THE KRATOS IN DÉMOKRATIA

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Démokratia is at the same time one of the simplest words in the ancient Greek lexicon to translate and one of the most difficult to understand.\(^1\) It suggests ‘democracy’, but what did that imply two and a half thousand years ago? As is often observed, démos meant ‘people’, kratos ‘power’ or ‘rule’, leading to the conventional glosses ‘rule by the people’ or ‘people-power’.\(^2\) But these glosses raise further questions. ‘People’ defined how? ‘Ruling’ or ‘exercising power’ in what way?

In previous work, I have tackled the first question, arguing—against the prevailing view that démos in this context denoted ‘people’ in the sense of the entire citizen body—that the démos in démokratia indicated, first and foremost, the common people formally constituted as a political body, that is to say, a popular assembly.\(^3\) Démokratia, on this interpretation, indicated rule by, or the power of, the assembly, in contradisinction from that of a council or single man.

In this paper I turn to the second question. What did, and did not, kratos imply in the classical democratic context? I focus here on our most important source, the Aristotelian Athênaiôn Politeia or ‘Constitution of the Athenians’, rediscovered only in 1890 and whose full impact on the interpretation of Athenian democracy has arguably not yet been felt.\(^4\) Establishing the meaning of kratos requires distinguishing it from two proximate ‘power’ terms: archê, usually translated ‘rule’, ‘government’ or ‘empire’, and to kuros, ‘authority’ or ‘sovereignty’ (adjective kurios, ‘authoritative’ or ‘sovereign’), and one advantage of the Athênaiôn Politeia is that it contains these and cognate terms in abundance. Accordingly, the relations among them may be investigated without having to make allowance for different historical or rhetorical contexts.

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\(^{3}\) ‘The Dêmos in Démokratia’, Classical Quarterly, forthcoming.

\(^{4}\) As argued in my Rethinking Athenian Democracy (Harvard diss., 2013).
The disadvantage of focusing on a single source is of course that the author’s usages may have been idiosyncratic—a difficulty which I mitigate by drawing on other texts throughout the paper, albeit in a less systematic manner.

The results of this comparative lexical analysis are twofold. First, in contrast to Josiah Ober, I argue that kratos implied the physical superiority of one party over another. Typically, it denoted the capacity of one party to overpower another by force of arms. In this respect, it differed from kurios, which was associated with juridical authority, sanctioned either by the will of the gods or by the agreement of men. Yet as the Athênaïôn Politeia shows, what was gained through kratos could easily become kurios: it required only general acceptance. Putting this together with my earlier work on the meaning of dêmos, I argue that démokratia implied the capacity, in the first instance physical but soon enshrined in accepted political processes, of the collective common people to dominate its rivals for command of the politeia. Who were these rivals? The term archê suggests one answer: those who held political office. The role played by prostatai tou dêmou or dêmagogoi, ‘demagogues’ or (more neutrally) dêmos-leaders, in ancient Greek politics suggests another. Ultimately, it was the dêmos’s capacity to control its political elite—both office-holders and public speakers—through political processes and (when necessary) physical force that secured its political rule.

Second, the analyses of kratos, kurios, archê and démagogia offered here together suggest a typology of political power that may illuminate not only ancient but also modern democratic politics. Kratos, archê, kurios and démagogia represent four distinct forms of power: respectively, superior physical strength, power derived from office, juridical power or jurisdiction, and rhetorical influence. Roughly, this corresponds to domination, administration, sovereignty, and leadership. In Athens, sovereignty—that is to say, rule—belonged to those who dominated physically, i.e. the mass of ordinary citizens, while administrative and leadership functions were performed by weaker parties.

To the extent that, in modern democracies, office-holders and political leaders are also physically supreme, we may suspect one possible cause of dissatisfaction with democracy: the dêmos’s lack of ‘teeth’ with respect to its political elite. A mass of citizens cannot, by its nature, hold office or perform a leading political role. Its sovereignty rests on its capacity to compel those who play those roles to accept its rule, that is, ultimately, on kratos. The kratos of the Athenian dêmos was tested and proven militarily in 508/7 and 404/3, and procedurally every time a political leader or office-holder was convicted of a political charge and accepted his punishment. Whether a modern dêmos could prove its strength in these ways is uncertain. Yet where kratos is lacking, on the

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ancient Greek view, there is no démokratia—leading to frustration for those citizens who would rather the collective common people dominate the political elite than be dominated by them.

I. ‘The démos is ho kratôn’ (Ath. Pol. 41)

As noted above, the kratos in démokratia is normally interpreted ‘rule’ or ‘power’. In an important and widely cited discussion, Josiah Ober has argued strongly in favour of ‘power’. Though he observes that ‘Greek linguistic usage of the noun kratos and its verbal forms ranges widely across the power spectrum, from “domination” to “rule” to “capacity”’, he finds that ‘kratos, when it is used as a regime-type suffix, becomes power in the sense of strength, enablement, or “capacity to do things”’. 6 Démokratia thereby refers to a démos’s ‘collective capacity to do things in the public realm, to make things happen’, or, as he puts it in his more recent book Demopolis, “the People’s capacity to do things”—to make history through joint action at scale’. 7

This interpretation allows Ober to make the analytically significant move of distinguishing démokratia from ‘majority rule’, or as he also puts it, ‘majoritarian tyranny’. 8 Yet his argument is a curious one. He begins by presenting all the comparands for démokratia attested in the classical sources: aristokratia, isokratia, timokratia, and gynaikokratia (‘best’, ‘equal’, ‘honour’ and ‘women’ -kratia, respectively). He then infers, reasonably enough, that krat- cannot indicate office-holding, as arch- does in oligarchia (to be discussed further below), since of the prefixes listed only hoi aristoi, ‘the excellent’, and hai gynaikes, ‘women’, would personally have been able to hold office. 9

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

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6 Ober, ‘Original Meaning’, p. 6. In Demopolis, this becomes: “Greek linguistic usage of the noun kratos and its verbal forms ranges widely across the power spectrum, from ‘strength/power to’ through ‘constraint’ to ‘domination/power over’” (p. 25). As I do not find “constraint” attested, and Ober provides no examples, I will not take up this formulation here but focus instead on his original presentation.

