suggest that natural forces are discreetly invested with the role that, in the Homeric epic and Greek tragedy, is reserved for the gods. The workings of nature are subtle and circumstantial, unlike a *deus ex-machina*, but they have the power to interfere with and alter the course of events, gearing them towards a particular purpose. Nature does not spare humans of responsibility for their own actions, but it affects their conduct by helping or hindering, at times in a random or accidental way akin to *tyche*, at times intentionally and deliberately like a manipulative god. The idea of nature as a manipulative force is corroborated by the cases of the Aetolians, Demosthenes and the Plataeans.<sup>33</sup> Thucydides himself employs nature, firstly as a chronological marker, and later as a narrative and ideological device, putting into practice what Hayden White (1978, 81–100) would lay bare centuries later, that historical writing is also a literary artefact. This is proven by the association between natural and human events. The escalation in military violence is accompanied by an escalation in natural violence, which manifests in the form of diverse natural disasters (Cusumano 2018). To use Bakker's (2017, 240) words: "military activity across the Greek world can no longer be seen in isolation, and it looks as if the forces of nature operate in harmony, orchestrating an ominous background against which this increase in activity unfolds". Even the episode of the tsunami, apparently straying from this logic, gestures towards an underlying explanatory model whereby "all events in the cosmos are interdependent" (Ibid.). Without stating so explicitly, Thucydides, in evoking a parallel between human suffering (*pathemata*) and natural disasters, seems to suggest an animist and holistic vision of nature, with which some authors disagree (Furley 2006, 423).

<sup>33</sup> Dobski (2017, 46), referring to the case of Demosthenes, speaks of an intelligible and ordered nature that allows itself to be known and manipulated for political and military ends.

It is not easy to determine the Thucydidean concept of nature, as the author does not write a great deal to this effect. Perhaps, however, we can deduce more in terms of mankind. Strauss (1963, 159) states that, for Thucydides, “the nature of men cannot be understood without some understanding of nature as a whole”. We believe that the opposite is also true. By examining human nature, we can arrive at an understanding of nature as a whole. In doing so, we return to the famous binary of *physis/nomos*, which is particularly meaningful in the work of Thucydides and the Sophists of his time (Nogueira 2012; Orwin 2017). In this respect we have no choice but to reference two famous passages: the historian’s commentary on the *stasis* in Corcyra, associating the inevitability of such events to human nature (*physis antropon*), capable of persisting and adapting to circumstantial changes (*metabolai*) (III.82.2); and an Athenian messenger’s dialogue with the Melians, justifying the dominion of the strong over the weak as a necessity imposed by nature (*physeos anankaias*) (V.105.2). If any inference can be drawn surrounding Thucydides’ conception of nature, it would have to be negative. The *nomos/physis* tension that runs through reflections on *stasis* such as the Melians’ dialogue reveals that nature is a compulsive force that imposes itself on convention, law and ethics, preventing mankind from being good and virtuous. Furthermore, both the *stasis* and the Melians’ dialogue show that politics imitates nature, imposing itself through force and violence. If our reasoning is correct, we are faced with a pessimistic anthropological vision, understandable in light of the tragic events of war. And if it is true that nature is presented in the work of Thucydides as an ambiguous force, it is an unbalanced ambiguity. Although it can be tilted in favour of mankind, the image that persists is that of an obstacle, highlighting humans’ deficiencies and vulnerabilities, and their anthropological condition of being dependent and inferior. On the other hand, without the author having the express intention of doing so, lacking knowledge of the modern-day ecological awareness, Thucydides makes clear the enormous negative impact of human action on the natural world. These problems are not on the same scale as they are today but are still clear acts of environmental degradation.

The text is also conditioned by a tension between movement (*kinesis*) and stillness (*hesyche*). We are told from the outset that this war represents a great movement or agitation (*kinesis... megiste* I.1.2).<sup>34</sup> Nature is in some way related to this circular fluctuation of change and stagnation. Orwin (2017, 367) even argues that “it marks the intersection of human nature with nature as such”. If this is the case, we may be led to believe that, for the Athenian historian, all movement entails change and is bad. War is movement, natural phenomena generate movement, and the displacement of the Athenian peasants has terrible consequences, just as the migration of island peoples to poorer soils leads to poverty. Athens, which is initially distinguished from neighbouring peoples in its stability, is now seen by the Corinthians as in constant movement (I.70) while Sparta represents immobility and justice, just as Nicias and Diodotus

<sup>34</sup> On the possible meanings of *kinesis*, see Munson 2015.

represent peace and Cleon and Alcibiades embody war. *Stasis* alone configures an extreme image of *kinesis*, an eruption of terrible social and political consequences. The opposite would be stability, justice, wealth and peace. But this semiotic correspondence does not always ring true. Strauss (1963, 159–60) lists a series of examples to the contrary. At times, movement leads to wealth and progress (I.15.1–2; XXVIII.2–3), while stillness impedes the acquisition of knowledge (I.71.3). In Thucydides, then, the ideal would be a well-considered and balanced combination of movement and stillness in nature's image. Everything, including politics, seems to participate in this natural dynamic, in which the positive presupposes the negative and vice-versa, just as movement presupposes or even produces stillness; as is typical of nature, whose constant movement is permanent and stable.

Moreover, Greek historiography, in the words of Hannah Arendt, is related to the (im)mobility and permanence of nature. The philosopher, in her reading of the prefaces of Herodotus and Thucydides, establishes this relationship upon a basis of grandiosity and immortality. In recalling the singular circumstances and events that “interrupt the circular movement of daily life in the same sense that the rectilinear βίος of the mortals interrupts the circular movement of biological life”, the historian elevates these grandiose and extraordinary occurrences to the immortal and circular condition of nature (Arendt 1961, 43). In this way, “through history men almost became the equals of nature, and only those events, deeds, or words that rose by themselves to the ever-present challenge of natural universe were what we call historical” (Arendt 1961, 47–8).

Speculation aside, one idea that the author clearly conveys is that the environment is not separated from human life, nor is it not merely a setting for human history. This speaks to the founding principle of environmental history that it is necessary to overcome the scientific division between, on the one hand, historical, sociological and economic study, taking human society as their point of departure, and the study of plants and animals on the other. The *History of the Peloponnesian War* is a good example of how human culture is inseparable from nature (Schliephake 2020). Through our analysis, we hope to clearly establish that the environment directly affects the actions of war, but that the actions of war exert a much greater negative impact on the environment (Hughes 2006, 150–62). It is not an exaggeration to state that this war, at the time it transpired, was comparable to a natural disaster. We establish two forms of action upon nature. One without impact, such as that of Phormio, the Plataeans and Demosthenes, who make intelligent use of natural conditions without altering them. The other is destructive and disproportionate, such as that of the Spartans in Plataea, and the Syracusans and the Athenians in Sicily. This war, like all others that followed it, is marked by the enormous ecological damage it caused. This is attested to by the excessive use of wood, the use of fire against settlements and forests, the destruction of fields and crops, the death of animals; not to mention the most obvious: the huge number of human lives lost.

Finally, as highlighted by Funke and Haake (2006) and Pothou (2009), Thucydides does not make theoretical observations regarding the importance

of geography and topography, nor does he engage in substantial digressions to this effect, as did his predecessor Herodotus. However, in order to maintain narrative cohesion, these factors are integrated into the chronicle in such a measure that allows the reader to follow the unfolding of events. Campaigns such as that of Demosthenes in Aetolia and Pylos are rich in descriptions of the landscape and topography since these elements condition combat and its outcomes. And if it is true that Thucydides is economical with information relating to geography and landscape,<sup>35</sup> largely omitting relevant data such as distances, areas and geographical location, it is no less true that there is in his work a sense of place that values and illuminates man's relationship with the environment as a space of interaction and experience, or, rather, with the landscape. The Athenian historian is considered "one of the first authors to link geographical elements with various human phenomena" (Dueck 2012, 37). Consider, for example, the observations made regarding the economic prosperity of Corinth, justified by its location on the Isthmus (I.13); about the dangers of navigating through the Strait of Messina (IV.24); or concerning the military tactics used during the Pylos campaign (IV.3). Dueck (2012, 84–90) understands this relationship between the environment/geography and human life in light of the theories of climatic and ecological determinism or Greco-Roman ethnography that date back to the Hippocratic school. Thucydides' wartime landscape makes us aware of the profound relationship between people and the spaces they inhabit, with these acting as anthropological conditions rather than a mere backdrop to human activities (James 2017, 13–5). Space and time, as demonstrated by Thucydides' work, are not neutral entities. On the contrary, they are dominant forces that condition human action. Man can do nothing against them, and everything with them.

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<sup>35</sup> The description of the course of the river Achelous in II.102 is an exceptional case.

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# Democracy under the *kothornos*: Thucydides and Xenophon on Theramenes<sup>1</sup>

Lucia Sano, Breno Battistin Sebastiani

**Abstract:** We analyze the political actions of Theramenes as described by Thucydides (during the coup of 411 BCE) and Xenophon (under the Thirty, 404–3 BCE) to map the features that converged to make him a paradigmatic character in the ancient Greek political imaginary. Xenophon, at least, may have been an eyewitness to the facts reported and both historians have conditioned Theramenes' portrayal by later authors. We highlight the traits of Theramenes that fostered his identification as either the quintessence of the turncoat or as a role-model for moderate politics. Our goal is also to discuss the implications of his political stances for the configuration of Athenian democracy in the last quarter of the 5th century and how this may still help us consider our own democratic system and its flaws.

**Keywords:** Thucydides, Xenophon, Theramenes, Athens.

Theramenes is a most controversial character in Athenian history, being, according to Thucydides, both one of the main leaders of the oligarchic coup of 411 BCE, as well as an opponent who acted to end it. He is also an important agent in Xenophon's *Hellenika*, mainly due to his involvement in the trial of the generals of the Battle of Arginusae in 406 and his being part of the Thirty Tyrants, who he ultimately rebelled against, leading to his execution in 404. All these shifts during the final years of the Peloponnesian War and the violent regime of the Thirty led to interpretations of Theramenes' political trajectory, produced only a few years after his death, that are profoundly conflicting: in the *Constitution of the Athenians*, we find a very sympathetic portrayal of him, but the opposite can be seen in two speeches made by Lysias (12 and 13), and even the *Hellenika* initially portrays him as a villain before going on to depict him as an example of virtue.

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Lucia Sano, University of Sao Paulo, Brazil, luciano@gmail.com, 0000-0003-3928-4277  
Breno Battistin Sebastiani, University of Sao Paulo, Brazil, sebastiani@usp.br, 0000-0002-3777-6086

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Political figures who adapt their conduct according to circumstances arising from crisis are not a phenomenon restricted to Antiquity, but have been seen throughout history and are familiar to the citizens of most modern-day countries. Examining the contexts and political motivations behind such shifts in the case of Theramenes may provide us with a better judgment on some contemporary democratic practices and shed light on the broader political spectrum, ranging from open opportunism to necessary reparations. The past few years have witnessed a general rise in feelings of distrust in democracy, which once again brought into perspective the dangers of political polarization and of tyranny as its possible aftermath, a worrying scenario in which Theramenes once found his way to political power.

Thucydides' first mention of Theramenes is among the leaders of the movement that would become known as the Athenian Coup of 411, a particularly critical moment. For the first time in the city's reorganization on the democratic grounds advanced by Cleisthenes a century before, there was a decisive split between the popular faction and the oligarchs: "Theramenes, son of Hagnon, was the first among those who would bring down democracy (ἐν τοῖς ξυγκαταλύουσι τὸν δῆμον), a man not unskilled in speaking and thinking" (8.68.4).<sup>2</sup> When narrating the final moments of the coup, the historian explicitly qualifies the occurrence as a *stasiasmos* ("sedition", 8.94.2), reinforcing the same idea when he states that "the city was in civil war" (πόλεώς τε στασιαζούσης, 8.95.2). The moment of *stasis* is also called a *metabole*, that is, a change, as Thucydides describes the movement that put an end to the coup and immediately delivered the conduct of public affairs to five thousand citizens, converting the city into a new type of government similar to an aristocracy ([ἐ]ν δὲ τῇ μεταβολῇ ταύτῃ, 8.98.1).<sup>3</sup>

The summer of 411, during which the coup took place in the city, was not, however, marked by cohesive leadership.<sup>4</sup> First, recognizing itself as the legitimate democratic unit of a city taken over by an opposing and numerically inferior faction, the Athenian army stationed in Samos revolted under the competent leadership of Thrasybulus and Thrasyllus (8.76). Then, faced with the threat

<sup>2</sup> All translations are by the authors unless otherwise stated.

<sup>3</sup> On the problem of the selection of the Five Thousand see Hurni 1991.

<sup>4</sup> The coup of 411 can be detailed in six main phases: a) anti-democratic movement in Athens and extraordinary measures that allowed the dissolution of democracy; b) negotiations with Alcibiades; c) assembly in Colonus; d) initiatives by oligarchy leaders; resistance in Samos and reconciliation with Alcibiades; e) episodes of Etioneia, the revolt in Euboia and actions of people led by Theramenes; f) fall of the oligarchy. Since this text focuses on issues other than a detailed discussion of the political, social and economic aspects of the coup, readers interested in indications of reconstructions and fundamental discussions about the episode, as well as its background and immediate developments, may refer to Leão 2001, 52-8; Raaflaub 2006; Plácido 2008; Hurni 2010; Osborne 2010, 277; Shear 2011, 19-69; Gallego 2012, 2016; Bearzot 1979, 2006, 2012a (with a sharp critique against Shear's use of exclusively Anglophone bibliography), 2012b, 2013a, 25-81; Forsdyke 2013; Tritle 2013; Tuci 2013; Teergarden 2014, 17-30; Ober 2015, 454-458; Pritchard 2015, 98-9; 2016; Wolpert 2017; Zumbunnen 2017; Paiaro 2018; Sebastiani 2018a, 2018b; Sebastiani et al, 2018.

posed by this contingent and filled with hopes of Persian aid and victory against the Lacedemonians, which had been awakened by Alcibiades' promises, some of the oligarchic leaders perceived turning against the movement that they had helped to trigger as a possible solution to the tensions brought about by the coup:

These people were now starting to gather in groups and find fault with the state of affairs. Their leaders were men who were very much part of the oligarchy and held office within it, such as Theramenes son of Hagnon, Aristocrates son of Scelias and others. They had all been taking a leading role in affairs but were now seriously afraid, they said, of Alcibiades and the army in Samos, as well as of those sending delegations to Sparta, which they feared might inflict some harm on the city through acting without majority approval. They thought they should dispense with the excessively narrow oligarchy they had, and should instead demonstrate that the Five Thousand existed in reality and not only in name, and should establish the constitution on a more equal basis. But this form of words was just their political pretence (σχῆμα πολιτικόν). Most of them were drawn through personal ambition into a mode of behavior that is sure to end up destroying any oligarchy that emerges from a democracy. Right from the first day they not only all fail to consider themselves equals, but each thinks he deserves the very first place himself. Whereas under a democracy an election is held and a person can bear the result more easily, telling himself that he was not defeated by his peers. (8.89.2–4; translation by Mynott)

In this passage one reads the first decisive change of position on the part of Theramenes. The words are difficult to interpret; on one hand, the historian suggests that he

exerted great pressure on the Four Hundred to publish the list of the Five Thousand, a fact that, coupled with the support that the hoplites gave him to establish the government of these Five Thousand, could mean that he allied with extremists in the fight against democrats, but that, in fact, he identified with a moderate constitution from the beginning. He would have moved away from the extremists when he understood the weak commitment they made to sharing the government with the Five Thousand, as it should have been agreed initially. (Leão 2001, 58; translation by the authors).

On the other hand, the way that Thucydides disqualifies his posture—“this form of words was just their political pretence (σχῆμα πολιτικόν)” —indicates a negative bias in the appreciation of Theramenes' attitude. Of those who were leading the coup, Antiphon would then suffer capital punishment (8.68.1), Peisander would take refuge in Deceleia (8.98.1) and Phrynichus would be murdered. These facts could have led Theramenes, unscathed and associated with an apparently moderate faction, to “act more boldly” (8.92.2).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Underlined excerpt of the quotation above. In Greek: οὐ τὸ † ἀπαλαξείειν τοῦ ἄγαν ἐς ὀλίγους ἐλθεῖν, ἀλλὰ τοὺς πεντακισχιλίους ἔργῳ καὶ μὴ ὀνόματι χρεῖνα ἀποδεικνύειν καὶ τὴν πολιτείαν ἰσαιτέραν καθιστάναι (8.89.2).

The political pretence unveiled by the historian indirectly associates Theramenes with Alcibiades, whose chameleonic behavior would have already been perceived by Phrynichus:

The rest of these thought the proposals viable and credible, but Phrynichus (who was still general) was totally dissatisfied with them. Alcibiades seemed to him to have no more desire for oligarchy than for democracy, as was indeed the case, and to be concerned only with finding some way of securing his own return at the invitation of his associates by destabilising (μεταστήσας) the existing order of things in the city. But their own overriding concern, he insisted, must be this—to avoid internal conflict (μη στασιάζωσιν). (8.48.4; transl. Mynott).

