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## Oligarchy and the Hellenistic city

Christel Müller

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# The Polis in the Hellenistic World

Edited by Henning Börm  
and Nino Luraghi



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## OLIGARCHY AND THE HELLENISTIC CITY

*Christel Müller\**

After three or more decades of constant celebration of democracy, and especially ancient Greek democracy as embodied by Classical Athens,<sup>1</sup> oligarchy is now back on stage, with more than a hint of bitterness from those who study it because of the weaknesses and failures of Western states.<sup>2</sup> To be fair, the book published in 2000 by Roger BROCK and Stephen HODKINSON, *Alternatives to Athens*, had already tried to breach the pan-democratic paradigm,<sup>3</sup> but it was devoted to counter-models of Athens during the Archaic and Classical periods only. For the Hellenistic period, at least the early part of it, democracy is still seen as a pervasive regime shaped on the Athenian one,<sup>4</sup> and writing about oligarchy in such a straightforward way as I will do might seem to rub up the wrong way. However, everything is first and foremost a matter of definition.

The trivial definition of oligarchy, that has become a common place in political theory, is that of a constitutional form meaning “the rule of a few” (*oligoi*): it’s often trapped in between monarchy (the rule of one) and democracy (the rule of the many)

\* I owe a lot of important comments to my friends and colleagues, fellow-members of the *European Network for the Study of Ancient Greek History*, especially Josine BLOK, Lin FOXHALL, Hans-Joachim GEHRKE, Nino LURAGHI, Irad MALKIN, Christian MANN and Oswyn MURRAY. I am also most grateful to Vincent AZOULAY and Emeline PRIOL for reading drafts of this chapter and suggesting improvements. Responsibility for what follows remains mine.

1 See for instance the celebration of Athenian democracy and its material culture in 1992 in Coulson et al. 1994, a “conference celebrating 2500 years since the birth of democracy in Greece, held at the American School of Classical Studies at Athens”.

2 As is obvious in contemporary political studies; cf. Winters 2011, to whom I will go back.

3 See the excellent introduction “Alternatives to the Democratic Polis” by the two editors in Brock/Hodkinson 2000: 1–32.

4 See e.g. Philippe GAUTHIER, who talks about a “democratic *koiné*” (Gauthier 2011 [1993]: 360) and insists on the influence of the Athenian democratic model, cf. Gauthier 2011 (1984): 337 f.

in a tripartite conception that goes back maybe to Pindar,<sup>5</sup> but more surely to Herodotus and his famous Constitutional debate that supposedly took place among three Persian conspirators.<sup>6</sup> With Plato, the tripartite division falls into six types, according to their degree of acceptance or rejection of the laws and precepts conceived by the expert knowledge of the *basilikos*, the “royal statesman”: these are kingship (n° 1) vs tyranny (n° 6), aristocracy (n° 2) vs oligarchy (n° 5) and democracy standing in the middle (n° 3 and 4), both the “worst of all the law-abiding constitutions, and the best of all those that transgress the laws.”<sup>7</sup> This scheme, which lasted with adaptations throughout the fourth century BCE and the Hellenistic period, was always in competition with a crude binary opposition between *dēmokratia* and *oligarchia*: that can be observed in the pseudo-Xenophontic *Constitution of the Athenians*,<sup>8</sup> whose author has been tagged as the “Old Oligarch”, or even more in Thucydides who shaped the idea that oligarchies were linked with Sparta and democracies with Athens.<sup>9</sup> This major divide, whose aim for Thucydides was to explain the ideological issues of the Peloponnesian War, has gained such a wide recognition that it has been since taken for granted (classical Greek cities are either democracies or oligarchies).<sup>10</sup> For the Hellenistic period, this couple “democracy/oligarchy” has made its way, in recent literature, along two lines: either Hellenistic *poleis* are seen as fake democracies, while *de facto* oligarchies, or are described as real democracies in their beginning that finally turned into “governments of a few”, obeying R. MICHELS’ famous “iron law of oligarchy”.<sup>11</sup> But things are not that simple, as the “great divide” between democracy and oligarchy is not operative enough and seeks more elaboration in my opinion.