7 Ober, ‘Original Meaning’, p. 7; Ober, Demopolis, p. 29.

8 Ober, ‘Original Meaning’, p. 3; Demopolis, p. 22.

the public good of *kratos*—to public power that conduces to the common
good by enabling good things to happen in the public realm*.\(^\text{10}\)

Interpreting the *krat-* suffix purely by way of an analogy with
terms featuring the *iso-* prefix is an interesting strategy, but the direct
evidence pertaining to both *isokratia* and other *krat-* terms points in
another direction. Neither *isokratia* nor other *isokrat-* terms are well
attested in the classical sources. Herodotus, Hippocrates and the author of
the Aristotelian *Problems* provide our only examples.\(^\text{11}\) But later examples
offer some clues as to its meaning. In Galen, *isokrateia* implied
‘equilibrium’ or ‘equivalence’ (*Hist. Phil.* 126), while Zeno the Stoic used
isokrateô to suggest ‘evenly balanced’ (1.27).

What seems to be implied in these cases is an *equal balance of*
*opposing forces*, and the classical examples support this interpretation. In
Hippocrates, the reference is to wine mixed ‘half and half’, i.e. mixed with
an equal quantity of water (*Morb.* 2.42). In *Problems*, the reference is to
the equinox, which is defined as an even balance (*isokratês*) between
winter and summer (942b37). In Herodotus, meanwhile, the Issodones are
said to eat the flesh of their deceased fathers, but in other respects to be a
‘law-abiding people and the women to rule equally with the men’
(*isokratees de homoiôs hai gynaikes toisi andrasì, 4.26*). The male
Issodones do not dominate over the female, that is to say; rather, the
powers of the two genders are evenly balanced. In the other example, a
contrast is drawn between *isokratia* and tyranny, ‘a thing more
unrighteous and bloodthirsty than anything else on this earth’ (5.92A, tr.
Godley). Here, the even balance of forces in one political system is
contrasted with another in which one man dominates over the rest.\(^\text{12}\)

The other *krat-* compounds listed by Ober also suggest opposing
forces, except that without the *iso-* prefix, what is implied is not an even
balance of forces or non-domination but rather an unequal balance, that is,
domination by one party over another. Aristotle, in the *Politics*, cites
gynaikokratia te peri tas oikias, ‘women’s domination at home’, as
something that arises in extreme democracy and tyranny (1313b33). *Krato-
here cannot possibly denote a ‘capacity to make good things happen in the
public realm’, not only because the context is not public but domestic but
also and more importantly because Aristotle connects gynaikokratia to the
‘dissemination of reports against men’, or in other words to the
domination of women *over* men. The participle gynaikokratoumenoi,
which appears in his discussion of Sparta and other military communities,
suggests the same thing. Aristotle claims not that Spartan women are able
to make things happen in the public realm, but that they actually rule over

\(^{10}\) Ober, ‘Original Meaning’, p. 6.

\(^{11}\) Hdt. 4.26, 5.92; Hipp. *Morb.* 2.42; Aristot., *Problems* 942b37.

\(^{12}\) Ober, *Demopolis*, p. 26, argues that ‘Because *isokratia* was employed as a synonym for
dêmokratia, it is especially important for comparative purposes’. It is worth noting that a) Hdt. 5.92A is the only extant use of this term and b) it is not obvious that it is intended
synonymously with démokratia. In fact the referent is (Ionic) plural—*tas polis*, ‘cities’—
not even Athens alone.
their male fellow-citizens. This is evident from his conclusion. ‘In the time of [the Spartan] empire many things were managed (diókeito) by women; yet what difference does it make whether the women rule (archein) or whether the rulers (tous archontas) are ruled (archesthai) by women? The result is the same.’ The pairing of the active verb archein with the passive archesthai leaves no doubt that what Aristotle has in mind is the rule of women over those who (nominally) rule, that is, again, the uneven balance of power between two parties.

Similarly, aristokratia implies rule by the best, while timokratia (at least on the usual interpretation of Aristotle’s definition) suggests rule by those who possess a certain property-qualification (Pol. 1293b1, NE 1160a36, b17). In each case krat- implies not merely power but a power differential between two forces. It suggests the existence of two parties, one of whom dominates, or prevails, over the other.¹⁴

How far does the Athênaion Politeia support this interpretation? Leaving aside démokratia itself, which appears eight times (chs. 23, 29, 38, 40 and 41), krat-terms appear eleven times in this text. Twice, the verb krateó is used with the accusative object tauta, ‘these things’: ‘These deeds (tauta) I made prevail…’ (a line of Solon’s poetry quoted in ch. 12, tr. Rackham), and the archon’s proclamation that whatever someone holds at the start of the archon’s year in office, these things (tauta) he shall echêin and kratêin, ‘have and control’, until the end of the year (ch. 56). In these examples there is no clear reference to a power struggle, although Rackham’s rendering ‘prevail’ certainly suggests the pressure on Solon to have things turn out another way.