In Thucydides' understanding, Theramenes was one of the many opportunists who used popular opinion—the coup had been voted for, but under intimidation (8.67)—to, in association with other agents who may have been actually engaged in the cause that they defended, galvanize as much power and prestige as possible. The indirect association with Alcibiades becomes all the more ironic and critical when the historian reports that Theramenes was among those who most feared Alcibiades and the sailors.<sup>6</sup>

Xenophon's portrayal of Theramenes is much more ambiguous than Thucydides'. His character in the *Hellenika* shows how much the author leaves for his readers to judge on the facts he reports.<sup>7</sup> The representation of Theramenes' actions is undoubtedly negative, both in the episode of the trial of the generals who participated in the Battle of the Arginusae, and in the negotiation of Athens' surrender to the Spartans at the end of the Peloponnesian War. He is, however, much more positively characterized when opposing Critias in the leadership of the Thirty Tyrants. This change was often justified by a time discrepancy: there is an old hypothesis that the section of the *Hellenika* that goes until the end of the War was composed a few years afterwards but that the author would then have resumed the narrative only decades later. In this hiatus a strong restoration of the figure of Theramenes in Athens would have occurred<sup>8</sup> and resulted in his representation by Xenophon as a “moderate ideal oligarch”, a characterization more clearly seen in the *Athenian Constitution*. Besides the temporal aspect, however, Xenophon's particular mode of narrative composition—favoring an episodic structure—would allow a view of Theramenes as both the “bad guy” earlier in the narrative and the “good guy”

<sup>6</sup> For the discussion of the role of sailors as a constituent force of Athenian democracy and the critique of the old ideological view that such actors would only be the poorest citizens, whose attitudes and requisitions would tend to radicalisms with the potential to transform Athenian democracy into a mob rule, see Pritchard 2019, 83-4.

<sup>7</sup> Flower 2015, 119 notes that Xenophon's narrative style allows the reader to be active in the construction of meaning and character, by leaving them to realize what kind of people the agents involved are and to what measure their actions are appropriated. See also Sordi 1981; Bearzot 2012b.

<sup>8</sup> The so-called “Theramenes myth”; see Harding 1974; Engels 1993.

later. If, however, the episodes of the generals' trial, the surrender negotiation, and Theramenes' own trial are not read independently, but in a continuous narrative, a very problematic portrayal emerges.

Theramenes' shifts, albeit recurrent, appear less opportunist in the *Hellenika*, as his opposition of Critias' views and attitudes make him a *de facto* voice of reason. It is a common understanding that he represents, in his clash with Critias, an ideal that would have come from Xenophon himself, that of a moderate and just oligarchy, not to be confused with tyranny, and that his portrayal in this episode is completely restorative. The idea that Xenophon was a most committed oligarch, however, has been questioned in recent years, with the growing understanding that his work at various times represents democratic attitudes in a favorable way.<sup>9</sup> It is our understanding that this extradiegetic information should be mostly left aside, as it is unnecessary to the interpretation of what he reports concerning Theramenes.

Five years after the fall of the oligarchy, in 406, Theramenes was involved in another grievous situation for the city. Even though the occurrence was not qualified as *stasis* by Xenophon, the lawsuit against the generals of the Battle of Arginusae was to become a sign of profound change in the conduct of the democratic regime in Athens. Aggravated by the *demos*' wrath and suspicions caused by the fractures left open since 411, the lawsuit turned into a witch hunt against those momentarily perceived as responsible for the city's difficult situation at the end of the war. The trial was the preamble of a new coup, which again would count Theramenes among its main protagonists.<sup>10</sup>

At the end of section 6 of the first book of the *Hellenika*, Xenophon relates the main facts that led to the trial of the generals. The narrator states from the very beginning the motive that made the rescue impossible (a storm), and there is no internal focus on the generals in this passage of the narrative. The generals had decided that the trierarchs Theramenes and Thrasybulos and some taxiarchs should sail with 47 ships to rescue the damaged vessels and their men, a task that they could not fulfill due to the weather. So it was that the Athenians had won the battle but lost 25 ships with men (1.6.34). The news of the death of the castaways caused great commotion in Athens and all eight generals were deposed (1.7.1). In these circumstances, Xenophon re-

<sup>9</sup> For a positive portrayal of democracy in Xenophon, see Gray 2004; Kroeker 2009; Lee 2017. Some conjectures led some experts to argue that Xenophon's support for the oligarchic factions in Athens would have resulted in him being part of the cavalry that operated under the Thirty Tyrants. This is a hypothesis from the end of the 19th century that still has adherents; see Bevilacqua 2018, 472. For the evidence, Delebecque 1957, 61-4. The representation of cavalry under the command of the Thirty is, however, ambiguous; although the cavalry had supported the coup, there is also some suggestion that part of it would have defected to the democratic resistance (Diod. 24.33.4 and *Hell.* 2.4.25).

<sup>10</sup> On the decisive performance of the *demos* in the episode see Sano 2018. On instrumentalization for political purposes—in this case, the letter that Theramenes would have used for his own acquittal—see Burckhardt, 2000; Gazzano 2020, 59-60.

ports that only six of them returned to the city, probably already fearing the aftermath of the failed rescue mission. Subsequently, it is said that a certain Archidamos, who was a leader of the people, accused one of the generals in court, Erasinides, for his actions as general, while also claiming that he kept funds from the Hellespont that belonged to the people. These allegations resulted in Erasinides' arrest. After that, the remaining five generals were summoned to speak to the Council about the battle and the storm that would have prevented the rescue mission (1.7.3). Once the hearing ended, it was decided that the generals would be arrested and tried by the people.

Then there was an Assembly in which the generals were accused mainly by Theramenes.<sup>11</sup> Xenophon also states that there were several testimonies in favor of the generals (1.7.7) and that they were almost acquitted, information that is relevant because it shows that the *demos*' initial attitude towards the defendants was correct. The generals claimed that, in order to be able to concentrate on attacking the enemy, their trierarchs, one of whom was Theramenes himself, were in charge of the rescue. They explained that even these, however, should not be seen as responsible, since the mission was not at all possible due to the storm (1.7.5–6). The assembly ended without any concluding deliberation because it was already late in the day. The Council was then charged with determining how the trial would proceed. It is important to note here that, according to Xenophon, when Theramenes was attending the rules of democratic institutions without resorting to subterfuges, he failed in his intention to persuade the people that the generals were guilty of neglect.

It is in the interim between this first Assembly and the Council meeting that Theramenes' actions can be considered infamous:

After this came the feast of the Apatouria, in which fathers and their relatives meet together. Now Theramenes and his followers suborned many men to wear black cloaks and have their hair shorn close during the festival so that, when they went to the Assembly, it might appear that they were relatives of the men who had died; they also persuaded Kallixenos to accuse the generals in the Council (1.7.8, transl. Marincola).

From Xenophon's report one can understand that these two initiatives by Theramenes promoted change in the people's disposition towards the generals, a turning point so decisive that it led to their execution. After the Council met, its decision to comply with Kallixenos' proposal was presented in the Assembly. The proposal stated that two ballot boxes would be arranged for

<sup>11</sup> Xenophon does not say what motivates Theramenes to accuse the generals nor does he record the content of his speech. Two influential texts in the modern interpretation of the trial raised hypotheses: Grote (1861) suggested that Theramenes had contradicted the generals in relation to the actual conditions of the storm; Cloché (1919) conjectured that he might have accused them of delaying too much the decision for the rescue, to the point where it had become impossible.

the *demos* to vote for or against capital punishment for all the generals and that they should not be allowed time for defense, based on the allegation that they had already had the opportunity to speak for themselves during the previous Assembly.

At this point Euryptolemus spoke for the first time, initially claiming the motion of Kallixenos to be illegal and so “some popular ones approved, but the crowd shouted (τὸ δὲ πλῆθος ἐβόα) that it would be terrible if someone prevented the people from doing what they wanted” (1.7.12).<sup>12</sup> When one Lyciscus stood up to further instigate the audience, stating that Euryptolemus and his supporters should also be judged as the generals had, then “the mass produced a new turmoil (ἐπεθορύβησε πάλιν ὁ ὄχλος), and they were constrained to withdraw the proposal” (1.7.13). Finally, when some *prytaneis* opposed the summary vote proposed by Kallixenos, again some of the people “shouted (οἱ δὲ ἐβόων) that those who tried to stop him should also be called to court” (1.7.15).

All *prytaneis* yielded to the pressure of public opinion, with Socrates being the only one not to accept the illegality, and Euryptolemus then resumed the defense of the accused, trying to show that they were victims of a conspiracy (ἐπιβουλεύόμενοι, Xen.Hell.1.7.18). Xenophon reports his speech (1.7.16-33)—the first long one in the narrative—, which is organized around the idea of obedience to the laws. He strives to persuade the people that the generals should be judged individually, claiming that the men could be prosecuted by two other laws: the decree of Cannonus, which established that those guilty of injuring the *demos* should be executed, their property confiscated and a tenth given to the Goddess; or that they could be accused also of sacrilege and betrayal, under the penalty of having their property confiscated, being executed and prevented from having a tomb in Attica. Euryptolemos also suggests that Theramenes and Thrasybulos might have to be prosecuted as well for failing to carry out the orders of the generals. The discourse ends with the statement that it would better to reward the victorious men with garlands than to punish them with death, persuaded by evil men (1.7.33).

Finally, the *prytaneis* allowed the generals to be judged immediately and jointly (1.7.34). As is well known, the Athenians came to regret voting for capital punishment very shortly afterwards and decided to prosecute those who had at that time deceived the people (1.7.35, τὸν δῆμον ἐξηπάτησαν). Kallixenos and four other men were arrested on this charge. Having managed to escape from prison, Xenophon states that Kallixenos returned to Athens but died of hunger because he was hated by everyone.

Although the historian does not state this explicitly, such attitudes are manifestations of great collective unrest, thus constituting a moment of *stasis*; not so much because there are positions for or against the generals, but because of the potential institutional and procedural laceration that the precedent of *πράττειν*

<sup>12</sup> On the meaning and implications of the *graphe paranomon*, see Carawan 2007. Aristophanes (*Ra.* 534-541, 967-970) mocks the labile character of Theramenes in the Arginusae dossier, but without wry criticism. Rhodes 2006, 169.

ὁ ἄν βούληται ratified through the intimidating turmoil brought to the city. In such a scenario, sudden and conjectural voluntarism would take precedence over the norm. Between the lines of Xenophon's critical report, however, one can find what this would be considered in another band of the Athenian political-ideological spectrum, with all the bonuses and burdens that this implies: that is, a legitimate manifestation of the democratic debate—raised, in this case, by Theramenes' strategy of pitting public opinion against the generals. It has already been suggested that it was not Theramenes' intention to convict the generals to death, since before 406 no Athenian general had been executed in the city (Roberts 1977, 109). One may suppose that he had not foreseen such a course of action and that Kallixenos had to a large extent acted alone, which could also explain why Theramenes was not one of the men accused to deceive the people by promoting the execution. It is impossible to establish if this was the case but it is a possibility. A few years later he would again set forth a violent motion that once again grew out of his control: the rise of the Thirty Tyrants.

Theramenes played an important role after the Athenian defeat at Aegospotami in 405, which concluded the Peloponnesian War with the victory of Sparta over the fleet of Athens (*Hell.* 2.2.16). At a point when the Athenians could not even discuss the possibility of tearing down part of their walls—a man was arrested for merely proposing this and, subsequently, a decree was passed preventing new similar proposals (2.2.15)—, Theramenes suggested sending him to Lysander to find out if the Spartans simply wanted a demonstration of good faith from the Athenians with the demolition of the walls or if they intended to enslave them. He also persuaded his fellow citizens to choose him as ambassador—either because his popularity was on the rise again or, with all the casualties of the war, there was no other politician with stature enough to earn the Athenians' trust.<sup>13</sup>

He then remained with the Spartan admiral for over three months, “waiting for the moment when the Athenians would accept any proposal, since all their supplies of wheat would have been consumed” (2.2.16). Xenophon reports that, in the presence of Lysander's peace proposal formalized by Theramenes, “some opposed it, but many approved it and ended up voting to accept peace” (2.2.22). The city's *soteria* slogan was much more pressing in 404 than it was in 411, and it was systematically exploited again to undermine the foundations of popular resistance and democracy itself (Bearzot 2013a, 190 and chiefly 2013b). Theramenes' behavior, in the episode, can be seen as that of a double agent<sup>14</sup> or even of a traitor to his countrymen.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> On the episode see Bearzot 1991, 2001, 2012b.

<sup>14</sup> Such representation may, however, have the character of a topical accusation, that is, a rhetorical procedure *ad hominem* carried out whenever it was desired to accuse someone along similar lines. In the fourth century, for example, Demosthenes, Aeschines, Phocion and Demetrius Phalereus will be described in similar terms. See Leão 2010, 2018, for Phocion and Demetrius respectfully.

<sup>15</sup> The source of Aristotle and Diodorus, however, preserved a more favorable appreciation of Theramenes: Leão 2001, 68-9.

This portrayal is consistent with that of Thucydides and with that made by Xenophon in the episode of the trial of the generals: he is a man who puts his own interests first. The narrative of Xenophon on this point, however, has many gaps. In fact, a modern reader of the *Hellenika* wonders why Theramenes' involvement in the trial after the battle of Arginusae did not result in the end of his political career and why the *demos* would have chosen a suspicious figure like him to negotiate their fate with the Spartans at such a critical moment. Some have attempted to supplement this gap with other sources, mainly with Lysias's speeches (12 and 13) and the so-called "Theramenes papyrus" (Engels 1993; Loftus 2000; Bearzot 2001). Both sources indicate that Theramenes claimed he had a strategy to negotiate the best conditions with the Spartans, but that he could not reveal them to the people, allegedly because this secrecy would benefit the Athenians themselves.<sup>16</sup> Theramenes was once again undermining the democratic practices by acting against its fundamental principles and promoting confusion and misinformation among his fellow citizens (Bearzot 2013a, 46ff)—a strategy that proved to be convincing. Upon returning after the three unnecessary months spent among the Spartans, he was able to gain a "carte blanche" to negotiate the surrender of Athens with nine other ambassadors. The permission he received to "save the city", although against the will of the democratic opponents, was costly for Athens, which, on his advice, accepted all the terms of surrender presented by Sparta.

Xenophon then proceeds to report the establishment of the government of the Thirty Tyrants in 404 and its escalation of violence without failing to point out that the association with Sparta ensured their power and how they were also guided by the interest in maintaining good relations with the city.<sup>17</sup> Initially selected to carry out a reform of the constitution, the thirty men continually postponed the task and established a Council and other institutions in an arbitrary manner, beginning shortly afterwards to act as tyrants (2.3.11–3): first, they decided to execute the sycophants; then, potential political enemies, in order to be allowed "to govern as they wished" (2.3.13); and, having received a Spartan garrison that guaranteed their safety and confiscated the citizens' weapons (2.3.20), they began to condemn men for personal enmity and greed.

In this scenario, Gray (1989) analyzes how Xenophon narrates the end of the friendship between Theramenes and Critias, whom the author represents as the main actor responsible for the greedy and violent behavior of the Thirty. Theramenes' opposition started when aristocratic men well regarded by him, but also by the people, began to be executed (2.3.15). Critias justified these ac-

<sup>16</sup> According to Lysias (12.68ss), Theramenes claimed to be able to negotiate a surrender that would not involve returning hostages, the destruction of the walls or delivery of ships, but he actually would have offered the Spartans to tear down the walls of Piraeus and to dissolve the constitution. It is necessary to consider the judicial context in which this information on Theramenes is being presented, though, one in which it was interesting to portray him in the most negative way. On the episode see also Bearzot 1991.

<sup>17</sup> *Hell.* 2.3.13-14; 2.3.25; 2.3.34.

tions by stating that the maintenance of power depended on the elimination of its opponents. For Theramenes, however, they were doing “two completely contradictory things” (2.3.19) with the establishment of a government that was both violent and weaker than the ones it governed, and he advocated for an expansion of political participation not limited to the number of three thousand men, as proposed by the Thirty and accepted by the Council. He also refused to choose a foreigner at random and execute him with a view to confiscating his assets.

At this point the Thirty considered that Theramenes “was trying to prevent them from acting as they pleased” (οἱ δ’ ἐμποδῶν νομίζοντες αὐτὸν εἶναι τῷ ποιεῖν ὅ τι βούλοιντο), spreading the idea by word of mouth. This move resulted in the accusation of treason made by Critias. Xenophon then presents the reader with a speech of accusation and defense; these are the first long-recorded speeches since Euryptolemo’s in the episode of the generals’ trial. The clash presupposes, again, a context similar to that of a *stasis*: Critias defines his own place of speech stating that “we have always been openly hostile to the people” (Xen. *Hell.* 2.3.28: ἡμεῖς φανερώς ἐχθροὶ τῷ δήμῳ γεγενήμεθα) and he resumes the accusation that he had already weighed against Theramenes, that he was in charge of collecting the shipwrecked in Arginusae without fulfilling it. In addition to a delayed reckoning, Critias’ strategy is to insist on the mutable, that is, treacherous (2.3.29)<sup>18</sup> character of the adversary to disqualify his refractory attitude to the excessive violence on the part of the Thirty and to remove him from the scene, something he was able to accomplish (2.3.50–6).