Oligarchy needs to be redefined and viewed as potentially separable from its mirror-concept. Following the political scientist Jeffrey A. WINTERS, in his recent opus on oligarchy,<sup>12</sup> I make here two proposals. First, I suggest that the central notion implied in oligarchy is wealth and the defence of wealth by its owners, a point that might seem banal, but has been obliterated, or at least not highlighted enough for a long time by historians, especially when studying Hellenistic cities; thus, as stated by WINTERS, oligarchy is not a synonym for “elites”, in so far as there are multiple types of elites whose power is based on different kinds of assets (education, culture, networks ...)

5 Pind., Pyth. 2.86–88, with the commentary of Ostwald 2000: 15.

6 Hdt. 3.80–82.

7 Plat. Pol. 303a7–8; transl. Ostwald 2000: 33 (slightly modified).

8 Ps.-Xen. Ath. Pol. 2.17 and 20.

9 E. g.: Thuc. 3.47.2 or 6.11.7.

10 Cf. Hansen/Nielsen 2004, *passim*.

11 Michels 2001 [1911].

12 Cf. Winters 2011.

and not necessarily on wealth.<sup>13</sup> It follows therefore, and this is the second point, that oligarchy, far from being incompatible with, is closely intertwined into different kinds of regimes and notably democracy.<sup>14</sup> It might seem an anachronistic use of the term, as it draws on contemporary political theory and goes far beyond any traditional legalistic approach, but we'll see that the link between wealth and power has been part of all definitions of oligarchy in Greek sources themselves. I will here focus on what I call "oligarchic situations", that is cases where the power detained by wealthy people, citizens or foreigners, interferes in a spectacular way with their civic environment. To achieve the demonstration, I will use textual evidence, starting with Aristotle and Polybius, but the main bulk of material consists in the hundreds of inscriptions engraved by cities and individuals between the fourth and the first centuries BCE. That will lead me to evoke the political terminology used in the Hellenistic period (I), the concentration and the display of wealth (II) and the oligarchisation of civic institutions themselves (III).

## I. Words: *oligarchia* and *demokratia* in Hellenistic texts

### 1. Aristotle

The best way to start is to go back just before the Hellenistic period to Aristotle, as always the closest of all to what could be called a synthetic view of both political theory and practice. Martin OSTWALD has given a remarkably clear conspectus on Aristotle and oligarchy, which perfectly fits the idea of wealth as the key-element of the latter.<sup>15</sup> In his *Rhetoric* already, the philosopher establishes that among four kinds of empirically defined constitutions, the aim of oligarchy is wealth and its base property qualification<sup>16</sup>. Interestingly enough, it is clearly distinguished from aristocracy, a regime based on the distribution of *archai*, offices, according to an education (*paid-eia*) defined by law that gives birth to the elite. The next step is in the *Politics*, where one finds the most famous classification of constitutions, with the tripartite scheme, obviously recalling Plato's *Politikos*, in which a good version of each of the three (one,

**13** See the excellent analysis by Winters 2011: 1–39, especially chapter one, devoted to "The Material Foundations of Oligarchy".

**14** "Democracy and oligarchy are remarkably compatible, provided the two realms of power do not clash" (Winters 2011: 11).

**15** Cf. Ostwald 2000: 37–75.

**16** Arist. Rhet. 1.8, 1365b21–1366a16.

a few, many) is accompanied by a perverted one.<sup>17</sup> Democracy is here on the wrong side, while a regime called simply *politeia* (and usually translated as “polity”) is the best possible one, as it aims at what is best for the governed; oligarchy appears in a classical way as a perverted aristocracy. In Book 4 of the same opus, the tripartite scheme gives way to the couple “oligarchy” vs “democracy”.<sup>18</sup>