In the other nine cases, the power of one agent over another is evident. This may not be immediately obvious in relation to the noun autokratôr, which appears five times (chs. 31-2, 37-9). Defined in LSJ as ‘one’s own master’, in the Athênaion Politeia it usually refers to the power of elected generals, office-holders (in ch. 37, the Thirty) or treaty negotiators to act without further consultation of the body that had empowered them. It also appears in the post-civil war reconciliation


¹⁴ In Demopolis, Ober acknowledges in a footnote that he ‘cannot positively eliminate the counterposition that in each case, what is being asserted…is the defining characteristic (excellent, female, honorable, equal to one another) of the group that rules by domination over others. But this seems less likely, in light of the positive connotations of the relevant terms (with the possible exception of gunaikokratia) and the general Greek disapproval of brute domination of rulers over potential rulers (free, native males as opposed to e.g. slaves)’ (p. 27, n. 14). The issue here may be the negative connotations of ‘domination’ to modern (liberal?) ears. The ancient Greeks may not have regarded this quality, insofar as it inhere in kratos, in quite the same light. One could of course go too far, as tyrannos showed; but domination in the sense of one athlete dominating a competition, for example, was perfectly acceptable to the ancient Greeks, and same thing may have applied to politics.
agreement of 403 between the oligarchical and democratical factions: those who had supported the defeated oligarchs and wished to leave the city were granted the nearby settlement of Eleusis, where they would be kurious kai autokratoras heautôn, ‘sovereign and masters of themselves’, and enjoy their own revenues (ch. 39). Yet krat- here can be understood as signalling the exceptional nature of the independence enjoyed by the possessor, in implicit contradistinction from the rule by another which was the norm. Generals were typically held accountable for their actions in the field, and offering full autonomy to the oligarchs at Eleusis, only a few miles from the city, was an extraordinary move (even if, in the end, the enclave lasted only three years before being folded back into the Athenian polis). In both cases, being autokratôr denoted being ‘one’s own master’ in a context where being answerable to another was expected.

The comparative adverb engkratesteros, ‘more firmly’, appears once (ch. 35) and reveals another dimension of krat- terminology. The polis, we are told, was initially delighted with the moderate-seeming measures of the Thirty and believed that they were acting for the best. But once the Thirty tén polin engkratesteron eschon, ‘held the polis more firmly’, they ‘kept their hands off none of the citizens, but put to death those of outstanding wealth, birth or reputation’. Superior power, that of the Thirty over the rest of the citizen body, is clearly in evidence here. Additionally we must note the sense of physical force suggested by eschon and confirmed by the account of the executions carried out by the Thirty. Paul Cartledge has emphasized the association of kratos with ‘grip’, and that is certainly indicated in this passage.15

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

Dêmos appears again in chs. 40 and 41, both times as the grammatical subject of the verb krateô. These uses effectively mark the transition from the historical part of the text, when démokratia was not securely established, to the contemporaneous part, when, according to the author, it was well settled (ch. 41). In ch. 40, the topic is the generosity of the victorious Athenians in paying back the funds that the Thirty had borrowed from the Spartans in order to fight the civil war, even though the peace treaty had called for each side to take responsibility for its own

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15 P. Cartledge, Ancient Greek Political Thought in Practice (Cambridge, 2009), p. 74.
debts. This generosity is all the more remarkable since, the author notes, in other states, *hoi démoi kratésantes*, ‘the newly prevailing démor’, not only do not pay any more out of their own funds but even make a redistribution of land’. Superior power is certainly indicated here: having defeated their opponents, the victorious démoi are able to redistribute their property. Physical power may also be implied, if as in Athens the démos’s political supremacy was the result of its victory in war.

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

After which it [the political system] has continued down to today, constantly taking on additions to the power (exousia) of the majority (plêthos). For the démos has made itself sovereign (kurion) over everything, and everything is managed (dioikeitai) through decrees and courts in which the démos is ho kratôn, for even the decisions of the Council have come to the démos.

Once again superior power is in view. The participle ho kratôn literally means ‘the powerful one’ or ‘the prevailing one’, in implicit contradistinction from some other less powerful party. Indeed, it is worth noting that both times that démos and krat- are seen together in this text, krat- is a participle: the noun kratos does not appear. The démos does not, in the Athênaion Politeia, ‘have’ or ‘hold’ kratos, as we say the people ‘have’ or ‘hold’ power. Rather, the démos simply is ‘the (more) powerful one’. This suggests that kratos is not conceived as a thing possessed by an agent, which can be alienated and transferred to from one party to another like a juridical property. Rather, kratos simply inheres in the dominant agent. In this respect it exactly resembles physical strength. Ho kratôn is the mighty one, in relation to which some other is weaker.

The use of krat- terminology in the Athênaion Politeia thus supports the view that krat- implied not a ‘capacity to do things’ but specifically the superior physical capacity of one party over another. As Nicole Loraux put it, kratos ‘designates superiority, and thus victory’. And this is in line with other evidence. In Aeschylus’ Suppliants, for example, krateô represents the power of the sons of Aegyptus over the supplicant maidens (387, 393). In Euripides’ Suppliants, it represents those victorious in battle (18, 684). Similarly, in the Constitution of the Athenians found among the writings of Xenophon, the Athenians are

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16 Here I follow P. J. Rhodes, *A Commentary on the Athênaion Politeia* (Oxford, 1992), 480. The papyri, Kenyon and Blass have *hoi démokratêsantes*, “those who have set up democracy.” The alternative reading would not affect my point.

17 Cf. however Hdt. 3.81, where to kratos is ‘given’ (pherein) and ‘invested’ (peritheômen).

repeatedly represented as ‘thalassocrats’ owing to their control of the sea (2.2, 14).