As a central argument for the disqualification, Critias characterizes Theramenes as the quintessence of the turncoat, reminding him of the pejorative nickname of *kothornos* (2.3.30–1), given to him because this type of shoe would fit both right and left foot without distinction: initially being one of the leaders of the Four Hundred in 411, he would have been the first to launch the people against the oligarchs once he perceived the growing opposition. Because he was trying something similar in 404/3, he was, according to Critias, showing his *eumetabolos* character—“prone to change” (σὺ δὲ διὰ τὸ εὐμετάβολος εἶναι, Xen. *Hell.* 2.3.32)—, whose frequent *metabolai* (2.3.33) should inspire permanent caution, not trust. In trying to counter such accusations, Theramenes claims to have opposed the chiefs of the Four Hundred who wished to allow the city to be handed over to the Spartans, attacks Critias as a permanent enemy of both democracy and aristocracy and, finally, claims to have always been against the radicalization of democracy as well as the potential transformation of an oligarchy into tyranny (2.3.45–8): his choice would have always been centrality (a kind of moderate “third way”), from which he was not departing at that very moment (νῦν οὐ μεταβάλλομαι, “and now I will not change my position”, 2.3.49).<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> This single paragraph gathers three expressions alluding to the posture attributed to Theramenes: ὡς προδότῃ, προδοσία, ὃν δ’ ἂν προδιδόντα.

<sup>19</sup> As with the coup of 411 (above), also for reconstructions and recent discussions fundamental to the understanding of the historical problem regarding the Thirty Tyrants, see Leão 2001,

The narrator in the *Hellenika* does not make any judgment about it, leaving only in the character's mouth a positive self-appreciation. As already pointed out, most critics tend to see in the speech of Theramenes a thoughtful oligarch, who is represented very favorably by Xenophon. Bearzot (2013a, 143) is an exception: "one notes that Xenophon does not actually believe in this moderate image of Theramenes, as Thucydides did not: Theramenes' problem is not to achieve a moderate government, but to 'maintain the oligarchy'".<sup>20</sup> In fact, three times Critias affirms that the number of deaths ordered by the Thirty is justified by the need to eliminate opponents during the institution of a new regime; Theramenes does not disagree (2.3.37) but argues that they were executing men who were not their opponents and who would support an oligarchic government that did not turn against them (2.3.39–40). Besides that, his argument to oppose the confiscation of weapons is based on the importance of Athens remaining militarily strong and being an ally to Sparta rather than on the rights of its fellow citizens.

And although Critias' account of the generals' trial must be considered within a persecutory context, it is a clear record that at least part of the Athenians saw Theramenes as one of those responsible for the unjust decision to execute the generals. He replies that the generals had accused themselves when they suggested that, in fact, it would have been possible to rescue those shipwrecked despite the storm (1.3.32). The reader who is familiar with Book I of the *Hellenika*, however, knows that he is not as innocent as he claims. The only conclusion to be drawn from this part of his speech is that Theramenes lies. And persuasively. Perhaps he does the same when he claims (2.3.45) that the institution of the oligarchy in 411 was made by the people themselves because the Spartans would not negotiate an end to the war with the democrats, since this reason is not among those reported by Thucydides for the coup (8.70). Theramenes further declares that, since he realized that the Spartans still would not reduce their prosecution to war and that their collaborators wanted to hand over the city to their enemies, he prevented this from happening; but this speech sounds contradictory and somehow cynical, seen both in the light of the testimony that Thucydides offers of the growing democratic opposition that was already threatening to overthrow the 400, and of Xenophon's reports on how he acted to allow the Spartans to impose whatever conditions of surrender they wanted in 404.

As Dillery (1995, 146–63) points out, however, the narrative of the rise and fall of the Thirty Tyrants in the *Hellenika* observes an internal coherence and is a paradigm that also guides the understanding of the subsequent Spartan collapse in Greek politics. It is a programmatic account of an unjust regime that destroys itself for lack of self-control and, perhaps because of this, its agents become almost caricatural. In this narrative structure, Theramenes is only there to play the same role that Euryptolemos had played when the generals were judged: he

52-58; Németh 2006; Hurni 2010; Shear 2011; Gish 2012; Bearzot 1979, 2006, 2012, 2013a, 109-170; Teergarden 2014, 43-52; Ober 2015, 456-8; Gallego 2012, 2016; Sano 2018.

<sup>20</sup> See also Bearzot 1994.

tried in vain to clarify to the people the conditions under which the rescue had not taken place and the reasons why the generals should be allowed individual judgments, while Theramenes tried to persuade Critias that the means of maintaining oligarchic power were not exacerbated by violence and control, which would only give rise to a greater number of opponents. Also in vain.

Let us now return to the idea that Xenophon's narrative may have been influenced by a campaign to enhance whatever qualities later oligarchs wanted to attribute to him. In fact, it is often suggested that the author manipulated his portrayal of Theramenes so that he could distance himself from the tyrants by promoting the idea of a moderate oligarchy that also fell victim to their violence. Theramenes began the propagation of the image of a moderate and legalist shortly after his death, as attested to by Lysias (12.64), an image that would be taken up by the tradition that goes from Aristotle (the author of the *Athenaion Politeia*) to Diodorus (or Ephorus) and reinforce the vision that associates the Athenian leader with a moderate posture.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, in the *Athenaion Politeia* and in Diodorus, the events narrated

[...] are favorable to this group and, especially, to the figure of Theramenes, who they seek to dissociate from the excesses of the Thirty. Only in them does the dispute between the political groups appear (regarding the type of constitution to be adopted) and the information that the Thirty were established by Lysander with the opposition of Theramenes. [...] The source [of those authors], intending to disconnect Theramenes from the performance of the Thirty, would have anticipated in time his opposition to the extremists and to Lysander. This antagonism, moreover, would end up leading him to death, transforming him into a kind of martyr of the moderate cause. (Leão 2001, 68-9; transl. by the authors).<sup>22</sup>

From Thucydides to Lysias, we have an ascending and cumulative curve of accusations attributed to Theramenes, all the more serious when associated with the recognition of his practical and intellectual talent, even though the characterization produced by Xenophon is ambivalent, because it is marked by indirect accusations, often attributed intra-narratively to other characters.<sup>23</sup> But in the *Athenaion Politeia* the portrayal of the Athenian leader is drawn from an entirely favorable angle.

Of this appreciation, however, a large gap and an indirect indictment are particularly notable. The author of the text says nothing about the performance of

<sup>21</sup> For the critique of the tradition that is read in the Aristotelian treatise and its impact for the appreciation of Athenian democracy in the fourth century see Sancho Rocher 2004, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c. For the historian, it would be unlikely that there would be a third way consciously moderate, halfway between oligarchy and democracy, especially in a city and at a time when no ideological convictions, but rather personal reasons, would guide the conduct of agents like Theramenes.

<sup>22</sup> On Diodorus and the process of the Arginusae see Bearzot 2015.

<sup>23</sup> On the complexity of Xenophon's portrayal of Theramenes, see Wolpert 2002, 10.

the then trierarch in the legal process against the generals of the battle of Arginusae and seems to make every effort to erase his desertion, or only reproduces an already thinned-out version of these events, which puts in check the portrayal that emerges from Thucydides, Lysias and most of Xenophon's appraisals. More important than that, however, is that the text reveals another problem with the Athenian leader's conduct: he is associated with the destruction of democracy,<sup>24</sup> something already stated by Thucydides (8.68.4; above) and Lysias (τὴν ὑπάρχουσαν πολιτείαν καταλύσαι, 12.70; also in 13.15 and 13.17) and alluded to by Xenophon when Critias accuses Theramenes of fomenting the *katalysis* of the *demos* in 411 (*Hell.*2.3.28: αὐτὸς δὲ τῆς τοῦ δήμου καταλύσεως). In *Ath. Pol.*28.5, one reads a version of these events that associates Theramenes' changes not to particular motivations, but to public interest. This main idea is, however, formulated through an expression that once again brings forward the subtext common to several accusations against him (qualified as slanders by the author—διαβάλλουσι): the author endeavors to present πάσας τὰς πολιτείας καταλύειν ("to dissolve all constitutions") in a positive manner, as a synonym for πάσας προάγειν ("to guide them all forward"),<sup>25</sup> in order to show Theramenes as someone capable of serving the city under all constitutions, as well as opposing those who acted illegally.

Assessing Theramenes' political trajectory during circumstances of *stasis* is as much a challenge for contemporary historians as it was for ancient authors. In other words, depending on how such a trajectory is viewed, we would be facing an opportunist or a legalist who tries to anticipate the potential catastrophes he foresees;<sup>26</sup> the leader that makes use of a moment of public *stasis* for his own benefit or who overrides the public interest over all others, even if this means putting his own life at risk; and the politician to be defined as inconsistent or as necessarily adaptive.

From an ethical point of view, none of the portrayals are favorable, on the contrary: in Thucydides' work this is due to the (anti-) ethics that underlies it; and in *Hellenika* it is because of the voluntary complicity or tolerance for regimes of exception and their implications. The events took place at critical moments when threats to dissolve or destabilize democracy had Theramenes among their main promoters. To find characters oriented by mutable political attitudes in oligarchic or monocratic situations is predictable, due to the very need for survival that such contexts of socio-political Darwinism necessarily imply. Finding them, however, in democratic contexts and, worse, embodied in agents of contemporary democracies, is not a simple triviality. Quite the contrary, it may be a sign that this democracy is fragile, especially when political figures can

<sup>24</sup> A very serious accusation, liable to capital punishment from 410, according to the Demophantus decree (*Andoc.*1.96-98). See Sebastiani 2018a, 2018b.

<sup>25</sup> For a detailed treatment of Theramenes in the *Ath. Pol.*, see Sebastiani and Leão, 2020.

<sup>26</sup> Somville (2004, 25) calls him a *fasciste modéré*. Plutarch (*Moralia* 824b) mentions him as an example of a politician who aims for agreement and can confer with both parties, without joining himself to neither (see Oudot, 2003).

swiftly shift the ideological views they promote, or their public commitments, without arousing suspicion.

From a political point of view, however, the issue requires greater nuance given the complexity of its circumstances. Frank and Monoson (2003 and 2009) bring Theramenes' attitudes closer to those of the *mesoi* citizens, whose political *phronesis* would be characterized precisely by a constant attention to legality. Although focused on the *Athenaion Politeia*, the researchers' perspective can also be applied to the other authors discussed in this paper. Although the idea is not explicitly mentioned in Thucydides or Xenophon, a similar political *phronesis* that would characterize such *mesoi* citizens could be seen as a key to understand Theramenes' actions and it would perhaps justify his most notorious trait—his adaptability, always aware of the new conjunctures forged by crucial events for the city such as the defeat in Sicily, the confrontation with the Spartan navy and the final defeat in the war.

Aware of the demands brought about by new events, Theramenes would embody a character who has no illusions about the possible resumption of the *patrios politeia* on pre-Peloponnesian War terms.<sup>27</sup> The circumstances were indeed far from favorable, considering the lack of resources such as the one that follows the defeat in Sicily and the pressure for an oligarchic government after Sparta's victory over Athens. It would be possible, then, to see in Theramenes not the unethical traitor but the tireless negotiator in search for the best possible conditions in the face of circumstances as overwhelming as they were uncontrollable. Furthermore, in 411 he would have supported oligarchs when he saw a way of saving the city in their actions but reasonably distanced himself from them and joined the democrats as soon as the established regime became unsustainable or started with abusive practices, so identifying his own salvation with that of the city. Something similar would again have happened with the Thirty.

But even that sequence of events, as politically justified as one may see it, can be read to this day as a cautionary tale. Ultimately, Xenophon makes the Athenian people responsible for choosing Theramenes as ambassador to negotiate the conditions of their surrender—thus granting power to the man who at that moment already intended to act in order to institute the oligarchy in the place of democracy. The fact that Xenophon does not record in the *Hellenika* the deliberation process that resulted in his selection emphasizes this. It is then simply the foolish decision of the people in choosing their representative, and not the discursive ability of Theramenes in presenting his supposed strategies, that is to blame for the disastrous situation in which the city found itself in the negotiations with Sparta. This is in line with Xenophon's stance when narrating the rise of the Thirty to a tyrannical position. All our sources on the Thirty say that they were appointed as a junta in a legal manner, but only Xenophon does not report the institution of *patrios politeia* as a condition imposed by the Spartans, thereby

<sup>27</sup> On the political uses of the idea of a moderate *patrios politeia* since the end of the V century see Bearzot 1979.

making the Athenians responsible for the oligarchic-tyrannical coup that city came to suffer at the hands of these men (2.3.2).<sup>28</sup>

Although Theramenes had tried to contain the violence of his fellow oligarchs, it is Thrasybulus who puts an end to the *stasis*, at the head of the armed democratic resistance and by instituting amnesty and pardon to those who had participated in the oligarchic government except for the Thirty themselves. Theramenes is unsuccessful because, as may have been the case in the trial of the generals, he was responsible for setting in motion a force more violent than he himself. In this sense, we think that Gray's (1989) interpretation of the clash between Critias and Theramenes, representing the decline of their friendship, is still interesting but can be seen from another perspective. According to her interpretation, Theramenes is the victim of the broken relationship and acts as a friend to Critias; once a paradigm of "misanthropy and ingratitude", he would change to one of "loyalty and constancy", exemplifying that betrayal does not mean opposing what friends do, but, on the contrary, that it should be seen as proof of friendship. His behavior, however, can also be seen as a demonstration that the tyrant (Critias) has no friends, and this fact is both his ruin and the ruin of those foolish enough to believe they could ally themselves with him. Lack of friendships is a well-marked element concerning the topic of tyranny, analyzed by Xenophon in *Hieron*.<sup>29</sup> Although the author addresses the issue from the perspective of the tyrant himself, it is clear that friendship presupposes some reciprocity and equality, and the tyrant cannot establish this type of relationship even with his own family members.

It is important to highlight, on the one hand, the contradictions of the supposed "moderate and restored Theramenes" in the light of a non-episodic reading of the *Hellenika*, because the reaffirmation of this positive portrayal, without any modulation, helps to erase his responsibility for the rise of a violent, greedy and arbitrary government. The fact that he was ultimately his own opponent and victim is not something that can completely redeem him. On the other hand, as Thucydides points out, for Athenian history to continue as a *ktēma es aei*, an "acquisition for eternity", it must give something to our and future generations to think about. Thus, the account of Theramenes' political path can serve as a warning to those who wish to obtain political power for themselves (or to see in power those ideologically closest to them) at any cost, including the demolition of other citizens' rights. Or, still, it can alert those who suffer from the induced anxiety of saving the *polis* at any cost, even if it is political freedom. These individuals may end up supporting the rise to power, in a cynical or utilitarian way, of men who move in times of crisis within the boundaries of the democratic system with the intention of overthrowing it.

Last but not least, when the ethical and political problems of Theramenes' initiatives are combined with economic factors that may have supported them, the circumstances in which he acted may be considered from a new perspective. That the rich Athenians had more possibilities to be heading political affairs is a

<sup>28</sup> Dillery 1995, 147.

<sup>29</sup> *Hier.* 3.1-9. See Sevieri 2004; Gray 1986.

fact.<sup>30</sup> Gray (2004, 158), for instance, takes up Lysias' *Pro Mantitheo*, to discuss the judiciary sovereignty of the *demos* gathered in an assembly, but whose power would be limited to endorsing or rejecting policies promoted by wealthy citizens:

[a] modern theory would like the *demos* to be its own master and to acquire the knowledge of the political affairs through the day-to-day administration of the *demos*, or the council, or their committees, but even in the speeches in which he addresses the *demos* in court, Lysias (XVI 21) identifies those who “do politics” (πράττειν τὰ πολιτικά... πράττειν καὶ λέγειν ὑπὲρ τῆς πόλεως) with the rich; the role of the *demos* is not to do politics this way but to hold ultimate power in his capacity as “judge” (οὐ γὰρ ἕτεροι περὶ αὐτῶν κριταὶ εἰσιν, ἀλλ’ ὁ μείζων) (transl. by the authors).

Grandson of the rich Nicias and son of Hagnon, who was a member of the Thirty alongside him, and an influential agent in the crucial decision-making processes of the Athenian democracy, Theramenes' actions can be taken as initiatives presented to the *demos* to serve the elite's interests, or proposals that were especially suitable to those who had proposed them rather than the people. Both in the distant past and today, such behavior has triggered or aggravated crises rather than effectively resolve them. The recurrence of so-called democratic leaders whose conduct is guided by their own interests should light up a bright warning sign everywhere—and we are not referring only to the (anti-) ethics implicit in such a stance.

This often causes fundamental democratic protocols such as civil and legal equality, or the universal right to justice, truth, free speech and defense to lose their guarantee within the democratic system. They are reconfigured to vague possibilities, in a process that functions to disguise the overwhelming predominance of economic power over collective decisions. In a similar way to that of contemporary democracies, the economic interests of a minority could be instrumentalized in their ancient counterparts, which would benefit, protect and legitimize itself through political debate and popular support. Ancient democracies, like contemporary democratic systems, would not exist without at least some prospect of democratization in the economic sphere with a view to social equity.