The most interesting statement for my purpose is here that the main characteristic of *oligarchia* is wealth and not the “rule of a few”. Of course, wealth usually goes with *eugeneia*, “nobility of birth”, and minority,<sup>19</sup> but these two criteria are not enough. To quote Aristotle, “what really distinguishes democracy from oligarchy is poverty (*penia*) and wealth (*ploutos*).”<sup>20</sup> The (absurd) proof of this statement is that if a minority was poor and in charge, the regime would not be called an oligarchy and vice-versa.<sup>21</sup> Oligarchy also means the attempt by the rich (*euporoi*) to maintain their wealth: if it’s classified as a perverted regime (at least in Book 3 of the *Politics*), it’s precisely because rich people, when in charge, aim at their own interest, instead of aiming at the common good as it happens with aristocracy.<sup>22</sup> Oligarchy is based on the *timema*, which means “property qualification” and is called therefore the regime *apo timematōn*, “based on ratable properties”, mostly land ownership, but probably not only.<sup>23</sup> There is though, according to Aristotle, a whole gradation of oligarchic stages according to the level of wealth required to get an office, while the more powerful wealth is, the less respected is the law.<sup>24</sup> The existence of a gradation leads in Aristotle to the idea that there is no great divide (and on the contrary a continuum) between democracy and oligarchy. And the tight intertwining of the two already appears throughout his work: the polity (*i. e.* the best regime) is indeed a mix of both in the *Politics*,<sup>25</sup> and even shows

17 Arist. Pol. 3.7.3–5 (1279a32–1279b10).

18 Arist. Pol. 4.3.6 (1290a13–16).

19 According to Aristotle (Pol. 4.4.6 [1290b19–20]), *oligarchia* occurs when a minority of *plousioi* (rich) and *eugenesteroi* (more noble) control the *polis*.

20 Arist. Pol. 3.8.7 (1279b39–40). Concerning plutocracy (made on *ploutos*), I know only of one occurrence of the word in Greek literature before the Imperial period, precisely where *oligarchia* is expected, in Xenophon’s Mem. 4.6.12: καὶ ὅπου μὲν ἐκ τῶν τὰ νόμιμα ἐπιτελούντων αἱ ἀρχαὶ καθίστανται, ταύτην μὲν τὴν πολιτείαν ἀριστοκρατίαν ἐνόμιζεν εἶναι, ὅπου δ’ ἐκ τιμημάτων, πλουτοκρατίαν, “and where the officials are chosen among those who fulfil the requirements of the laws, the constitution is an aristocracy, as he [Socrates] thought; where rateable property is the qualification for office, it is a plutocracy”.

21 Arist. Pol. 4.1–3 (1290a30–40).

22 Arist. Pol. 3.7.5 (1279b7–8).

23 Cf. Ostwald 2000: 48.

24 Arist. Pol. 4.6.7–11 (1293a10–34) and Ostwald 2000: 70 f.

25 Arist. Pol. 4.8.3 (1298b33–34).



up as a timocracy in the *Nicomachean Ethics*,<sup>26</sup> implying that it is based on property qualification (*timema*). No surprise then if Sparta fits the model of the polity and if the Spartans would have been the last to call their own regime an oligarchy!<sup>27</sup>

## 2. Polybius

Compared to the thorough reflection of Aristotle on *oligarchia*, Polybius' *Histories* are quite disappointing, as they give only six occurrences of words containing the oligarch- stem. This set can be divided into two sections.

The first mention of oligarchy in Polybius is to be found incidentally in Book 4, when the author deals with the *symmachikos polemos* ("Social War") that took place in 220–217 BCE. The Hellenic League, under the impulsion of the Achaians and Philip V, had made the decision to go to war with the Aitolians. But the Messenians, when asked by the envoys to ratify the common decision, answered they could not participate, as long as their neighbour, the city of Phigaleia, would be under the control of the enemy. Polybius stops at this point to harshly castigate the cowardice of this behaviour: according to him, the Messenian leaders took the wrong decision and that was due to their belonging to the *oligarchikoi*, the oligarchic faction. Oligarchs, he writes, are only driven by their own interest.<sup>28</sup> The use of the word *oligarchikoi* appears not as a self-qualification by the Messenian leaders ("we are the oligarchic party"), but as a pejorative characterisation by Polybius, that fits his reflection on oligarchy as a perverted (one should say disgusting) regime in Book 6.

The second and most interesting series belongs precisely to this book, the famous "pause" in the narrative used by the historian to explain Rome's conquest of the *oikoumene* ("inhabited world") mostly thanks to its mixed constitution. One finds here the very traditional classification of *politeiai*, picked up from the Greek philosophical tradition. The three types of constitutions, kingship (*basileia*), aristocracy and democracy, have perverted counterparts: tyranny, oligarchy and *ochlokratia* ("rule of the mob").<sup>29</sup> Nothing original then, except for the way Polybius instills movement

<sup>26</sup> Arist. Nic. 8.10 (1160a31–b22).