Most striking, krateó appears some 150 times in Thucydides, and all but a handful of cases concern military supremacy. We are told, for example, that Minos mastered (ekratêse) most of what is now called the Hellenic sea (1.4); that if the Greeks had taken sufficient supplies with them, they would easily have defeated (kratountes) the Trojans (1.11); that when the Plateans saw how few the invading Thebans were, they realised they could easily overpower (kratêsen) them (2.3); and so on. The handful of non-military uses also show one force prevailing over another. ‘As in art, so in politics, improvements ever prevail’ (kratein, 1.7, 1.3); ‘human nature, always rebelling against the law and now its master…’ (kratêsasa, 3.84); ‘the incalculable element in the future exercises the widest influence’ (kratei, 4.62); ‘good counsel, which entitles cities to direct armies’ (kratei, 8.76, all tr. Crawley). Krateó also appears in Thucydides’ account of the second debate on the fate of the Mytilenaeans. After Kleon and Diodotus had spoken, the Athenians ‘proceeded to a division, in which the show of hands was almost equal, although the motion of Diodotus carried the day’ (ekratêse, 3.49, tr. Crawley). Pace Ober, krat- could indeed indicate majority rule: the power of even a slim majority to determine the course of events, over the dissent of the minority.

The association of krat- with superior power, typically physical, thus seems strong. Yet this interpretation raises an important question. If, in dêmokratia, the dêmos had superior power, who or what were they superior to? Two possible answers present themselves. One is the entire polis or politeia: the object of the Thirty’s ‘grip’ in the example quoted above (Ath. Pol. 35). The other is any rivals for command of the politeia, such as the Thirty and their supporters.

Both interpretations are possible (and may, perhaps, be said to come to the same thing), but the latter is more in line with common usage. In the examples we have seen, even when the object of krateó is not itself a defeated party—for example, ‘these things’ (Ath. Pol. 12 and 56), or the sea (Thuc. 1.4, Ps.-Xenophon Ath. Pol. 2.2 and 14)—it is nonetheless implied that a power struggle has taken place. Krat- terminology, that is to say, suggests a power struggle between at least two parties over some object coveted by both, even when only the victorious party is named. By analogy, the kratos in dêmokratia suggested not that the dêmos had defeated or overpowered the politeia, but that it had overpowered—and continued to overpower—some unspecified rivals for its command.

Who, then, were these rivals? In 404/3, during and immediately after the civil war, the answer was obvious: the Thirty and their supporters. But what about in the mature dêmokratia of the late fourth century? If the dêmos was ho kratôn, the strong one, who in that context was ho hêttôn, the weaker party—or parties?

II. ‘If tas archas…archein kalôs’ (Ath. Pol. 43)
Though Ober’s argument that krat- implied a ‘capacity to make good things happen in the public realm’ is unconvincing, the premises from which he begins are sound. As he observes, the three most important ancient Greek regime-type terms were monarchia, oligarchia, and démokratia, and of these, démokratia stands out for two reasons. One, because unlike mon- (one) and olig- (few), démo- did not represent some number of persons but a collective body; and two, because krat- rather than arch- was used to represent the dèmos’s political supremacy.¹⁹

As Ober notes, this was not because démarchia was impossible to conceive. On the contrary, that term is attested, but it indicated not the rule of the ‘national’ dèmos but the office or rank of démarchos, that is, the chief official in a local deme (dèmos)—a position rather like a village mayor.²⁰ When démokratia was coined (usually supposed to be some time in the second quarter of the fifth century), arch- was thus deliberately passed over as an appropriate suffix. Accordingly, we may infer—as Ober does—that arch- and krat- meant different things.²¹ Indeed, the Athênaïon Politeia reveals a profound difference in their uses. Arch- terms are never associated with the ‘national’ dèmos, though they appear over 160 times—far more than any comparable power referand.²² Particularly striking is the fact that dèmos is never the subject of the verb archô, ‘rule’ or ‘hold office’, although other rulers or ruling bodies do take this verb, such as Peisistratus and the government of the Four Hundred and their associates, the ten generals autokratores (chs. 19 and 32).

So how did arch- and krat- differ? As Ober notes, archê had several meanings. ‘Beginning’ or ‘origin’ is exemplified in ch. 28: ‘Solon was the original (ex archês) champion of the dèmos’ (cf. chs. 35, 55). This usage need not detain us here. Another meaning, ‘empire’ (perhaps the most common in the extant sources), appears in chs. 24, 32 and 41. The first is a reference to the Athenians’ ‘despotic’ treatment of all their allies except the Chians, Lesbians and Samians, whom they kept as ‘guards of the empire’ (phulakas…tês archês). The others refer to the Athenians’ ‘empire [or ‘rule’] of the sea’ (tês thalattês archên), a usage also found in Thucydides (8.46) and Pseudo-Xenophon (2.4-6, 11, 13-14, 16).

A closely connected set of meanings is ‘rule’ ‘government’ and ‘power’. These meanings, and the overlaps between them, are illustrated by the Ath. Pol.’s account of the mid-sixth century tyranny (or ‘reign’, also archê) of Peisistratus and his sons. Peisistratus’ initial seizure of the Acropolis is described as ‘taking tên archên’, perhaps ‘taking the government’ or ‘taking power’ (ch. 14). He was then expelled from the

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²⁰ E.g. Dem. 57.63.
²² I have come across only two exceptions to this rule: Hdt 3.82.4 and Ps.-Xen. Ath. Pol. 3.14. From context it is not clear whether these uses are intended straightforwardly or represent a kind of play on words.
city by his opponents ‘before his archēs had taken root’ (ch. 14): ‘rule’ may be a good rendering here. He then recovered tên archēn (‘rule’, ‘power’) by force (ch. 15) and proceeded to manage the affairs of the polis in a ‘moderate and statesmanlike’ manner—though when his sons succeeded him, tên archēn (the ‘government’ or ‘regime’) became much harsher (ch. 16). Peisistratus remained en tê archē (‘in power’) for a long time (ch. 16), even growing old there (ch. 17). After his death his sons kateichon tên archēn, ‘took over the government’ (ch. 17), and the elder, Hippias, epestatei tês archēs, ‘took the lead in power’ (ch. 18).