<sup>30</sup> On the problem of economic equality in Athenian democracy see Cartledge 1996; Raaflaub 1996, and chiefly Patriquin 2015, 82: “[i]f Athenian democracy teaches anything it is that struggle for relative equality on the ‘material plane’ is essential if we are to move beyond forms of public decision-making that disproportionately benefit society’s elite. In short, economic democracy is a necessary prerequisite of political democracy. Without the former, the latter cannot exist”. Patriquin’s book echoes one of E. M. Wood central thesis: “[a]s long as direct producers remained free of purely ‘economic’ imperatives, politically-constituted property would remain a lucrative resource, as an instrument of private appropriation or, conversely, a protection against exploitation; and, in that context, the civic status of the Athenian citizen was a valuable asset which had direct economic implications. Political equality not only coexisted with, but substantially modified socio-economic inequality, and democracy was more substantive than ‘formal’” (Wood 2012, 184). On the economic question around 411 and 404/3 see Ober 1989, 192-247; Pritchard 2015, 98-9; Sebastiani 2018a, 2018b.

Among the lessons that can be drawn from this framework for the contemporary democratic experience, it may still be worth bearing in mind what we can learn from a democracy that is as old as it is concealed in different instances and by different agents: that the lack of commitment towards an economic democracy (conveyed also as social and political) is equivalent to complacency, if not complicity, with forms of domination that hide beneath beautiful names easily legitimized by rhetorical charmers. Such neglect may entail purely cosmetic and superficial political changes, which better maintain the political predominance of those who have a lot to lose by tackling of one of the most complex political problems of all times: the hyper-concentration of economic instruments, an issue that is barely noticeable in the texts of ancient historians, yet frames the performance of leaders such as Theramenes and impacts on contemporary democracies. In this way, such leaders are often able to change sides or correct their own decisions, guided by an agenda of their own or their supporters, as the case of Theramenes seems to exemplify.

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# Uniting past and present: Sicily as a *locus* of identity between Greece and Rome

Maria do Céu Fialho

**Abstract:** Basing on the accounts of Thucydides and Plutarch, the paper analyses the way Sicily and the proposed Athenian expedition to Sicily, as a strategic bridge to advance over Carthage, define Nicias and Alcibiades, and what they represent: old Athens, comprised of experienced rulers and devoted, thoughtful citizens, who retreat, aware of the madness and threat of disaster that will lead to the ruinous outcome of the civil war. Forced to join the expedition, Nicias, as the embodiment of this polis, will stay until the end, in a campaign with which he does not agree, trying to save his fellow citizens. Alcibiades together with what he represents are fighting fiercely for the realisation of a megalomaniacal dream that will bring fortune and power for their own advantage. While Nicias accepts the command out of duty and imitation, Alcibiades yearns for it. In this background, Sicily and Carthage, waving from afar with their wealth and promise of power, constitute the stimulus for action that ultimately destroys an Athens close to defeat. On the other hand, in the young Roman republic, Sicily and Carthage offer natural encouragement of the conquest and submission of their power, as an imperative of the logic of expansion, affirmation and survival of Rome as a nascent power. It is the generation of the old Roman nobility that claims *Carthago delenda est*.

**Keywords:** Sicily, Carthage, Athens, Rome, Nicias, Alcibiades.

## 1. Preliminary remarks<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1 Sicily: its strategic position

The historical phenomenon of colonisation, as it is known, was a major movement. It began with colonising expeditions to islands in the eastern Mediterranean, northeast and southeast and, later, to the coasts of Asia Minor, following a general climate of economic and social crisis that was sweeping mainland Ancient Greece. As a result of Doric invasions, agricultural devastation, and the rough mountainous backbone that runs through the Balkan Peninsula from north to

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Maria do Céu Fialho, University of Coimbra, Portugal, mcfialhofluc@gmail.com, 0000-0003-2115-9638

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south, leaving only a narrow strip of fertile land between mountain and coast, hungry peasants were fleeing to seek shelter in the cities of eastern Greece—those that had once been founded by Ionic and Aeolian ethnicities, of the same strain to which the refugees belonged. Overcrowding of the poleis, with all its implications, led the most daring of Greeks to regard the sea as a space for reconstructing their lives. Although this movement had seen its expansion from the beginning of the 8th century BCE, reaching its climax in the century 7th century BCE, there exists testimony of the migration of the first Aeolians and Ionians from as early as the end of the second millennium, as well as of the existence of an amphictyony of colonies on the Ionian Sea and the western coast of Anatolia.

The umbilical relationship between a colony and its metropolis would, in future, decisively manifest itself in commercial mobility, in protection in the event of war, but also in the expectation of loyalty and alliance on the part of the metropolis. And that was how this movement was extended, still in the 8th century BCE, to the western and northwestern strip of Greece, as well as to the Peloponnese, populated by Greeks who were, for the most part, of Doric ancestry and whose dialect constituted a different bloc than the eastern bloc, which consisted of dialects that were closer together, such as that of the Ionic-Attic.

The geographical vocation of this new colonisation movement was, naturally, to look to the west and, through the Ionian Sea, reach Sicily, the western coast of the Italic Peninsula and the Mediterranean coastal strip of the current French Riviera, up to the Iberian Peninsula. The importance and prestige of the entire complex of colonies founded there justifies the designation by which this entire region would later be known: ἡ Μεγάλη Ἑλλάς (Polybius 2.39.1; Strabo 6.1.2). Within this cosmos, Sicily stands out. Due to its climate, the richness of its soil and subsoil, and its geostrategic position, as guardian of the passage between the eastern and western Mediterranean, this island attracted the attention of those leading the colonising expeditions, who would come to found cities that saw a rapid development and soon became rich and powerful. This was the case, among others, for Syracuse (733), Selinus (650–628), Himera (649), Gela and Leontini (also in the 7th century). Later, we witnessed the phenomena of the foundation of new cities by citizens of established colonies: this was the case for Agrigentum (581–580), founded by citizens of Gela, and for Camarina, founded by Syracusans. The island's own extension and geographical configuration established a network of relations between its cities, giving rise to new centres, but also to a complex web of hostilities: let us recall, for example, the town of Leontini, occupied by Gela and subsequently maintained under the control of Syracuse, or the story of Camarina, created by Syracusans in 599 and destroyed, again by Syracusans, in 552. Gela supported its reconstruction in 461 and, in 405, the city once again fell victim to the conquering threat of Carthage.

The island's wealth and strategic position had long since shaped it as a coveted territory in Antiquity. The indigenous population coexisted with Phoenicians, who had introduced commercial warehouses and converted them into prosperous cities, such as the city of Eggesta, whose origins are lost in time. Thucydides 6.2 attributes its foundation to Trojans fleeing the devastation of their home-

land. The city was not Greek and, if we believe the testimony of Diodorus Siculus 11.20.71, there were rumours of hostilities between Egesta and Selinus from 580 BCE onwards, as the territories of both cities expanded—clashes that would continue between them.

Indeed, the Sicily colonised by the Greeks was not a formerly uninhabited territory. In addition to indigenous ethnic groups, the Phoenicians had established themselves there and, moreover, the Carthaginians then controlled part of the island, especially to the west and northwest (Hitchner 2009, 430–1). Eager to take advantage of the rivalry between the cities, the Carthaginians, commanded by Hamilcar I, responded to the call of the tyrant of Himera, who was expelled from his city by Theron of Agrigento. This aimed to weaken the growing hegemony of the new inhabitants, which posed a threat to their dominance of the Western Mediterranean and their strategic position between West and East, capable of converting Sicily into a vast strategic bastion.

Despite an extensive fleet, advances on the island were hampered by a storm. Still, Hamilcar's forces advanced to Himera, where they were confronted with a Greek coalition, led by Gelon of Syracuse. The defeat of the Carthaginians, in 480 BCE, is symbolic of his loss of power and influence in Sicily, lasting for many years.<sup>2</sup> Syracuse, for its part, grew in power and preponderance over the other poleis and fuelled its hostility towards Carthage. An awareness of the strategic position and wealth of the largest island in the Mediterranean determined the multiple pretensions of dominion that stretched over it for centuries.

Sicily is praised for its livestock and fertility. Numerous allusions attest to this throughout Greek poetry: Pindar, in his *Olympic Ode I*, dedicates his lyrics to the tyrant of Syracuse; Hieron, who is victorious in the horse races at the Pan-Hellenic games, is based “in Sicily rich in cattle” (ἐν πολυμήλωι Σικελίαι, vv.12–3); in the victory song in honour of Hieron of Etna, the poet praises the polis, famous for its festivals and for its horses (*P.* 1.37–8), near the fearsome mountain, “front of the fruitful land” (εὐκάρπιοι γαίαις μέτωπον, *P.* 1.31); “The vast fields of fertile Sicily” (τῆς καλικάρπου Σικελίας λευροῦς γύας) are invoked by Aeschylus, the Sicilian poet, in the words of Prometheus (*Pr.* 369).<sup>3</sup>

And that land, which would become the breadbasket of Rome, allows the Syracuse tyrant, Gelon, to respond to the Hellenic *symmachia* embassy that travels to his city in 480 and asks him for support and alliance against the Persians, with the promise of generous military reinforcements of men, horses, and ships, as well as general provisions for Greek livelihood, as long as the great confrontation with the Persians endures—this, in exchange for granting him command of the army. The Spartan envoy violently refuses, accord-

<sup>2</sup> Herodotus 7.166–67 asserts that the battle took place on the same day as that of Salamis. Although this was not the case, this reading reveals the awareness of the analogous and decisive consequences of the two battles for the survival and reinforcement of Greek identity. See the account of Diodorus Siculus 11.20–7.

<sup>3</sup> It is not appropriate to engage here in discussion about the authorship of the play, as it deviates from the objective of this study.

ing to the account of Herodotus 7. 158–61. Gelon makes a new proposal: the offer of outstanding support if, at least, he is given leadership of the Greek fleet, which the Athenians refuse. Gelon then retreats to a position of neutrality (Hammond 1986, 223–5). It should, in passing, be said that, among the reforms implemented by the tyrant in the government of Syracuse, one of the most notable was the organisation of a proper naval force that would ensure the undisputed hegemony of his city on the island, as a naval power capable of facing the Carthaginian enemy.

## 1.2 Sicily: a source of knowledge and high achievements

That episode, reported by Herodotus, mirrors the conscience and proud affirmation of a Sicilian identity before the Hellenic *symmachia*, whose representative approaches the lord of the most powerful polis of this great island. From this it can be concluded that, in terms of its resources, Sicily is autonomous, and that its great weakness lies in its motherland: the rivalries between its poleis. Gelon, through his alliance with Theron of Agrigentum, which is consolidated when he marries his daughter, Demarete, is capable of seizing power in Syracuse, which he governs between 485–78 BCE. He destroys and annexes several Sicilian colonies and transforms Syracuse—that colony founded by Greeks from Corinth, the eternal rival of Athens—into the most powerful city of the island. Meanwhile, shielded by his *symmachia* with Agrigentum, he resumes hostilities towards the Carthaginians. It is in this context that the Battle of Himera takes place.

Gelon inaugurates the tradition of participation of the Sicilian aristocracy, namely of the city governors, in the Panhellenic games. In 488 BCE, he wins the horse chariots race at the Olympic Games and thus inaugurates a brilliant tradition that finds echoes in the *epinikia* of Pindar and Bacchylides, dedicated, for the most part, to the winners of several modalities using horses, who are in charge of numerous poleis of the island (Hirata 2012, 23–38): Syracuse, Agrigentum, Etna, Himera, Gela. It is understood that this is a policy of Panhellenic affirmation of the authority and prestige of these great lords, who hold absolute power. Euripides, in his *Trojan Women*, vv. 222–23, bows to this splendour of glory from successive sporting victories, when he praises the land of Etna through the Chorus of Trojan Captives and its crowns, which were obtained in the games and expanded its fame by merit.

In fact, a phenomenon peculiar to many of the colonies, including those in the Aegean, lies in the form of government adopted. The colonies of Sicily are, even in the classical era, ruled by *tyrannoi*, descendants of the founders of the cities, several of them associated, by kinship ties or wedding rings, with the reigning house of Syracuse, as seen above, for example, between Syracuse and Agrigentum (Rhodes 2007, 71–3). It was only as they approached the second half of the century V BCE that the political landscape began to change and, one after another, the Sicilian poleis grew familiar with a democratic regime. This movement started with the revolt and expulsion from Syracuse of the tyrant Thrasybulus,

in 466, and the subsequent institution of a democratic form of government, before then extending to other cities (Rhodes 2007, 76).

The form of deliberation in the assemblies and voting in judicial cases promotes an awareness that, in addition to the weight of truth inherent in the argument, powers of persuasion depend heavily on the expertise behind the argument. Thus, persuasion becomes autonomous as an art form, capable of being learned, with precise techniques. The Syracusans Corax and Teisias were the first two figures of whom there is an echo in this early *rhetorike technē*. The last quarter of the fifth century is notable for the presence of Gorgias of Leontini, the Sophist and *Rhetor*, in Athens, who taught the art of the word in exchange for money,<sup>4</sup> demonstrating the possibility that a discourse built on expertise can persuade listeners either of a thesis or of its opposite.<sup>5</sup> The teaching of the Sophists in Athens, and their discussions in the agora, which coincide, precisely, with the troubled time of the Peloponnesian War, provoked a sharp revolution of mentalities and a strong sense of controversy between those who rejected them and their disciples or sympathisers (Guthrie 1971, chap. 8).

In Magna Graecia, between the 6th and 5th centuries, and between cities in the south of the Italian Peninsula and Sicily, a great circuit of ideas and philosophical schools was constituted, within the scope of Pythagoreanism and its contamination with Orphism (Bernabé 2013, 121–30; Casadesús Bordoy 2013, 153 ff.), the dimensions of which cannot be determined, neither by the Ancients, nor by contemporary research (Rossetti and Santaniello 2004, chap. 3). Plato visited Archytas' school in Tarentum several times; by contrast, without having travelled to Athens, Empedocles of Agrigento saw his philosophy spread throughout the Greek world, including Athens. This involved his cosmogony and theory of the four elements and the dynamic role of *Neikos* and *Philia*, as well as his views with respect to ontology and his convictions about metempsychosis (which coincide, to a great extent, with the reports that Herodotus 2 would have heard in Egypt).

Thus, for the collective of Athenian citizens facing troubled times of civil war in the last quarter of the 5th century, the distant Sicily imposed itself, on the imagination and knowledge of travellers, as a safeguard between the western and eastern Mediterranean, a buffer against Carthage expansionist ambitions and a land of fertility and prosperity, wealth and glory, strength and wisdom, albeit suffering from a terrible evil: that of a devastating hostility between cities, based on alliances or intentional strategy. Hence the formation of the verb σικελίζω, “to be in bad faith, like the Sicilians”, occurring in Epicharmus.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Euripides, *Hec.*, vv. 812 ff.

<sup>5</sup> López Eire (2002, 191–6) underlines the psychagogical dimension as an objective of Gorgias' rhetorical-argumentative technique. This is evidenced by the fact that Gorgias composed a speech “Against Helen”, which was lost, and another “In defense of Helen”, which reached us partially.

## 2. Athens and the Expedition to Sicily (415–13 BCE) in the Context of The Peloponnesian War

### 2.1 Background hostilities (427, 424, 422 BCE)

From the middle of the 5th century, following the democratisation of the Sicilian poleis, Athens began, with increasing interest, to follow developments in Magna Graecia. Syracuse, in its eagerness for hegemony in Sicily, tried to dominate the political constellation of the island, continuing its attacks on other cities—an action that was far from eased by the context of the Peloponnesian War. Fully aware of the original animosity between Syracuse and Athens, cities allied to Athens, such as Leontini and Rhegium (in current Calabria), sought the assistance of the latter in the unequal war they waged with Syracuse, supported by the island of Dorian poleis (with the exception of Camarina and the Chalcidian cities, Thuc. 3.86). An embassy was sent to Athens; one of its members was the speaker Gorgias, whose art of persuasion would have deeply impressed the Athenians (Plato, *Hp. Mai.* 282b). In 427 the Athenians then sent a fleet of 20 ships to Sicily, under the command of two generals. This would ensure control of the strait between Italy and the island, with the Athenians installed in Rhegium. According to Thucydides 3.86:

The Athenians sent it [a fleet] upon the plea of their common descent, but in reality to prevent the exportation of Sicilian corn to the Peloponnesus and to test the possibility of bringing Sicily into subjection. Accordingly, they established themselves in Rhegium in Italy, and from thence carried on the war in concert with their allies.<sup>6</sup>

On beginning the account of events in which Alcibiades was involved and which led to the ruinous expedition to Sicily, Plutarch, *Alc.* 17.1 recognises that “already in the life of Pericles, the Athenians had their eyes set on Sicily”.<sup>7</sup> After his death they joined the campaign. Every time a Sicilian community was mistreated by Syracusans, they sent what they called “aid” and “military support”. And the island became the primary target of the young Alcibiades (*Alc.* 17.2).

It is quite probable that, in view of his ambition to command an expedition to Sicily, Alcibiades would have been concerned to impose himself, in the eyes of the Assembly and the demos, as an energetic, implacable and triumphant general. His eccentricities, allied to his prodigalities, exercised a manipulative power of the demos, which excused those (Plut. *Alc.* 16).<sup>8</sup> He seems to have been one of the fiercest

<sup>6</sup> As pointed out by Rhodes (2007, 103–4): “We do not know to what extent the Peloponnesians were importing grain from Sicily, but if they did they could spare more time from their own farms for fighting. Whether the Athenians were already thinking of conquest Sicily in 427 cannot be confirmed, but they were certainly doing so by the end of this campaign in 424”.