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

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

Closer inspection of the Athēnaion Politeia suggests that archē, at least in within the context of a single politeia (that is, leaving aside the meaning ‘empire’), never suggested rule independent of office. Rather, where rule was implied—as in the case of the nine seventh-century archons, Peisistratus, or the Four Hundred—it was always as a function of office-holding. In the early history of Athens, ‘ruling’ and ‘holding office’ were indistinguishable. Holding office was simply what rulers did—or, equally, ruling was simply what office-holders did. Rule, that is to say, was personal: rulers performed the functions of government—which were principally religious and judicial (chs. 3 and 4)—themselves. Peisistratus, who ‘often went about the country himself settling disputes in person’, also followed this model (ch. 16), as did the Four Hundred and the Thirty.

In dēmokratia, however, office-holding and rule were discontinuous. That some significant change had occurred with respect to the status of office-holders is first signalled in ch. 13, in the discussion of the events of the years after Solon’s intervention. During this time the

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23 ‘Original Meaning’, p. 7 (though see Ps.-Xen. Ath. Pol. 3.14, as noted above, where the reference certainly seems to be to office-holding).
Athenians twice ‘did not appoint an archonta owing to stasis’; then they chose Damasias, who ruled (ërken) for two years and two months before being driven out; then they elected ten men to rule (ërkan) jointly. The crucial line is the next one: ‘This makes clear that the archôn had very great power (dynamin), for they were always having stasis about this archês’. Evidently, this was no longer the case.

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

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

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

III. ‘Kurios of the politeia’ (Ath. Pol. 9)

In a recent article, Melissa Lane has asked virtually the same question. ‘If those doing the ruling (in Greek, archein) are those who hold the offices (in Greek, archai)—call this the “standard equation”—how then might the mass of people nevertheless be in charge or in control?’ Though, as I have just argued, I do not think that archein, in the context of démokratia, did in fact imply ‘ruling’, Lane’s question is otherwise well put, and her answer important. She argues that this ‘equation’ was ‘solved’ by some fourth-century thinkers by suggesting ‘that the popular multitude…should be kurios’—which she translates ‘sovereign’—by electing the highest office-holders and holding them to account.24

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

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

As well as inanimate objects, kurios could apply to acts. One of the first acts of the Thirty was to allow citizens to bestow property on whomever they wished, which the author says they accomplished by ‘making the act of donation kurion’, again, plausibly, ‘decisive’ or ‘authoritative’ (ch. 35). It could also suggest ‘main’ or ‘principal’, as in

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ekklēsia kuria, the name of the main assembly meeting of each prytany and the one that offered the most pay to attendees (ch. 42).

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

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

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

Kurios thus connoted not merely, or necessarily, sovereignty but more broadly jurisdiction or juridical power. It indicated the power to make legally recognised and enforceable decisions within a certain defined field, whether the whole politeia or some other sphere. The nature of this power is suggested not only by the contexts already discussed, but also by the verbs in which kur- appears. The political systems sketched out by one hundred delegates during the regime of the Five Thousand were epikurōthentôn, ‘ratified’, by the majority (ch. 32). Similarly, it is said that the fourth-century thesmotheiai kouroi, ‘validate’ or ‘ratify’, contracts with other states (ch. 59). In each case, kur- implies

25 An important context that I will not discuss is the household. Kurios often meant ‘master’ or ‘guardian’, as in e.g. Aeschylus, Libation-Bearers 658, 689, and throughout Dem. 59.
the quality of lawfulness imparted to a decision because it is made by the proper agent.

Chapter 37 reveals the association of *kurios* with law particularly clearly. The Thirty had decided to destroy Theramenes, so they introduced two laws into the Council, with orders to pass them: one making the Thirty *autokratoras* to execute any of the citizens not on the roll of Three Thousand, and the other banning sharing in the current *politeia* for all who had taken part either in the demolition of the fort on Eetonia or in any opposition to the previous oligarchy of Four Hundred. Theramenes, of course, had done both, ‘so when the laws were ratified (epikurôthentôn) he became outside the *politeia* and the Thirty were *kurious* to kill him’. Here, as in the cases above, *kur-* connotes legitimate jurisdiction and lawfulness—even when the law-giving agent acts under duress, as in the case of the Council.

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

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

To some extent, the necessity of these procedures is implied by the concept of *kuros* itself. As has been discussed, *tas archas* were *kurioi* in

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their respective fields. But inasmuch as *kur-* terminology delineated a specific jurisdiction, being *kurios* implied limits on power as much as scope. Most *kurios* agents mentioned in the *Athênaïôn Politeia* were *kurios* over a relatively small domain, and both the limits of this domain and proper behaviour within it had to be controlled—by the agent that was *kurios* over the whole *politeia*.

There is an interesting twist here, however, in that these processes were judged not by the *dêmos* itself—that is, the *dêmos qua* assembly—but by the *dikastêria* or popular courts. It was the courts, staffed by ordinary citizens randomly selected in a lengthy process described in the final seven chapters of the *Athênaïôn Politeia*, that policed the activities of office-holders within the political system and thus maintained the sovereignty of the *dêmos qua* collective common people overall.

The significance of the courts rather than the assembly as the linchpin of demotic power first appears in the discussion of Solon’s reforms in ch. 9: the one that most strengthened the majority (*to plêthos*), the author claims, was the appeal to the *dikastérion*, ‘for the *dêmos* being *kurios* of the vote becomes *kurios* of the *politeia*’. It is suggested next by the Thirty’s early move to dissolve *kuros* lodged in the *dikastai*, the authority lodged in the judges (ch. 35). And it is confirmed and elaborated in ch. 41, in the crucial line that we have already seen: ‘the *dêmos* has made itself *kurion* over everything, and everything is managed by decrees and by *dikastérior* in which the *dêmos* is *ho kratôn*...’ In Athens, popular sovereignty rested on popular judicial power—specifically, the capacity of the *dêmos* to prevail in court. The *kuros* of the *dêmos* had been gained through *kratos*, but it was maintained through judicial procedures in which the *dêmos* continued to have the upper hand.

IV. ‘The eager *dêmagógountas*’ (*Ath. Pol. 26*)

Yet office-holders were not the biggest threat to the supremacy of the Athenian *dêmos*. In some circumstances they could certainly prove dangerous, as Aristotle, discussing in the *Politics* the various ways in which democracy can come to an end, recognized: ‘at Miletus a tyranny

27 In *Demopolis*, Ober suggest that *krat-* implies these limits. I cannot find any textual support for this claim.

28 The relationship of the courts to the assembly, and particularly the extent to which the courts represented the assembly, has been the subject of some controversy. See Alastair Blanshard, ‘What Counts as the Demos? Some Notes on the Relationship between the Jury and “The People” in Classical Athens’, *Phoenix* 58 (2004), pp. 28-48; Mogens Hansen, ‘The Concepts of Demos, Ekklesia and Dikasterion in Classical Athens’, *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 50 (2010), pp. 499-536; Josiah Ober, *The Athenian Revolution* (Princeton, 1998), pp. 107-122; D. Cammock, ‘The Democratic Significance of the Athenian Courts’, forthcoming. Hansen, in particular, has favoured the language of representation in this context, while Ober has opposed it. Not yet discussed in this context is the use of the phrase ‘on behalf of the *dêmos*’ with respect to juries, e.g. Dinarchus 4.84, ‘you who are assembled on behalf of the *dêmos*’ (ὑπ' οὗ δήμου συνελεγμένων). I intend to discuss this evidence in another paper.
arose out of the prutaneia, for the prutanis was kurios over many important matters’ (1305a15). But that had been ‘in former times’ (1305a12). In a mature democracy, where the authority invested in the offices was both less and tightly controlled, the most serious threat to the rule of the dēmos came from another source, one closer to home—one that, lacking formal or constitutional power, owed its influence to the strength of the dēmos itself: the dēmagôgoi, ‘demagogues’ or leaders of the dēmos.

Though in modern parlance ‘demagogue’ is always pejorative, dēmagôgos (from dēmos and agô, ‘lead’) was not. Some sources, such as Aesop’s fables (dating to the sixth century) may seem to suggest otherwise: the tale of the fisherman represents dēmagôgoi as invariably creating discord in poleis, while that of the serpent, the weasel and the mice recommends letting them pursue their quarrels among themselves. Aristophanes was also scathing, suggesting that a dēmagôgos had to be ‘an ignoramus and a rogue’ with ‘a screeching, horrible voice, a perverse, crossgrained nature ad the language of the market-place’.  

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

What did it mean to be a ‘good demagogue’? According to Isocrates, Nicocles should ‘neither allow the mob (ton ochlon) to do or to suffer outrage, but see to it that the best of them have honours while the rest suffer no derogation of their rights: for these are the first and most important elements of good government’ (chréstês politeias).  Theseus’ demagôgia he associated with administering the polis ‘lawfully and well’ (nomimós kai kalôs), while that of Perikles he tied more closely to material prosperity: ‘Pericles, because he was both a good leader of the people (dēmagôgos on agathos) and an excellent orator (rhêtôr aristos), so

31 Isoc. To Nicocles 16.4.
adorned the *polis* with temples, monuments, and other objects of beauty that even today visitors who come to Athens think her worthy of ruling (*archein*) not only the Greeks but the rest of the world; moreover, he stored away in the Acropolis not less than ten thousand talents.*[^32]  

Other writers suggested other desirable attributes. Lysias, in *Against Epicrates*, argued before a popular judicial panel that it was the duty of good *démagôgoi* ‘not to take your property in the stress of your misfortunes, but to give their own property to you’.[^33] Aeschines emphasized an appropriate level of fellow-feeling: ‘for the man who hates his child and is a bad father could never be a worthy leader (*démagôgos chrêstos*); the man who does not cherish those nearest and dearest to him will never care much about you, who are no relation to him’.[^34] Hypereides, to Demosthenes, said simply ‘A true (*dikaion*) *démagôgon* should be the saviour (*sôtera*) of his country, not a deserter’.[^35]

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

The *dêmos*’s leaders, that is to say, had played a crucial role in extending the power of the Athenian *dêmos*.[^36] How had they been able to do this? According to Aristotle, through the *dêmos*’s pre-existing power to bestow favours and make fortunes, especially via its control of the courts. ‘For as this institution [the *dikastêria*] grew strong, men courted favour (*charizomenoi*) with the *dêmos* as with a tyrant and so brought the constitution to the present democracy’ (1274a). The *dêmos* and its leaders enjoyed a symbiotic relationship: the *démagôgoi* were influential because the *dêmhos* was strong, especially with respect to judicial authority—and the *dêmhos* grew yet stronger under the *démagôgoi*’s influence. As the author of the *Athênaiôn Politeia* put it, ‘the *dêmhos* being *kurios* of the vote becomes *kurios* of the *politeia*’ (ch. 9). The vote referred to here was that of the court (*dikastêrion*); the party responsible for establishing the right

[^33]: Lys. 27.10.  
[^34]: Aeschin. 3.78.  
[^35]: Hyp. ‘Against Demosthenes’, Fr. 4, col. 16b line 26.  
[^36]: Aristotle claimed that something similar had happened at Sparta, where the kings had been forced to *démagôgein* on account of the power of the elected Ephorate thus converting an *aristokratia* to a *dêmokratia* (1270b). *Démagogountes* also played a role in converting some old-fashioned elective democracies to the ‘ultimate’ kind, since ‘men ambitious of popular office…bring things to the point of the *dêmhos*’s being *kurion* even over the laws’ (1305a30).
of appeal to the dikasterion was the démágogos Solon; and the power this gave the démos made those who led the démos powerful in turn.