<sup>7</sup> Translation borrowed from Strassler and Hanson (1996). On the whole relational complex of Magna Graecia with continental Hellas, according to the perspective of Thucydides, see Zahrnt (2006).

<sup>8</sup> Bearing in mind that these are attitudes and strategies adopted by an aristocrat with the aim of manipulating public opinion about him, Mosconi’s systematization and conclusion, in

defenders of the attack and the fate given to the Melians, in the expedition and siege of 416 BCE (see Rhodes 2011, 37–8)—this same man who takes a Melian captive as his concubine, to whom he makes a son.<sup>9</sup> Another of his bets consisted of ostentation and triumphs in the Olympic Games (although the way in which he appropriated chariots bought by Teisias was the subject of yet another of his scandals).<sup>10</sup>

This call from both Sicilian factions for support from parties at war led Sparta to set expectations for support from Syracusans—but to no avail. Skilfully, Hermocrates of Syracuse proposed a peace treaty between the remaining Greek cities on the island, in order to be freed from the influence and pressure of Athens and to maintain the island's autonomy. The deal was made in 424. The Athenian forces stationed there returned, defrauded, to their homeland, without having achieved Sicilian dominance. Instead of taking control of the island, their generals were removed or accused of receiving bribes (Hammond 1986, 369–70; Rhodes 2007, 102–6).

This coalition, however, was extremely fragile, not only because of the military record between the cities, but also because living conditions were changing rapidly. The war aggravated disparities between rich and poor, which fostered conditions for civil strife. In Leontini, democrats proposed land redistribution, which the oligarchs rejected. The same happened in Messina, resulting in civil war between social classes, just as in Leontini and Corcyra. The Leontini oligarchs sought Syracuse's assistance. This was, according to Athens, an opportunity to try to reach an agreement against Syracuse. In 422 the Athenians sent Phaeax, leading a diplomatic embassy, to the ancient allied cities of Sicily, in the hope of being able to recover an alliance against Syracuse. Times had changed: Phaeax was well received in Agrigentum and Camarina, as well as by the Siculi and Locrians, but the same could not be said in Gela and other cities (Thuc. 5.5–6). Disappointed, Phaeax returned to Athens, when the Peace of Nicias was brought about following the death of Cleon at Amphipolis, in a battle against the Spartans, who were commanded by Brasidas. Once again, a prosperous Sicily thus evaded Athenian attacks, in search of allies and, above all, the geostrategic domain that the island represented.

## 2.2 Divergences in Athens: around the Sicilian expedition (415–13 BCE)

### 2.2.1. Nicias and Alcibiades: two groups in opposition

After long and difficult talks and negotiations, Sparta and Athens managed to sign a peace treaty in 421 BCE that should have been in force for fifty years. It is evident that, after Cleon's death and substantial losses in the war, both Sparta

the last thesis (2021) is right: the *demos* has deliberative powers and competence, but it is ultimately vitiated, by political leaders who were given command responsibility.

<sup>9</sup> According to Vickers (1999a, 265–281), the 'Dialogue of the Melians' represents a careful approach, on the part of Thucydides, to make understandable Alcibiades' connection to this undertaking. Cf. Vickers 2019b, 115 ff.

<sup>10</sup> Stuttard 2018, 134 ff.

and Athens were eager to regain peace. General Nicias, renowned for his performance in the war and his prudence,<sup>11</sup> was presented with this difficult dialogue with the enemy.<sup>12</sup> The peace achieved by Nicias was received with enthusiasm in Athens. The agricultural Athenians saw in that peace the return of times when they could safely cultivate their farms (Hammond 1986, 380). The old aristocracy, for its part, considered that conditions ripe for the normal functioning of the city and its institutions had been restored. However, the expectations brought about by the war had not been fulfilled at all: hostilities persisted with Boeotia, Megara, Corinth. The Athenians' conquest of Sicyon in the summer of 421—resulting in the cruel execution of all men and the exploitation of women and children as slaves (Thuc. 5.32)—increased the animosity between cities in the Peloponnesian League. The Chalcidians attacked cities allied with the Athenians and captured a garrison. Despite the truce, Athens' citizens were therefore prisoners of war.

In addition, it should be recalled that there was a dangerous distance and conflict of interest in Athens between descendants of the old aristocracy and the agitated demos that filled the assemblies. Hammond (1986, 369–70) points to the consequences of the plague: it had stolen the lives of a third of the population. In the year of 424, despite recent military successes, the city therefore had a reduced military force—the number of hoplites was low. The fleet, for its part, was reinforced: the plague had clearly not hit the ships and the crew was essentially made up of people recruited from the lower classes: artisans from whom the war had stripped their usual work, or landless rural workers—the *thetai*, paid as mercenaries, for whom war was a source of income. Small farmers, in turn, experienced the tragedy of systematically devastated fields, while the Athenians of wealthier families, through trade, land tenure, and mines, paid taxes to the state coffers and maintained, through their land, a relationship of deeper roots, which increased their desire for peace and stability. It was, in turn, these people who were responsible for leading the military forces into battle, by land or sea. Invigorated by warmongers, they avoided confrontation with the crowds in Athens. This *ochlophobia* was not, therefore, a unique feature of Nicias, but rather a typical reaction of a social group.

Lasting peace was unlikely from the outset: the interests of the poleis of both constellations were abundant and diverse. There were even cities in the Peloponnese and, above all, Corinth, that were unhappy with the conditions of the treaty. They too yearned to satisfy and guarantee their acquired hegemonic interests. Corinth went so far as to create an autonomous league with Boeotians,

<sup>11</sup> Although Plutarch (*Nic.* 6.1–2) interprets the reticence of Nicias in action as a defect, reflecting indecision and lack of commitment to developing warlike actions, it is important to remember that Plutarch sets up his presentation of Nicias according to the parallelism established with Crassus, in the *Vitae* of both, preparing a final evaluative judgment in favour of Crassus.

<sup>12</sup> Rhodes (2007, 124): “But a peace which resulted from Sparta’s failure rather than Athens’ success might in any case not have been long-lasting; and, as we have seen..., the terms of the peace were not fully implemented and several of Sparta allies refused to swear it.”

Thracians and Megarians (Thuc. 5. 38), with a view to also involving Argos. By the winter of 421–20 the climate had changed, even in Sparta: two new ephors, Cleobulus and Xenares, defended the reinstating of hostilities (Thuc. 5. 36). As conditions deteriorated, according to Thucydides 5.45 (followed by Plutarch, *Alc.* 14–5), the young Alcibiades entered the field in the summer of 420 BCE, in order to put into practice a subtle and perfidious plan of intrigue, provoking the wrath of the Assembly of Athens against Spartan ambassadors and causing the Athenians, on impulse, to establish an agreement with Argos, the traditional antagonist of Sparta (Ruzé 2006, 269–72; Rhodes 2007, 126), as well as with Mantinea and Elis (Romilly 1995, 64–7).

According to Thucydides 5.46, Nicias attempted to lead the Assembly to postpone the agreement with Argos. Their efforts were in vain and did not prevent the truce from being officially broken. It was then that Alcibiades started to gain supporters in the Assembly, having been immediately elected commander. At the same time, he continued its efforts to discredit Nicias.<sup>13</sup> As a matter of fact, Nicias represented the voice of the citizens who disagreed with a euphoric and dangerous military policy, while his prudence, taste for privacy and aversion to crowds were well known. Alcibiades, on the contrary, yearned to be the centre of attention. As vain as he was intelligent, as prone to excesses and eccentricities as he was capable of seducing public opinion, ambitious, manipulative and endowed with a refined oratory talent, Alcibiades knew how to play on the volatility and emotions of the masses.<sup>14</sup>

Plutarch (*Alc.* 17.1–2) recognises that the Athenians had their eyes set on Sicily, even at an early stage of Pericles' life. Pericles, however, knew how to curb the crowd's foolish impulses. As recognised by the polygraph of Chaeronea, conquering the island was a clear objective of the young Alcibiades, who was thus preparing, from an early age, to boost morale and mobilise the Athenians for a campaign from which he hoped to extract maximum glory and profit.

Nicias did not belong to the generation of Alcibiades. He was a prestigious general, having proved his worth in the field in the year of 424. In a joint action with Demosthenes and Hippocrates, he had achieved success through a strategy of blockading Sparta, by means of the conquest and occupation of strategic cities in favour of a great rival, intercepting commercial maritime circuits (Hammond 1986, 368–421). He belonged to the same generation as Cleon. However, a deep contrast separated them in the way they conducted themselves in political life. Concerning Cleon, Thucydides suggests that he was the first to deserve the designation of demagogue;<sup>15</sup> aggressive and relentless in attacking antagonists in the Assembly, he argued in order to obtain the favour of the people. Nicias,

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Plut. *Alc.* 14.4–5.

<sup>14</sup> On this point, Plutarch agrees with Thucydides and observes the Athenian historian very closely.

<sup>15</sup> Thuc. 4. 21. Vide Rhodes (1997, 120), who notes that, even so, Thucydides seems to have exaggerated Cleon's character traits.

on the other hand, remained discreet and avoided the crowds, whose emotional irrationality he feared, despite his performance in the war and the generous way in which he distributed his personal wealth.

Nicias did not have an aristocratic ancestry, but he behaved like an aristocrat and identified himself with the *aristoi*, from whom he sought and obtained sympathy. As Plutarch informs us, the enormous fortune inherited from his father was due to the possession and exploitation of silver mines in Attica (Plut. *Nic.* 4.2). He was a pious man and possessed a noble character, although, in the synthesis formulated by Rhodes (2007, 121), and in keeping with Plutarch's *Vita*, "he may have been general every year from 427/6 until his death in Sicily in 413: he seems to have been a competent commander, but more anxious to avoid failure than eager to achieve success". This is undoubtedly an aspect explored in Alcibiades' argument in the Assembly where the great expedition was decided on.

The speeches made by Thucydides, in his book 6, and attributed to Nicias and Alcibiades, do not correspond to exactly what was pronounced by the two antagonists. However, their verisimilitude and potential truth are valuable—they correspond to what would have potentially been said according to the circumstances, characters and position of the age group and the respective ethical and political values that each of the two speakers represented. On the one hand, the reader apprehends, in this way, the *ethos* of both figures, their intentions and motivations, the political and social context in which they speak and what they defend. Nicias represents the voice of thoughtfulness, embodying the prolonged experience of leading the war, of those who defend, above all, the security of Athens and the stability of the city, to arrive, unscathed, at a time of peace: from a group that is increasingly stifled by the noise of the demos, stimulated against the madness of the demagogues, the group of an aristocratic generation, wounded by the war and its visceral relation to the city.

On the other hand, although descended from an aristocratic lineage, Alcibiades represents, to the worst extreme, the voice of a new aristocracy—that of dissolute, ambitious young people, thirsty for adventure and protagonism. He prevailed over these young people, according to the multitude of testimonies from Thucydides, Xenophon, Plato, Plutarch. It is a generation that is the product of war and that, in the extent of its ambition, approaches the irrational greed of a crowd, influenced and manipulated by the argument of profit and wealth induced by war. Alcibiades dominates the powerful new weapon brought precisely from Sicily, by Gorgias, to the Athens of his time: the technique of argumentation and persuasion. He prevails over Nicias.

The arguments exchanged may not have been between the two, but they certainly correspond to the incongruity of opinion in Athens: one formulated more timidly, the other in a sonorous and ostentatious way. Prudence and experience lead us to consider that, at the point the war has reached, it is extremely dangerous to breach a military front (Thuc. 6.10), sending part of the forces to Sicily. This strategy weakens Athens and endangers the control of the empire it still has in the East. In addition to this argument, another emerges, based on experience of relations with Sicily: the island, despite its strategic interest, is too

far away, in the event of an Athenian victory, to possibly be controlled remotely (Thuc. 6.11). There is an awareness that, if the island's cities are rich, they are also powerful and of stable government (Thuc. 6.20). They would understand each other more easily than they would tolerate Athenian hegemony. This argument was based on historical background.

The greed and euphoria of power are fixed on the wealth and prosperity of the island and its cities, belittling their strength. The mistakes pointed out by Thucydides (2.65.11), concerning the initiative of the expedition, may be the geographical ignorance of the demos, led to approve it, but the generals knew perfectly what kind of physical obstacles were between Athens and Sicily (Mosconi 2021, 186–94).

Based on the constant wars between the cities of Sicily, it would be easy—but mistaken—to conclude that their governments are weak and chaotic (Thuc. 6.17) and, therefore, that the campaign would be easy and guaranteed to bring a certain profit and glory. And as if distance were not enough, Alcibiades (or the strand he represents) argues with a strategic leap that, given the distance, represents a mirage: Sicily is a bridge to Carthage and to an assault on the wealth of another empire (Thuc. 6.15.2). Thucydides understands and points out to Alcibiades' immensely ambitious plan: to conquer Sicily in order to pass to Carthage.

What represents a mirage of ambition, due to this distance and military context, will reveal itself, for another state in the process of affirmation and expansion, as a natural and inevitable undertaking: for the Rome of the early days of its republic. Sicily represented, as it were, the natural extension of Italy and the outpost in the Mediterranean. In Sicily, the need to neutralise another empire by having a presence there—Carthage, based on the African coast and dominating the sea—would certainly be confirmed. For the safety of Rome and its navigation, so that the Mediterranean could become the *mare nostrum*, evidence is imposed, this time by irony of fate, on the conservative *optimates* of old Rome: "*Carthago delenda est*". Shy was the voice of those who eventually advocated the opposite thesis.

Thus, in the face of Egesta's request for help, promising deceptive treasures if the Athenians assisted it in the war against Selinus, a city then supported by Syracuse, the Assembly voted in favour of sending the disastrous expedition.<sup>16</sup> For fear that Alcibiades would take absolute power in the campaign and, later, in Athens, Lamachus and Nicias were, in addition to Alcibiades, appointed as chiefs.

It is around this time, in the summer of 415 BCE, that numerous Hermes were found at dawn, beheaded in the streets of Athens. Suspicion fell on Alcibiades and his ensemble of night parties. Witnesses were listed. Soon after, there was a rumour that Alcibiades and his friends had, in one of their parties, staged a parody of the Eleusinian Mysteries (Thuc. 6.27). It remains unclear whether Alcibiades was the author or instigator, or whether the two sacrileges were designed

<sup>16</sup> On the deceitful behaviour of Egesta see Rhodes (2006, 537–38).

to incriminate Alcibiades, for civic fear that the young man presented the threat of becoming a tyrant; what is certain is that a lawsuit was filed against him.<sup>17</sup>

So, when sailing on the high seas, the fleet sees the ship *Salaminia*, which had come seeking Alcibiades to be tried. The young general then escaped to Sparta. Lamachus later died in Sicily and it was Nicias who continued a campaign with which he was at odds, already sick and injured, until he was cruelly killed in 413 at the hands of his enemies, pleading nobly for the life of his soldiers, according to Plutarch (*Nic.* 27.5), to the Spartan general Gylippus in Syracuse. Thucydides 7.83.2–4 gives us another version: realising that the Greeks are irretrievably lost, Nicias proposes to offer a very high sum of money from his personal assets, if the Sicilians and Gylippus allow the Athenians to return safely to their motherland. The offer is declined. In 7.86.2–3, Thucydides cites that generals Nicias and Demosthenes were savagely murdered by the Sicilians, against Gylippus' will, adding that Nicias had not deserved that fate.<sup>18</sup>

This effect of tragic outcome is literarily prepared through its contrast with the final speeches given by the Athenian general, in which his *ethos* of a pious man towards the gods, and a just citizen towards men, with a deep sense of belonging to his polis, leads him to urge and appeal to his soldiers' sense of political community. This speaking voice is that of an Athens from the past. The Athens of the present, having already lost its most devoted leaders and citizens, is delivered into the hands of an uncontrolled crowd comprised of those who manipulate in accordance with their interests.

Alcibiades, having gone to the Spartan side and later taken refuge in the court of Persian satraps, eventually returned to Athens, where he would liberate the way to Eleusis and obtain brilliant but brief victories. He ended up as a fugitive, pursued by the weight of his own vices, while Athens faced defeat in a ruinous war. The organisation of the polis would never recover.

### 3. Concluding Remarks

#### 3.1 The time of 'great men': stasis or disruption?

Aristotle repeatedly stated, in his *Nicomachean Ethics* and in his *Poetics*, that the human *ethos* is defined in action and that human action develops, on the part of each agent, with one objective—to achieve *eudaimonia*. In truth, this *eudaimonia* is measured and gains meaning in the context of the polis. Applied as a reading tool, this perspective on the paths of Nicias and Alcibiades seems extremely productive—so much so that Plutarch appears to have resorted to it too.

In times of upheaval and civic disorder, class unrest, parties, threats from within or without, which disintegrate a community, its future destiny—whether

<sup>17</sup> On Alcibiades and the Eleusinian Mysteries, see Leão (2012), with bibliography.

<sup>18</sup> Rhodes (2007, 140) remarks: “The hard-headed Thucydides has puzzled his readers by making no comment on Demosthenes but remarking that Nicias was particularly undeserving of his fate because of his devotion to virtue”.

that be a new order or destruction and wandering—remains in doubt. It is in these fracturing historical moments that figures who usually identify with one of the groups in dispute appear, or who see, beyond the dispute, the sensible solution to reach. They may take the profile of natural leaders, who impose themselves through their leadership skills and with whom a community identifies, or they can become “leaders by force”. In this case, these are figures respected for their status and qualities of character, but without political ambitions—lovers of their private life, who are compelled to assume a leadership role by conjuncture and collective request. Let us recall, for example, the figure of Cincinnatus in Rome.

In any case, these figures, who we can call “great men”, give voice to a collective conscience. In times of crisis and rupture, communities lack visible representations of their identity markers as a promise of stability or confidence in the revolutionary adventure. The historian, on the other hand—and this is already noticeable in Thucydides—tends to project onto such figures the reading he makes of an era, of a crisis, of the consciousness of a people or a class. Historical biography and literary portraits are grown from this dynamic. Plutarch’s *Vitae* constitute an exquisite example of this construction of a character-symbol, as a field for the projection and personification of a historical process of which he becomes an agent, of the collective spirit that gives him a dimension of universality (Catroga 2004, 257–60).

Can we understand as *stasis*, according to the Aristotelian concept (*Pol.* 1.2.1253a),<sup>19</sup> this whole process of conflict and confrontation in the polis? In the beginning, in the historiography of Thucydides and the biography of Plutarch, both Nicias and Alcibiades concentrate in themselves the representative dimension of two groups that, in Athens, have been confronted, moved by opposing interests, guided by antagonistic values. However, as can be seen, while Nicias sets up the struggle for what is fair and useful to the city, acting prudently, even reluctantly, but within a traditional model of piety, Alcibiades sets up the dimension of individualism of all those who encourage war for their own benefit. This faction dominates the events and change to which the city is subjected and which the polis will soon undergo. It does not represent the establishment of a new order, but rather the extreme disruption and weakening of democracy and of the polis system itself, without a valid alternative.

Thus, the course of action and life of Nicias, in the *History of the Peloponnesian War* and in the *Parallel Lives* of Plutarch, tends to embody the journey and destiny of an old caste of citizens of Athens, characterised by their nobility, piety, love of the city and compassion—a caste of citizens, guided by democratic ideals, who were by no means at ease in the face of agitated assemblies or crowds manipulated by demagogues. This Athens was shipwrecked by the disaster that was the expedition to Sicily, without deserving such a destination. In turn, refined in intelligence and perversion, Alcibiades is the symbol of a new Athenian caste, eager for profit and fame, grown in and having assimilated the logic of the

<sup>19</sup> On the “politicization” of *stasis* in Aristotle see Rogan (2018, 207–10).

war: everything is worth, intrigue, command by arms, dominion of crowds by the art of argumentation, to achieve their ends. The city is only the means by which personal interests are achieved.

### 3.2 Greece and Rome: their views towards Sicily

Thus, Sicily and the proposed expedition to Sicily, as a strategic bridge to advance over Carthage, define both figures and what they represent: old Athens, comprised of experienced rulers and devoted, thoughtful citizens, who retreat, aware of the madness and threat of disaster that will lead to the ruinous outcome of the civil war. The threat that constitutes the people in a manipulated uproar in the Assembly intimidates and inhibits the arguments of this Athens. Forced to join the expedition, Nicias, as the embodiment of this polis, will stay until the end, in a campaign with which he does not agree, trying to save his fellow citizens. Alcibiades and what he represents are fighting fiercely for the realisation of a megalomaniacal dream that will bring fortune and power for their own advantage. While Nicias accepts the command out of duty and imitation, Alcibiades yearns for it. However, on the verge of being taken to court before the city, he dodges and passes to the enemy's side. He will survive, thanks to his unparalleled chameleonic capacity,<sup>20</sup> with Spartans, Persians; he will return to Athens, in triumph, and end up being persecuted, ingloriously killed, victim of his own vices. Alcibiades is the image of this new suicidal Athens.

In fact, Plutarch carefully chooses the public figures of the Greek and Roman universe to be biographed according to their potential to represent a personification of the qualities and defects or the essential of the historical trajectory of the community to which they belong—Alcibiades' *Vita*, which follows so closely the historical narrative of Thucydides, is not an exception.

Sicily and Carthage, waving from afar with their wealth and promise of power, constitute the stimulus for action that ultimately destroys an Athens close to defeat.<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, in the young Roman republic, Sicily and Carthage offer natural encouragement of the conquest and submission of their power, as an imperative of the logic of expansion, affirmation and survival of Rome as a nascent power. It is the generation of the old Roman nobility that claims *Carthago delenda est*.

<sup>20</sup> This topic was previously addressed by Fialho (2008, 107–16).

<sup>21</sup> Soares, in his contribution to this volume, published as the chapter “Nature and natural phenomena in Thucydides' *The Peloponnesian War*: *physis* and *kinesis* as factors of political disturbance” considers: “After having imposed the law of *physis* upon *nomos* against the Melians (V.84–116), it is the Athenians who will experience the unstoppable law of *physis* in their disastrous expedition to Sicily” with Nicias and Diodotus representing peace and Cleon and Alcibiades embodying war. So, the author concludes: “*Stasis* alone configures an extreme image of *kinesis*, an eruption of terrible social and political consequences”: this is the huge *stasis* that fatally shook the foundations of Athenian democracy.

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# Forms of government and rhetoric: perceptions of democracy and oligarchy in Demosthenes<sup>1</sup>

Priscilla Gontijo Leite

**Abstract:** Demosthenes is recognized as one of the great orators of antiquity and as a defender of Athenian democracy and freedom, particularly in voicing his concern about the growth of Macedonian power. While the defence of democracy is a recurring theme in his speeches, Demosthenes did not develop a theory of democracy. Rather, he tended to idealize the Athenian democratic experience prior to the Peloponnesian War. Further, in his defence of democracy and the *ethos* of the democratic citizen, Demosthenes references oligarchy, though again not from a theoretical perspective. The objective of this paper is to analyse Demosthenes's use of the democratic and oligarchical forms of government in his defence of Athens, with a focus on his construction of an antithesis between them and his deployment of the Athenian experiences with oligarchy in 411 and 404 BC in his oratory.

**Keywords:** rhetoric, Demosthenes, democracy, oligarchy.

Tuttavia, anche se i regimi politici possono venire rovesciati, e le ideologie criticate e delegittimate, dietro un regime e la sua ideologia c'è sempre un modo di pensare e di sentire, una serie di abitudini culturali, una nebulosa di istinti oscuri e di insondabili pulsioni. C'è dunque ancora un altro fantasma che si aggira per l'Europa (per non parlare di altre parti del mondo)? (Eco 2017, 22–3).

## 1. Introduction

In the 20th and 21st centuries, democracy has generally been considered the best form of government, and most countries have defined themselves as democratic. Democracy has strongly positive connotations, being associated with

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Priscilla Gontijo Leite, Federal University of Paraíba, Brazil, priscillagontijo@gmail.com, 0000-0003-2616-7186

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freedom and equality under the law (*isonomia*). Today, the notion of democratic equality transcends the political field to include growing demands for socio-economic equality, as observed in the demands of various social movements. In these respects, democracy is fundamental to contemporary politics, guiding the conceptions and actions of modern citizens and leaders.

At the same time, democracy (Agamben 2009) has suffered some recent blows as autocratic governments have come to power in some countries and disrupted democratic processes. Thus fascism continues to haunt democratic governments like a ghost (*fantasma*), to borrow a simile from Umberto Eco (2017). Fascism can be considered a powerful expression of hatred for democracy that, as the French philosopher Rancière (2014, 8) observes, is coeval with it, while democracy itself can be viewed as an expression of hate. The term is inherently controversial since it implies conflict between the rich and poor<sup>2</sup> and the emergence of popular sovereignty through violence, as indicated by a *kratos* that the *demos* wields (cf. Pl. R. VIII, 557a–c).<sup>3</sup>

The political participation of the poor has always been a point of tension for governments. Since antiquity, critics of democracy have emphasized the inability of the poor to engage in politics on the grounds that they lack the education necessary to practise good government (Leite 2017, 2019a; Leite and Silva 2018). The discussion of this and other conditions necessary for political participation has been part of the broader discussion of the forms of government (Bobbio 1997). From the perspective of theory, the aim of the present discussion is to understand the qualities, positive and negative, of the major forms of government (rule by one, rule by the few, rule by the many) recognized in ancient Greece (De Romilly 1959). Reflections on these issues in the Western tradition trace back to Herodotus (Hdt. 3.80–3) and are dealt with in increasing depth by the Greek philosophers (Simpson 1998; Kraut 2002; Keyt 2006; Meyer 2006; Blössner 2007; Cartledge 2009, 65–90; Miller 2009), notably Plato and Aristotle in the *Republic* and *Politics*, respectively.

The textual sources make clear that the majority of Athenian citizens were familiar with such discussions of the forms and functions of government. Thus, Aristotle (Rh. I, 1365b) asserts that an understanding of the characteristics of various governments increases the persuasive powers of orators when arguing in support of a regime. In other words, an orator who knows how governments work and the positive and negative characteristics of their various forms (oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny) can persuade an audience by showing concern for the well-being of society. Similar arguments could also be used to attack opponents by characterizing them as indifferent to the security of the polity, a well-known example being Lycurgus's *Against Leocrates* (Leite 2018).

Unlike Attic political philosophy, Attic rhetoric rarely includes abstract thinking about forms of government. Rather, orators spoke about political experienc-

<sup>2</sup> On rich and poor in ancient Greece, see Fisher 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Canfora 2015, 180–81; Piovani and Giorgini 2021, 4–5; Hansen 2021, 27–8.

es, particularly in the context of Athenian democracy, which they idealized in the form that it had assumed before the Peloponnesian War. Thus, the forms of governments that orators presented to their audiences existed in a kind of middle ground between the real and the ideal.

The focus of this paper is Demosthenes's understanding of democracy and oligarchy as revealed in his speeches. These forms of government together constitute an antithesis so that each helps define the other. Almost by definition, democracy is characterized by freedom, broad participation, and political transparency, and oligarchy by the restriction of freedom and decision-making power to a small group. In ancient Greek politics, another form of government, tyranny, existed alongside oligarchy. The analysis here is broadened by consideration of the impact of Macedonian politics on Demosthenes's political thought, the argument being that the political situation contributed to his construction of the antithesis between democracy and oligarchy. Thus, the Athenian orator emphasized freedom, bribery, political transparency, and the preparation of rulers through this antithesis. These issues are of great relevance to contemporary politics and can inform reflections on the modern democratic experience (Dabdab Trabulsi 2016) in a moment of skepticism towards, and even weakening of, democracies worldwide (Rancière 2014).

## 2. Distrust in Democracy: Past and Present

Recent critiques of and actions against democracy have, in general, provoked strong reactions, reinforcing the importance of democracy as an ideal for most contemporary societies. In 2020, even amid the Covid-19 pandemic, the debate spilled out into the streets in popular demonstrations in democratic countries including the United States, France, the United Kingdom, and Brazil. The past few years have indeed witnessed an increase in radical rhetoric expressing disdain for democracy, though democracy has always been the subject of intense criticism from both the left and the right for failing to deliver on its promises. Today, its advocates promote democracy as the basis for a good quality of life, especially in material terms. When citizens under a democracy cease to believe that they can secure or maintain the lifestyles that they desire, various groups within the polity may begin to claim that only a strong authoritarian regime is capable of achieving this goal for them. In other words, when a desired improvement in their quality of life seems impossible, citizens may begin to aspire to an idealized order and notion of security characterized by a conservative orientation and rigid hierarchy. From this perspective, democracy is seen as a space of chaos that allows minority groups that would otherwise be invisible access to the public arena. Thus, the notion of restoring the hierarchy includes banishing these groups from the public arena and rendering them invisible.

As Bobbio (2015, 32) observes, democracies are constantly breaking their promises. Even the most loyal defenders of democracy accuse it of failing to come to terms with "invisible power" acting behind the scenes to maintain the continuity of political and commercial oligarchies. Contemporary democracies,

despite efforts to maintain egalitarian governance, have been unable to eliminate the weighty influence of elites from political decision-making. According to Castoriadis (2002, 117), modern democracies are increasingly resembling more or less liberal oligarchies in which power is in the hands of large corporations. Democratic governments have also been unable to implement self-government characterized by full equality. The result has been an increase in the concentration of income and successive economic crises in democratic countries that have been increasingly frequent and catastrophic. Under such circumstances, citizens, feeling impoverished and alienated from political decisions, may be sympathetic to authoritarian rhetoric that promises a change in the power structure and adherence to high moral standards.

Economic crisis and disbelief were likewise characteristic of Athens in the 4th century BC as the city recovered from the Peloponnesian War, which had nearly destroyed its infrastructure, caused revenues to plummet, increased the concentration of income and land, and left the peasants (*thetes*), as well as the mercenaries who had fought in the war, immiserated. This period was marked by profound social transformation involving democracy and citizenship as the government increasingly became the domain of specialists while the citizens turned their attention to their businesses (Leão 2012, 15–33). The decrease in revenue raised questions about *misthophoria*, the payments to citizens that were an important measure for guaranteeing the participation of the poor in public affairs (Dabdab Trabulsi 2018, 202–9).

The constant wars that disrupted the economies of some cities also fuelled the growth of a lucrative trade in war matériel and created the demand for the aforementioned mercenaries. For many poor Greeks, the only solution was to leave their cities and join a foreign military force. These conditions meant that there was no consensus regarding war or peace within cities. The speeches for and against war and peace were replete with examples from Athens in the previous century, which was depicted as a golden age (Worthington 1994), except for the oligarchic episodes. Furthermore, 4th-century orators depicted Solon as the exemplary legislator and founder of Athenian democracy, with references to *patrios politeia*<sup>4</sup> in various speeches serving to reinforce the call for a democracy that can deliver good legislation and command the obedience of its citizens.

Amid so many uncertainties, these orators adduced democratic values as a guide, and, therefore, various groups used them in rhetorical ways. So it is that, since antiquity, democracy has never been a fixed idea, instead remaining open and disputed. In 4th-century Athens, the wealthy with oligarchic tendencies criticized democracy as “radical” and pointed to excesses committed by the people when they had held power.

In this rhetoric of oligarchy, the *demos*<sup>5</sup> was compared to a tyrant who stops at nothing to satisfy his appetites. This trope has a long history in Greek thought,

<sup>4</sup> See the contribution of Leão, *supra*, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> On the *demos*, see Leite and Silva 2018; Leite 2019b.

appearing, for instance, in Herodotus, when Megabyzus characterizes the *demos* as foolish and hybriatic, conducting public affairs like a river in flood (Hdt. III 81). Plato famously does not consider democracy among the better forms of government and argues that democracies inevitably give rise to tyrannical regimes (Pl. R. VIII, 577a–c). Similarly, Aristotle frames democracy as one of the “deviations” (*parekbaseis*) from the “correct” (*orthas*) forms of government, though he suggests that it is the “most measured” (*metriotaten*) of these deviations (Arist. Pol. IV, 1291a). He goes on to enumerate various types of democracy, the worst of which emerges when demagogues—who he has already depicted in a negative light—hold power because the authority of the people is superior to that of the law; conversely, the best type of democracy emerges when the authority of the law is supreme. For Aristotle, then, the legitimacy of a regime is a function, not of its responsiveness to the popular will, but of its observance of the law.

Thus, part of the Athenian elite always looked with suspicion at the exercise of power by the people. The challenges of the 4th century BC caused the elites to rethink their role in the city, especially regarding the liturgies (essentially, taxes paid by the wealthy to fund specific public projects).<sup>6</sup> As a consequence, several proposals emerged, such as the “tutelary democracy” of Isocrates and Lysias under which the leadership would remain in the hands of the elites (Plácido and Fórnis 2012, 87–9). Demosthenes also does not disregard the importance of the elites for the city, assigning them a fundamental role in the recovery of the regime and the maintenance of Athenian power. Accordingly, he argues that the richest should fulfil the liturgies and that their actions should be closely monitored to avoid any possibility of their becoming tyrants. Demosthenes’s personal and political adversary Meidias was a particularly egregious example of abuse of power and the use of wealth to avoid punishment for serious crimes (MacDowell 2002; Leite 2017).

Athenian finances are a constant concern in Demosthenes’s speeches—for instance, *On Organization* (D. 13) and *Against Leptines* (D. 20)—in large part because he recognized that the fiscal health of the city was essential if it were to withstand the Macedonian advance. Thus, he distinguishes the wealthiest regarding their *ethos* as either concerned with their civic duties and willing to provide their money and services to the city or eager to evade their obligations (such as Meidias). Demosthenes’s characterization of the wealthy is rooted in popular ideas about democracy, in particular regarding the defence of freedom, the possibility of participation through speech, demonstrating respect in dealings with other fellow citizens, and the appropriate use of wealth.