The source of the démagógoi’s power was thus the démos itself, as opposed to the possession of landed property, the traditional foundation of political power. 37 More specifically, it lay in the capacity of the démagógoi to persuade the démos to put its might—its kratos—behind them and their proposals, even to the extent of overriding the established laws. 38 As Aeschines put it, a démágogos ‘has the power to cajole the people’ (ton men démon thópeusai dunaito). 39 Crawley, in his translation of Thucydides, put the nature of this relationship in plain terms when he described Kleon as ‘a popular leader (anêr démágogos)...and very powerful with the multitude,’ where ‘very powerful’ translates pithanótatos, literally ‘most persuasive’ (3.36). He repeated this wording with respect to Athenagoras of Syracuse, describing him as ‘the leader of the people (démou te prostatês) and very powerful (pithanótatos)...with the masses (tois pollois)’ (6.35). Yet peithô, ‘persuade’, the verb from which pithanos derives, is essentially ambiguous. In the passive voice, it can equally mean ‘obey’, and this ambiguity indicates the danger of this relationship from the point of view of the démos. Through winning votes in the assembly, the démos’s leaders could achieve many things on its behalf. Yet their power to bring about actions in the démos’s interests was predicated on a form of power over the démos: rhetorical influence. Demosthenes complained that ‘by playing the demagogue (démagógountes) and seeking favour (charizomenoi)’ Athens’ political speakers had ‘brought you to such a frame of mind that in your assemblies you are elated by their flattery and have no ear but for compliments’. 40 Wrongly deployed, this power could undermine the rule of the démos itself.

In the Politics, Aristotle outlined two ways that this might happen. One was that démagogoi might successfully carry actions that provoked too much opposition from landed property-owners, leading eventually to counter-revolution and oligarchy. According to Aristotle, this was the single most common reason that democracies fell. The ‘insolence’ (aselgeia) of démagógoi ‘cause the owners of property to band together, partly by malicious prosecutions...and partly by setting the pléthos against them as a class’, and he listed Kos, Rhodes, Heraclea, Megara, and Kyme as places where such overreaching had provoked a counter-revolution, leading to oligarchy. Elaborating, he added, ‘Sometimes they make the notables combine by wronging them in order to curry favour (charizônica) [with the démos], causing either their estates to be divided up or their

37 A contrast that appears, for example, in the Athénéaion Politeia’s representation the démagógoi are counterposed with the prostatai, ‘champions’, of the euporón, ‘well-to-do’ (ch. 28).
38 Aristot. Pol. 1292a, 1305a30, 1310a.
39 Aeschin. 3.226.2.
40 Dem. 8.34.
revenues by imposing public services, and sometimes by so slandering them that they may have the property of the wealthy to confiscate,' by getting judgments against them in the courts (1304b22-1305a10).\footnote{Cf. Xen. \textit{Hell.} 5.2.7.8: After Mantineia was divided into four separate villages, ‘the owners of the landed property, since they…enjoyed an aristocratic government and were rid of the troublesome demagogues (tôn bareôn dêmagôgôn), were pleased with what had been done’.}

The other way that, according to Aristotle, \textit{demokratia} might come to an end was more direct and arguably more alarming from the perspective of the \textit{dêmos}. Rather than provoke resistance from the \textit{dêmos}’s traditional opponents, the landed elite, popular leaders could simply take the \textit{politeia} into their own hands, converting themselves from leaders to rulers and the constitution from \textit{dêmokratia} to \textit{tyrannis}. The iconic example of this was the 6\textsuperscript{th}-century Athenian tyrant Peisistratos. Isocrates described the situation crisply. After he had made himself head of the people (\textit{hos dêmagôgos genomenos}), Peisistratos ‘brought an end to the rule of the people and set himself up as their master’ (\textit{teleutôn ton te dêmon kateutêse kai tyrranon auton katestêsen}).\footnote{Isoc. \textit{Panath.} 148.7, trans. Norlin.} The \textit{Athênaion Politeia} explained how this had happened. Peisistratos first came to prominence as the leader of the pro-\textit{dêmos} ‘hill-men’, being reputed to be an extreme advocate of the \textit{dêmos} (ch. 13); he then persuaded (\textit{synepeise}) the \textit{dêmos} to give him a bodyguard by making out that he had been wounded by the pro-oligarchic opposition, and with the help of these retainers rose against the \textit{dêmos} and took the acropolis (ch. 14). Despite being expelled by the pro-oligarchy factions, he regained his position by tricking the \textit{dêmos} into thinking that he had Athena herself on his side (ch. 14), and then after another break in his rule, won back control of the \textit{politeia} by first hiring mercenaries and defeating the government forces in battle, and then disarming the \textit{dêmos} by asking it to shift locations during an armed muster, which enabled his followers to carry off its weapons (ch. 15). This potent combination of persuasion, deceit and force completely overpowered the Athenian \textit{dêmos}, and the Peisistratids remained in power until 510, when they were driven out by the Spartans, following which the \textit{dêmos} under the leadership of Cleisthenes fought its way back to control of the \textit{politeia} (ch. 20).