The relationship of the rich with the rest of the population is presented with subtlety in Demosthenes. The leadership role of the elite included payment of the aforementioned liturgies, which symbolized an equal sharing between rich and poor in the benefits of citizenship. In a democracy, the rich need to feel that their assets are safe from undue appropriation; in return, they must com-

<sup>6</sup> On finance and democracy, see Hansen 2021, 43–5.

mit themselves and a portion of their resources to the city (D. 10.45). In this respect, the protection of the city was tied to the defence of private property. Demosthenes was clearly of the opinion the elite should do what was necessary to return Athens to its position at the head of an empire. This would form the *ethos* of the good democrat, who is concerned with defending the city and opposing tyranny. Demosthenes's speeches were not really intended to educate the elites, but he certainly hoped that the *demos* would adhere to his proposals and criticize the behaviour of certain members of the elite and, thereby, weaken his rivals politically. He characterizes Eubulus and Meidias, for example, as public and powerful statesmen (addressing the former, he says, a man of influence and a statesman—*δύνασαι μὲν καὶ πολιτεύει*, D. 21.207) who use rhetoric to evade their financial obligations while acting outside the law to harm their enemies, showing disdain for the people. Having described them thus, he asks the jury to imagine what would be the attitude of either, or of any of their allies, in the face of the supplications of the people should they become owners of the government, or, in other words, if they were to institute an oligarchy (D. 21.209–11). In this hypothetical situation, he affirms, these men would never hear the people's pleas, for the interests of oligarchs and democrats are irreconcilable.

After the consolidation of Macedonian power in Greece, a new political phase began for the cities. Although many remained democracies, at least in form, a kind of euergetism took hold, such that the actions of the rich came to be compared with those of contemporary Hellenistic kings. Depending on the circumstances, philanthropic oligarchs and hereditary rulers might be beneficial to the people. With the end of the Peloponnesian War, the argument that monarchy could be a good form of government circulated again as it had in the period leading up to the Persian Wars in intellectual circles, provided that the king possesses certain positive characteristics, particularly a sense of fairness, fear of the gods, self-control, incorruptibility, and considerable wealth. With the political success of Philip II and his son, these ideas gained more strength and became a rough model for model for Hellenistic monarchy (Eckstein 2009, 253). At that time, democracies only managed to survive under the protection of kings, who kept them under constant surveillance; thus, Athenian decrees of the period dedicated to the Macedonian king describe him as responsible for the protection of the city (Plácido and Fórnis 2012, 93).

### 3. Demosthenes and the 4th century BC

Demosthenes played an important role in Athenian politics for a considerable portion of the 4th century BC,<sup>7</sup> especially in the matters relating to foreign policy that were central to life in the *polis* (Worthington 2000, 97). Later, he came to be considered a model of rhetorical prowess and political action, for which reason his speeches were preserved. The *ethos* that he developed and dis-

<sup>7</sup> On democracy in the 4th century BC, see Sealy 1993; Hansen 1999.

played coloured the reception of his image over time. He presented himself as a staunch defender of democracy and his proposal as the best alternative for the preservation of a free Greece under Athenian leadership.

However, Demosthenes's proposal for maintaining the independence of the *poleis* was not the only one. The period was marked, like previous Greek history, by competition among Greek cities. The disputes among Thebes, Corinth, Sparta, and Athens naturally facilitated the Macedonian advance, allowing the king to expand his influence in the region, both through alliances and by force. Philip II presented a viable alternative to cities when he proposed taking the fight to the Persians and the signing of peace treaties that would allow economies weakened by war to recover. From 351 to 336 BC, then, Demosthenes directed all his rhetorical skill towards convincing his fellow Athenians not to adhere to these treaties, but he was largely unsuccessful (Ryder 2000, 45).

In numerous speeches, Demosthenes demonstrates the dangers posed by the Macedonian king, thereby reinforcing the impression that treaties with him were attractive, for, if opposition to the king were so easy, the orator would not need endless subterfuge to attack the supporters of Macedon. Thus, a lasting peace was perhaps an attractive proposition to the Greeks, who were still suffering from the after-effects of the Peloponnesian War. Though their speeches have not survived, the rhetorical ability of Demosthenes's opponents no doubt made these proposals the more appealing.

During the reign of Philip II, Demosthenes's career was very active. Worthington (2000, 94) describes his insistence that the Athenians take a firm position on Macedonian politics as "scare-tactic rhetoric." That is, Demosthenes emphasizes the dangers of the monarch's actions and their consequences for Athens, always exaggerating the consequences. This tactic found fertile ground in the 4th century BC, which was haunted by the "ghost of the lost thalassocracy" (Plácido and Fórnis 2012, 80).

Thus, on the level of ideas, Demosthenes's characterization of democracy and oligarchy was framed by the scare-tactic rhetoric and memories of the naval power that Athens once wielded. As he would have it, the citizens were responsible for maintaining the democracy and the leadership of Athens as a defender of freedom in Greece. Rhetorically, he associates himself positively with democracy and his opponents, especially Philip II, and negatively with oligarchy and tyranny.

According to Demosthenes, the king was responsible for spreading oligarchies wherever he went, thereby depriving people of freedom (D. 1.23; 28.65)<sup>8</sup> and showing himself to be a tyrant (D. 1.5) and a barbarian (D. 2.17, 24; 9.30–1). Likewise, changing political regimes by transforming democratic cities into tyrannies was one of Alexander's tactics (D. 17.14). The reality was, of course, more complex than the picture presented in Demosthenes's speeches, for Philip II is known to have helped democrats in some cities that, without his support, would

<sup>8</sup> Leite 2019a.

hardly have been able to remain in power. Alexander even transformed some cities, such as Chios and Sardis, into democracies, leaving garrisons there to ensure that his decisions were respected (Heckel 2006). In practice, Alexander and some others referred to local groups favourable to himself as “democrats”, and those favourable to the Persian king as “oligarchs” (Plácido and Fórnis 2012, 93–4).

In Demosthenes’s view, full democracy was impossible under the rule of the king because freedom was impossible. Thus, to him, despite calling themselves democrats, the subjects of the king were just that, subjects, and nothing more. The expansion of Macedonian politics, then, influenced the development of the opposition between democracy on the one hand and oligarchy/tyranny on the other, with the Macedonian kings being characterized as either tyrants or liberators of Greece by their opponents and allies, respectively.

Demosthenes had an active and successful career through Alexander’s ascension (336 BC) to *On the Crown* (330 BC), remaining a fixture of Athenian political life (Worthington 2000, 90–3). Proof of his political prestige includes his invitation to preside over the funeral prayer for those who died at the Battle of Chaironeia in 338 BC (Plu. *Dem.* 21), despite the fact that he had been one of the driving forces behind the policy that led to this decisive military defeat of Athens. His diplomatic stance from 336 to 330 BC was, again, subtle, though he remained committed to defending Athenian sovereignty (Worthington 2000, 98). His political fortunes began to decline in 330 BC as he remained outside Athens and travelled to Aegina and Troezen (Plu. *Dem.* 26). When Alexander died in 323 BC, Demosthenes began to organize resistance to Macedon and take advantage of this opportunity for Athens to free itself at last from foreign influence. Thus, he participated in the failed revolt against Alexander’s immediate successor in Greece, Antipater, and then, facing arrest, committed suicide in 322 BC.

#### 4. Demosthenes and Democracy

In general, in Demosthenes it is possible to notice that the Athenian democracy is always presented as the best alternative to ensure the freedom of the Greeks, threatened by the Macedonians. For him, democracy meant the freedom of a people, because it is what effectively guarantees the power of a *polis* (Sancho Rocher 2002, 252).

The guiding principles of Athenian democracy were freedom, political equality, and participation, conceptualized as *isegoria*, *isonomia*, and *isocracia* (Sancho Rocher 1991; Montiglio 1994; Lombardini 2013; Raaflaub 2015). Freedom was associated with political participation because it guaranteed the right to participate in the assembly, holding oneself and others to account, serving on juries, and, if the circumstances demanded it, submitting to a trial in court (Arist. *Pol.* IV, 1295b21–2, 1317b12–13). In other words, “being free” became synonymous with “being a citizen” (Hansen 2010b). Likewise for Aristotle, one of the main objectives of democracy is precisely to guarantee freedom. (Arist. *Rh.* I, 1366a; *Pol.* IV, 1317a40–b17).

Freedom in the Greek world proved to be a versatile notion easily mobilized in rhetoric. The arguments of promotion and restriction of freedom were used alternatively by the orators of both sides, for or against the Macedonian (see Leite 2019a). Philip II made use of this rhetoric when he characterized the Persians as the Greeks' common enemy. Demosthenes, on the other hand, used it to highlight what Greeks stood to lose as the monarch advanced. Thus, in *On the Chersonese* (D. 8) from 341 BC, he denounced Philip II as an irreconcilable enemy of *politeia* and democracy (ἐχθρὸν ὑπειληφέναι τῆς πολιτείας καὶ τῆς δημοκρατίας ἀδιάλλακτον ἐκείνον; D. 8.43). The monarch, he claims, is unconcerned about the freedom of Greek cities, while the defence of freedom was an Athenian tradition:

[42] You are not yourselves well-suited to acquire or possess an empire. Rather, you are good at preventing another from taking places, and at recovering them from one who has got hold of them, and at generally obstructing those who wish to rule, and at liberating people. He does not wish freedom at your hands to be lying in wait on any moment of crisis for him— quite the contrary—and his calculation is sound and to the point. [43] First, you must understand that he is an inveterate enemy of our democratic constitution. If you are not fully convinced of this, you will not be willing to treat the situation seriously. Second, you must recognize clearly that all his policies and machinations are directed against our city, and that, wherever anyone resists him, he does so on our behalf (D. 8.42–3; translation by Trevett 2011).

Demosthenes makes a similar point in *Philippic 4* (D. 10), which he composed the same year. He again characterizes Philip II as an enemy of *politeia* and democracy (ἐχθρὸν ὑπειληφέναι τῆς πολιτείας καὶ τῆς δημοκρατίας ἀδιάλλακτον ἐκείνον D. 10.15) whose ultimate goal is to conquer Athens. In this speech, to make explicit the tactics of the king, Demosthenes distinguishes two groups of Greek cities:

[4] Accordingly, at a time when the inhabitants of the cities of Greece are divided into two groups—those who wish neither to rule anybody else by force nor to be enslaved to another but to manage their city in peace and in accordance with the laws, on terms of equality, and those who desire to rule over their fellow-citizens, submitting to anyone who they imagine will allow them to do so—those who are of his persuasion, men who desire tyrannies and dictatorships, are everywhere victorious, and I cannot think of a single securely democratic city apart from our own. [5] And those who allow him to control their government are successful by means of all the things that get things done: first and foremost by having someone who will give money on their behalf to those who are willing to take it; and second—though no less important—by the existence of a power that can subdue their opponents whenever they ask (D. 10.4–5; translation by Trevett 2011).

Some cities wish to govern with freedom, laws and equality (ἐλευθερία καὶ νόμοις ἐξ ἴσου πολιτεύεσθαι) rather than by force, and not to be enslaved by

other cities (δουλεύειν), and thus have democratic tendencies. By contrast, in cities subject to external tyranny, a small group of citizens agrees to obey a foreign government in exchange for political support to rule over their fellow citizens. In this way, they make true freedom impossible since citizens must obey the rulers, and they, in turn, must obey the Macedonian king. With this type of tyranny having spread throughout Greece, Demosthenes asserted, Athens was left as one of the few cities with a stable democracy and, consequently, one of the few capable of saving all of Greece.

In *On the Liberty of the Rhodians* (D. 15), 353–352 BC, Demosthenes contrasts the reasons for which the Athenians go to war against oligarchies and democracies:

[17] Consider too, men of Athens, that you have fought many wars against both democracies and oligarchies. That much you know, but perhaps none of you has thought about what you were fighting for in each case. For what, then? Against democracies you were fighting either over private claims, which you could not resolve in public, or over the division of land or border disputes or out of rivalry or over leadership. But against oligarchies you fought not over any of these things but for a form of government and for freedom. [18] And so I would say, without hesitation, that in my opinion it would be better for all the Greeks to be at war with you, so long as they are democrats, than for them to be friendly to you and oligarchs. For I believe that you would have no difficulty in making peace with free men, whenever you wish, but with oligarchs I do not think that even friendship can be secure, since there is no way that the few can be well disposed to the many, or that those who seek to rule others can be well disposed to those who have chosen to live on terms of political equality (D. 15.17–8; translation by Trevett 2011)

The reasons for war against other democracies are related to Athenian interests in certain territories or in resolving internal problems in other cities that the local governments had found intractable. Waging war against an oligarchy, though, requires no justification since the problem is the governments that stood in the way of freedom. Besides, Demosthenes argues, oligarchical governments are unreliable and therefore incapable of sustaining long-lasting friendships.

From this perspective, it was better for Athens to wage war on other Greek cities with democratic regimes than to be on friendly terms with those ruled by oligarchies. For one thing, there could be no guarantee that oligarchs would respect an agreement because they failed to respect the freedom of their fellow citizens. Philip II, however, was responsible for spreading oligarchies, making himself an enemy of freedom. In *On Organization* (Dem. 13.9), Demosthenes appeals to the *pathos* of the audience in similar terms, affirming that the citizens should hate the enemies governed by oligarchies more than those living in a democracy and, by extension, that Philip II has revealed himself as the true enemy of freedom, one determined to destroy the *politeia* and replace it with an oligarchy. In practical terms, the type of regime was irrelevant to Athenian imperial policies, for there is no evidence of differences in Athens's treatment of

cities based on their forms of government. Nevertheless, Demosthenes systematically reinforces this difference for his audiences.

In characterizing democracy, he naturally emphasizes freedom, which is in line with his interest in emphasizing to the audience that Athens never submitted to a foreign ruler. The advantages of freedom for a democracy include ensuring that good citizens maintain a healthy rivalry among themselves, competing for honours and rewards offered by the *demos* (D. 20.108)—which is only possible in a democracy guided by the belief that everyone has equal and fair rights (τῶν ἴσων καὶ τῶν δικαίων, D. 21.67). The rewards of democracy are better than those of any other regime. In an oligarchy, the rich distribute rewards as they please, regardless of the merit of the recipients, who are, therefore, seen in many cases as sycophants. In a democracy, the principle of *isegoria* prevents the meritless distribution of rewards (D. 20.15). Furthermore, freedom of speech is important to prevent those in power from distributing favours to their friends (D. 20.17). In general, in the speeches of Demosthenes, democracy is characterized by the notion that the *demos*, as the legitimate holder of power, rewards the good citizen for his good deeds. This power is rooted in freedom and laws that protect citizens from anyone who wishes to take power away from the people (D. 21.107).

Freedom, however, can also cause problems for a democracy. Thus, orators may abuse the right of *isegoria* and persuade the citizens to pass laws and decrees contrary to their interests (D. 20.3). To avoid this pitfall, citizens need to be held accountable for what they say, for example through a protective mechanism such as the *graphe paranomon*, a legal procedure for challenging legislation and decrees and the authors thereof. Demosthenes does not criticize the freedom of speech in a democracy in principle but draws attention to some citizens, his opponents, who, he says, could take advantage of this freedom to achieve their private aims to the detriment of the community, characterizing them as liars and manipulators (Leite 2014).

In addition to being a liar, Demosthenes's bad citizen also accepts bribes, but the practice of bribery is more likely to be found out in a democracy owing to political transparency and freedom of speech, which empower citizens to inspect public officials and report them for any wrongdoing. Demosthenes also alerted his audiences to statements favourable to the oligarchy, questioning whether his fellow citizens were truly receptive to such rhetoric (D. Prooem. 2.1). For him, their true intent was to receive even greater advantages (i.e. through the payment of bribes) while excluding the people from any possibility of receiving benefits (D. Prooem. 2.2).

Further, because bribery was part of the real world of ancient Greek politics, a major responsibility of democratic institutions was to prevent it. One measure implemented for this purpose in Athens was the use of sortition (Dabdab Trabulsi 2018, 116–17; Sintomer 2021) as the complex system to select jurors for the popular courts (Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 63–6). Bribery also played a role in foreign policy, for instance, in securing local allies, and could serve to avoid armed conflict. According to Demosthenes, this strategy was one of Philip II's strategies for becoming an autocratic leader (αὐτοκράτωρ) and lord of all (κύριος πάντων),

paying off officials so that the cities would accept disadvantageous agreements (D. 18.235). He further asserts that there are individuals in Athens willing to lie on behalf of the city's enemies and prevent the proper consideration of serious matters in exchange for gifts. The offence, he insists, is especially serious in a democratic government in which speeches serve as the basis for political decisions.

There is no greater crime someone could commit against you than to speak false words. For how could people whose government is based on speeches govern themselves securely unless the speeches are true? And if someone is bribed to speak in support of policies that favor the enemy, how does that not also put you at risk? (D. 19.184; translation Yunis 2005).

To discourage bribery, the attention of officials' fellow citizens was important. For this reason, jurors should be careful when passing sentence, for, should they acquit a notoriously guilty defendant, they could be seen as having placed personal gain before their oath to follow the laws (D. 22.45).

The transparency of public actions, vigilant observation of one another, freedom of speech, and the liability of any citizen to face judgement for public crimes—all of these policies made democracy unattractive to those who wished to lead an unscrupulous life (D. 22.31). On the other hand, in an oligarchy, illegal and unethical behaviour may be committed without recriminations (D. 22.32) since those who hold power are not subject to scrutiny, even after committing shameful acts. Therefore, in addition to freedom, the transparency of public transactions distinguishes democracy from oligarchy.

Political transparency is among the oldest problems in political philosophy. The issue is discussed in Herodotus (Hdt. III 83) when Darius argues that monarchy is superior because decisions are restricted to the king, so that information that could be damaging, for instance, relating to war plans, cannot be leaked. Transparency and secrecy are a part of the politics with which each form of government deals in a distinct way. In a democracy, transparency is essential, as just discussed, regarding the actions of those who exercise political power, together with accountability and the right to make accusations against public officials. That is, true democratic regimes exercise public power in public (Bobbio 2015).<sup>9</sup> In fact, of the forms of government, only democracy imposes on those in power the obligation to make their acts transparent. Of course, at times, secrecy is beneficial and even essential for the functioning of a democracy; the example of war plans was already mentioned and the principle of the secret ballot is enshrined in contemporary representative democracies. It is up to the people to decide whether keeping a secret is positive or negative for a polity (Bobbio 2015, 63). Thus, according to Bobbio (2015), a secret becomes especially harmful during a scandal, which represents a disconnect between the promises of democracy and their fulfilment. A scandal can ruin a democracy, as has been

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of the public in Athenian democracy and the role of knowledge aggregation see Ober, 2021.

the case in some modern countries in which successive scandals have significantly undermined public trust in democratic institutions. For Demosthenes, peer pressure and transparency prevented “shameless and insolent and thieving and arrogant” individuals (ἀναιδῆ καὶ θρασὺν καὶ κλέπτην καὶ ὑπερήφανον, D. 22.47) from participating in a democracy. His expectation was that citizens would respect the laws and have “compassion, mercy, and all the feelings typical of free men” (ἔλεος, συγγνώμη, πάνθ’ ἃ προσήκει τοῖς ἐλευθέροις, D. 22.57; translation by Harris 2008).

The city’s greatest assets, Demosthenes therefore declares, are its democratic constitution and its freedom, which are made possible by its laws (D. 24.5). For democratic institutions to function, citizens have to be “philanthropic and democratic and neither cruel nor violent nor oligarchic” (φιλανθρώπως καὶ δημοτικῶς οὐδὲν γὰρ ὤμῶν οὐδὲ βίαιον οὐδ’ ὀλιγαρχικόν, D. 24.24; translation by Harris 2008).<sup>10</sup> With this opposition, he cautions his fellow-citizens to ensure that new laws and decrees will not unravel the *politeia* (D. 24.78). Thus, all legislation should follow democratic principles, and citizens should condemn a lawmaker who legislates on behalf of those whose acts damage society rather than for the purpose of protecting the temples and the people (μήθ’ ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶν μήθ’ ὑπὲρ τοῦ δήμου νομοθετεῖ, D. 24.119). The religious dimension and respect for customs constituted an essential aspect of Athenian civic life constantly mentioned by the Attic orators.

Laws also played an important role in maintaining the city’s power, which was, in turn, linked to the thalassocracy projected by its triremes that had given Athens a unique position in the Greek world. Demosthenes, inspired by an idealized notion of the thalassocracy, considers democracy, especially as manifest in a city’s laws, necessary for both maintaining and equitably sharing its wealth (D. 24.216). On this point, his analysis resembles that of the author of the *Constitution of the Athenians*, who likewise attributes to the *demos* the responsibility for maintaining the empire and describes the *demos* as the greatest beneficiary of its revenues (Ps. Xen. *Ath. Pol.* 1–2).

Maintenance of the Athenian empire depended on winning battles and making good decisions collectively and in accordance with the law and principles of freedom (D. 26.10). These were fundamental elements of ancient democracy, along with public participation in civic institutions. In the operation of these institutions, advantageous proposals (βέλτιστα λέγοντας) should, naturally, outweigh the bad (μοχθηρίαν ἀντιλεγόντων, D. 19.185). In the oligarchies and tyrannies, however, none of this was necessary, because the decisions were restricted to a few and subject to no debate:

[...] In those forms of government [oligarchy or tyranny], I believe, everything is done immediately by dictate. But with you first the Council must consider every matter and issue a preliminary decision, and that cannot happen any day but only when heralds and envoys have been notified in advance. Next, the

<sup>10</sup> The same was in D. 22.51.

Assembly must meet, and that takes place when the laws specify. Then the politicians who offer the best policy must defeat and overcome those who oppose them out of ignorance or corruption (D. 19.185; translation by Yunis 2005).

Democracy for Demosthenes is also characterized by the action of the courts that judge private and public cases, the council that makes its decisions in accordance with the law, and the assembly that brings the citizens together (cf. D. 24.99). For this kind of cohesiveness to be possible, the aforementioned *mis-thophoria* was necessary (D. 24.99), as it was at the height of the thalassocracy.

By Demosthenes's time, democracy had already consolidated the participation of even the poorest Athenian citizens as political actors in maintaining the empire. In particular, a considerable portion of them served in the Athenian navy. The social opposition between poor and rich was also mapped onto the ideological opposition between democracy and oligarchy. Thus, according to Aristotle, the poor govern democracies and the rich govern oligarchies (Aris. *Pol.* 3, 1279a–80a). Demosthenes understood these conditions, and, notably, mapped the opposition between poor and rich onto the opposition between good and bad citizens, leading his audience to identify with the former since the good citizens had as their main duty the defence of the city (D 16.32).

Thus, Demosthenes mobilizes a traditional conceptualization of democracy in terms of freedom and laws. The association of democracy with justice and the guarantee of freedom elicited a powerful sense of *pathos* in his audiences (Sancho Rocher 2001, 48–9). Democracy is preferable to oligarchy (D. 22.51; D. 24.163) because it brings prosperity (D. 20.111), justice, transparency, and courts composed entirely of citizens (D. 24.58), accountability (D. 19.2), and the guarantee that the laws will protect the citizens (D. 18.132). The laws especially protect those with few resources and lacking in rhetorical skill and, therefore, particularly susceptible to suffering injustices at the hands of the powerful. An example of citizen protection in a democracy is that no one may enter another's dwelling without permission or prior authorization by a decree of the assembly (*ἀνευ ψηφίσματος*) (D. 18.132). Only subjects with oligarchical tendencies, Demosthenes asserts, such as Androtion (D. 22) and Meidias (D. 21), disrespect these rules. Therefore, in his view, under a democratic regime, the law is the same for the strong and weak, while under an oligarchy, the strongest overpower the weak (D. 13.29).

## 5. Demosthenes and Oligarchy

Like the idea of democracy, the idea of oligarchy was disputed in ancient Greek political thought (Sancho Rocher 1991, 258). There is evidence for this dispute in the division between Plato and Aristotle on the one hand, who favoured oligarchy and looked with suspicion on democracy, and Polybius on the other, who favoured democracy and was suspicious of oligarchy (Plb. 6.1–11, 43–57). All three agreed that tyranny was the worst form of government, though they

differed on whether it was more closely related to democracy or oligarchy. In Demosthenes's rhetoric, tyranny was always linked to the oligarchy.

Tyranny for the Greeks did not always have a negative connotation. The term refers to the taking of power through force or persuasion. Typically, tyrants were members of a city's elite class, and, in the archaic period, they performed important services for the community, especially in terms of expanding access to citizenship. After the period of tyrannies, which rarely survived more than three generations, oligarchies and democracies emerged that were the predominant forms of government in the classical period.

The negative aspect of the tyrant who abuses his power was present in Greek literature from an early time. This sense was strengthened in the 5th and 4th centuries BC, in part owing to Greeks' exposure to the figure of the Near Eastern monarch, especially the Persian king. Common examples of tyrants' abuse of power included confiscation of property, capital punishment without trial, and indiscriminately exiling political opponents (Forsdyke 2009, 237).

Greek democrats and oligarchs alike mobilized the concept of tyranny as a counterpoint to criticize various forms of government (Forsdyke 2009, 245). Thus, democrats likened oligarchs to tyrants by pointing to their shared lack of transparency and unequal treatment of citizens before the law. From an ideological perspective, tyranny represented the opposite of good democratic government because it required the citizen to submit to the will of one man. These arguments served to criticize the performance of elites (Forsdyke 2009, 236). Again, such criticism had a long history in Greek thought tracing back to Herodotus, who puts in the mouth of one Persian, Otanes, a defence of ruler by the many on the grounds that the citizens are not subjected to the *hybris* and envy of a single individual (Hdt. III 80). Herodotus then has another Persian, Megabyzus, counter with the argument that the people display the typical characteristics of a tyrant, particularly disorderliness, violence, and impulsiveness (Hdt. III 81). It is precisely in this sense that the oligarchs used tyranny to criticize democracy, to instil in the elite the fear that they would be treated badly by the people, just as a tyrant abuses his subjects, including: i) financial exploitation and the moral duty to pay liturgies, ii) blame when a collective decision proves wrong, and iii) the threat of ostracism (Forsdyke 2009, 239). While disenfranchising the people, the oligarchs also sought to value the laws, rescuing its superhuman character. Thus, they made themselves political experts, justifying their unique position within the government (Sancho Rocher 1991, 261).

Generally speaking, then, Greek democrats labelled any disrespect of the will of the many as tyrannical, while oligarchs saw the people as a wishful tyrant. Their one point of agreement about tyranny was that it was characterized by the abuse of power. Demosthenes's negative characterization of both oligarchy and tyranny is rooted in the fact that, in both cases, a minority considers itself above the law. At times, he cites the events of 411 and 404 BC to highlight the serious drawbacks of oligarchy (Sancho Rocher 2002, 232), focusing on the persecution of citizens and suspension of democratic institutions, such as the people's court, during those short-lived regimes. Another element of the orator's nega-

tive characterization is slavery (Leite 2019a). Thus, he depicts Philip II and his allies as being on the side of oligarchy and tyranny, mainly because their actions limit the freedom of individual citizens and the city itself.

The abuse of power typical of tyranny is the main characteristic mobilized by Demosthenes in his descriptions of the Macedonian king.<sup>11</sup> For him, Philip II is driven by *hybris* (ὕβριστης, D. 1.23) and ambition (φιλοτιμία, D. 2.18). Wherever the monarch passes, he undermines the dignity, supremacy, and freedom of the cities, in part by altering their constitutions (εἰ δ' ὁμοίως ἀπάντων τὸ ἀξίωμα, τὴν ἡγεμονίαν, τὴν ἐλευθερίαν περιείλετο, μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ τὰς πολιτείας, D. 18.65).

But many of these cities, indeed all of them, fared worse than we did! For if after his victory Philip straightaway up and left and then kept to himself, bringing grief neither to any of his allies nor to any other Greeks, then one could blame and disparage those who opposed his actions. But since he stripped from all alike their reputation, their power, and their freedom, and, from as many as he could, even their very form of government, how is it that your decision to follow my advice was not absolutely commendable? (D. 18.65; translation by Yunis 2005).

The tyrant, then, acts without respecting common laws or listening to the advice and decisions of his fellow citizens. The oligarch may also display these behaviours. Demosthenes assimilates tyrants and oligarchs through the negative depiction of the *ethos* of these opponents of democracy, to the point of crediting them with evils greater than those of the Thirty Tyrants. (D. 22.52; D. 24.163–4), while elsewhere in his speeches he describes the events of 411 and 404 BC as the worst in the history of Athens<sup>12</sup> (e.g. D. 24.57, 90), including the various executions ordered by the oligarchs (D. 40.46). The brutality (ἀσελγέστερος) of life under the Thirty Tyrants did not, however, extend to disregard of the principle of the inviolability of the home (D. 22.52, D. 24.163). Also at that time, the courts committed major excesses, delivering unjust verdicts (D. 24.58), and rich and poor alike were afraid to go at the *agora* (D. 22.52; 24.164).

The Thirty Tyrants left deep marks on the Athenians that facilitated later Athenian orators' negative characterization of their regime as cruel and lacking in respect for freedom and the laws (Sancho Rocher 2002, 245). Under such a regime, only the richest would profit, providing them, at least, with a feeling of harmony among themselves (D. 24.108). Accordingly, they would be willing to do anything to preserve their power and ward off popular participation in government.

## 6. Final considerations

Demosthenes articulated his ideal of democracy by opposing it to oligarchy in terms of freedom, popular participation, and respect for the laws. He expected that citizens would come to consider democracy preferable to oligarchy because, under

<sup>11</sup> On the characterization of monarchy in Demosthenes see Bianco 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Siron 2017.

the former, everything would be exceedingly easy (τοῦτ' ἀνεύροιτε προχειρότατον, D. 22.51). The opposition served well to characterize the opponents of democratic government, especially Philip II, who Demosthenes urged the Athenians to consider an enemy with all the negative characteristics of both a tyrant and an oligarch (D. 6.24–5). He did not reserve this sort of condemnation for the Macedonian king but extended it to his Athenian opponents, such as Meidias, Androtion, and Timocrates.

The opposition between democracy and oligarchy serves to characterize the *ethos* of those involved in politics, as Demosthenes makes clear in the hyperbolic claim that his adversary is responsible for acts more terrible than those of the Thirty Tyrants. He also invokes the *pathos* of his audience when urging his fellow citizens to defend the freedom of their city. Demosthenes asserts that freedom is one of the key aspects of democracy, though whether this pro-democracy discourse reflected his personal beliefs or was simply deployed to elicit the citizens' sympathy is unclear. The fact is that the figure of Demosthenes entered posterity as a great defender of democracy and freedom in Athens. For the moment, this is what democratic countries need to recover.

Democracy, as a space characterized by freedom, equality, transparency, and public participation, will always be subject to the predation of opportunists, who, at the first chance, will try to subvert it. The enemies of democracy will keep trying to transform democratic governments into the kind of oligarchy described by Demosthenes: a space without freedom, full participation, or public transparency. This is the *fantasma* (Eco 2017) that haunts democracies now, and there is great need for vigilance because, as Bobbio (2015, 83) observes, with each new secret, a new *coup d'état* and the death of democracy becomes more likely.

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## Concluding remarks

Breno Battistin Sebastiani, Delfim Ferreira Leão

This book intended to emphasize three main suggestions for further reflections on both how democracies dealt in the past with issues involving *staseis* and *metabolai*, and how they can deal with them today. Those suggestions can be subsumed as epistemological, ethical, and anthropological ones.

As for the first group of suggestions, the chapters by Leão, Correa, and Gontijo highlight the central role played by *sophia* both for realizing circumstances of *staseis* and *metabolai* and appropriately dealing with them. *Sophia* is here understood as something much broader than someone's intellectual background, or the amount of knowledge one can collect through one's life. In a multi-disciplinary perspective, *sophia* means a keen and high-minded knowledge of the past combined with a sharp eye turned to the present. The byproduct of the hard work of philosophers, historians, orators, and so many others directly engaged with political affairs in their own contexts, form the necessary basis that enables anyone to start reflecting about two capital issues: the pressures exerted by *staseis* and *metabolai*, and how to appropriately deal with them so as to improve the situation rather than aggravate circumstances out of which they themselves arised.

A second group is formed by ethical suggestions chiefly derived from the chapters by Sano and Sebastiani, and Fialho. As Sano and Sebastiani highlighted, the lack of commitment towards an economic democracy (conveyed also as social and political) is equivalent to complacency, if not complicity, with forms

Breno Battistin Sebastiani, University of Sao Paulo, Brazil, [sebastiani@usp.br](mailto:sebastiani@usp.br), 0000-0002-3777-6086  
Delfim Ferreira Leão, University of Coimbra, Portugal, [leo@fl.uc.pt](mailto:leo@fl.uc.pt), 0000-0002-8107-9165

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of domination that hide beneath beautiful names easily legitimized by rhetorical charmers.

Without solid and properly oriented ethical foundations, *staseis* and *metabolai* can be quickly converted into negative and/or destructive situations instead of starting points to bettering or creating promising environments. This can happen when, for instance, economic power assumes the upper hand on political decisions or, as cristal-clearly stated by Fialho, “[t]he city is only the means by which personal interests are achieved”. Ancient tyrants, like current populists or (would be) dictators of whatever color of the ideological spectrum, form the most conspicuous examples of the former lack of commitment towards an economic democracy, especially when it becomes notorious that they are submitting their homelands to their own whims.

Finally, and according to Soares’ reflections, this book calls attention to the deep impact that every day and apparently banal decisions can have, and most of the time actually do, not only on the environment immediately neighboring the poleis, but also on *the environment* as a whole: “the environment is not separated from human life, nor is it not merely a setting for human history”. To pay attention to local *staseis* and *metabolai* and adequately ponder their reverberation beyond our own narrow walls is a necessary first step to realizing how all of us are interconnected and mutually dependent on each other.

These three points form like a red-thread that does not aim of course to serve as a guide to political action (in the sense that any of our actions are political and imply a previous political choice, either conscious or not); they can though at least give food for thought for everyone interested not only in reading about our world and its past, but chiefly in engaging their own knowledge with their immediate actions, because of being more conscious of the fact that our future as species depends also on a deep ethical commitment that shows up in every single one of our decisions.

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**Breno Battistin Sebastiani** is a historian of ancient Greece and Associate Professor of Classics (USP/CNPq, Brazil). He translated Polybius' five complete books into Portuguese, and co-edited *Sources et modèles des historiens anciens* and *A poiesis da democracia*.

**Delfim Ferreira Leão** is Full Professor at the Institute of Classical Studies at the University of Coimbra. His research is focused on ancient history, law and political theory of the Greeks, theatrical pragmatics, and the ancient novel. He also has a deep interest in Digital Humanities and scholarly communication.

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