Though Peisistratos was a famous example of a demagogue-turned-tyrant, he was not alone. Aristotle put Theagenes of Megara, Dionysius of Syracuse, Panaitius of Leontini, Cypselus of Corinth and others in the same category.\footnote{Aristot. \textit{Pol.} 1305a25-30, 1310b25-30.} Indeed, he claimed that ‘almost the greatest number of tyrants have risen…from being demagogues (\textit{ek dêmagôgôn}), having won the people’s confidence (\textit{pisteuthentes}) by slandering the notables’.ootnote{Aristot. \textit{Pol.} 1310b15, cf. 30.} Yet he also believed that this situation was not likely to recur.
In old times whenever the same man became both démagógos and general, they used to change the system to a tyranny... And the reason this used to happen but not any more is that then the leaders of the people (démagogoi) were drawn from those who held the office of general (for they were not yet skilled in oratory), but now that rhetoric has developed, the able speakers are leaders of the people (hoi dynamenoi legein démagógousi), but owing to their inexperience in military matters they are not put in control of these...

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

In the 340s, this claim may have seemed plausible, but it did not entirely match the experience of the Athenian dèmos in the late fifth century. By the 420s, if Aristophanes is to be believed, fear of tyranny had again become widespread: ‘Tyranny! I have not heard the word mentioned once in fifty years, and now it is more common than salt-fish...’ The author of the speech ‘Against Alcibiades’ suggested that the transition from demagoguery to tyranny had already occurred: Alcibiades’ behaviour ‘shows the democracy to be nothing but a sham, by talking like a champion of the people (démagógou) and acting like a tyrant, since he has found out that while the word ‘tyranny’ fills you with concern, the thing itself leaves you undisturbed’.

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

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

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47 [Andoc.] 4.27.7.
48 Lys. 25.9.3; Ath. Pol. chs. 34-5; Thuc. 8.65.2.6, Xen. Hell. 2.3.27.5.
How was the threat such men posed to be controlled in peacetime? Again, the dêmos’s control of the courts proved key. While office-holders were held accountable through the euthuna, the regular votes of confidence, and the possibility of impeachment, political leaders were targeted by other charges, such as lying to the dêmos or aiming to overturn the democracy. Most important was the indictment for making a proposal outside the laws (graphê paranomôn) and, after 403, a parallel indictment for proposing a law disadvantageous to the polis.

These indictments, which like all political charges in Athens were judged by a minimum of five hundred ordinary citizens, have been interpreted as a way of limiting the powers of the assembly do to as it pleased, but it is more plausible to read them as aimed at limiting the power of political leaders by providing an ex post way of rescinding resolutions that undermined the rule of the dêmos and punishing those responsible for advancing them. Peisistratos’ bodyguard had, after all, been supplied via a properly advanced and approved proposal, that of a certain Aristophon (ch. 14). The Four Hundred had been established as the result of two proposals, one drafted by Pythodorus of the deme Anaphylstus asking for thirty elected ‘preliminary councillors’ to draft new measures for the public safety, and another presented by the preliminary councillors requiring that a) all new proposals be put to the vote, b) that the graphê paranomôn and impeachment processes be repealed, and c) that anyone who attempted to indict or impeach proposers should be summarily arrested and executed (ch. 25). The Thirty, too, were—as we saw above—ushered in via a procedurally correct motion, proposed by Dracontides of Aphidna (ch. 32).

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

VI. Conclusion

50 Dem. 26.4.
Kratos, archē and kurios were each associated with rule, but it is krat- that is twinned with dēmos in one of the best known derivations from ancient Greek in use today. Why? The foregoing studies suggest an answer. The defining power of the dēmos—what ultimately secured its political supremacy—was its superior physical strength relative to other parts of the politeia, whether office-holders (hai archai), political leaders (hoi dēmagôgoi) or others. As the author of the Athēnaion Politeia observed, the dēmos taking over the politeia after the return from Phyle seemed just, for it had achieved its return itself (ch. 41)—by force. The collective body of common people could neither hold office itself nor, by itself, maintain the subordination of office-holders on a consistent basis. Nor could it collectively make proposals and argue for them. Those were by their nature tasks for single men, who if they were effective in their own way posed a threat to the supremacy of the dēmos. What the dēmos consistently had in its favour was its physical strength—the sheer power of large numbers of people engaged in collective action, a power made visible in peacetime in the form of regular assemblies and in wartime when drawn up under arms. This was the power that underpinned dêmokratia. In line with this, office-holding ceased to imply rulership, becoming instead simply administration. And this balance of power was maintained by the popular courts, which delimited the jurisdiction (kuros) of all the other offices and in which men of the dēmos preponderated.

Physical domination (kratos), administration (archē), juridical authority or sovereignty (kuros) and popular leadership (dēmagōgia): each of these forms of power had its place in the Athenian politeia. Indeed, dêmokratia may be understood as a certain configuration of these forms. The sovereignty of the dēmos was underpinned by its physical superiority, while administration and leadership functions were performed by others, distinct from both physical might and from each other—boundaries which, like all political jurisdictions, were patrolled by the courts, the supreme peacetime guarantor of the dēmos’ supremacy.

Three features of modern democracy are illuminated by comparison. Lacking the opportunity to meet, the collective physical capacity of the common people is normally nil. Hence the ultimate basis of the dēmos’s rule is lacking. There is no distinction between sovereignty and administration; rather, elected office-holders govern, without routinely being held legally accountable for their actions either during or after their tenure. And far from securing their power via the courts, most men and women of the dēmos are today locked out of the judicial system altogether, except as objects of discipline. An ancient Greek observer would identify this system not as dêmokratia but oligarchia—and a very successful version at that.