<sup>27</sup> Arist. Pol. 4.9.7–9 (1294b18–34).

<sup>28</sup> Pol. 4.31.2: The guilty leaders are the ephors Οἶνις καὶ Νίκιππος καὶ τινες ἕτεροι τῶν ὀλιγαρχικῶν ("Oinīs, Nikippos and some other members of the oligarchic party"); Pol. 4.32.1: οἱ δὲ τῶν Μεσσηνίων προεστῶτες ὀλιγαρχικοί, [καὶ] στοχαζόμενοι τοῦ παραπρὸς κατ' ἰδίαν λυσιτελοῦς, φιλοτιμότερον τοῦ δέοντος αἰεὶ διέκριντο πρὸς τὴν εἰρήνην ("The leaders of Messenia, being members of the oligarchic party and aiming at their immediate personal interest, were always inclined to maintain peace more eagerly than needed")

<sup>29</sup> Pol., 6.3.5–4.10 and 5.4–9.9. In these pages, the bad version of *basileia* is called either tyranny or monarchy (see Walbank 1957: 642).

into all these regimes, a process known as the *anakuklôsis*, that leads from *basileia* to *ochlokratia* through all the intermediary phases, and back again to the beginning when the leader of the *ochlos* starts behaving like a ferocious beast and meets a new “master” (*despotes*), the monarch.<sup>30</sup> In Book 6, therefore, *oligarchia* is always labeled as a bad constitution, which develops when (1.) the inexperienced sons of the aristocratic leaders inherit of power, having only enjoyed the privileges of their rank (“*proagôgai*”) since they were born; (2.) are driven by *pleonexia* (“cupidity”) and *philargyria* (“love of money”); (3.) or, according to Polybius’ usual standards, by a passion for getting drunk (*methe*), eating too much (*euôchia*), and last but not least committing rapes (*hybreis*) of women and abductions (*harpagai*) of boys!<sup>31</sup> Beyond the *topos*, one is mostly left with economic motives to explain the transformation from *aristokratia* to *oligarchia*, although wealth is not bad in itself but in its perverted use. The scheme underlying the process is roughly the same when one shifts from *basileia* to *tyrannis*, a regime based on an excessive social display of their wealth by monarchs. And it’s the reverse when one shifts from *demokratia* to *ochlokratia*, in which the leader of the mob is poor and seeks to redistribute wealth, especially through violence and the hated *ges anadamos*, “redistribution of land”.<sup>32</sup> It would be wrong then to assume that economic motives are absent from Polybius’ analysis of political regimes: the question of wealth, its acquisition and display, is central to the *anakuklôsis*.

That’s all there is about oligarchy in the whole Polybian corpus, which might be explained of course by the historian’s personal agenda, but also by the fact political terminology underwent transformations in Late Hellenistic period. One finds a hint of this in the *anakuklôsis* itself in Book 6, although quite hidden. The shift from democracy to ochlocracy is operated by the leader of the mob, who is “deprived of civic *timia* because of his poverty”.<sup>33</sup> Nothing is said about his being a foreigner or a slave and he appears simply as excluded from the civic body. The *timia* here mentioned could be of course honors, but they more probably refer to “magistracies”: the poor leader is deprived of access to offices under a regime called democracy. The latter is therefore to be understood as a timocracy, implying a tax-qualification.<sup>34</sup> That reminds directly of Aristotle’s *politeia*, the best possible democracy. But it differs from the first-grade

30 Pol. 6.9.10.

31 Pol. 8.4 f.

32 Pol. 7.7 (transition from *basileia* to tyranny) and 9.8 f. (transition from democracy to ochlocracy).

33 Pol. 6.9.8: ἐκκληϊόμενον δὲ διὰ πενίαν τῶν ἐν τῇ πολιτείᾳ τιμίων.

34 That seems to contradict MUSTI’s opinion of ‘Polybian’ democracy (Musti 1995: 306) as incompatible with a *numerus clausus*, based on the case of Cyrene that had *eleutheria* restored but could not qualify as a *demokratia*. Nicolet 1983: 31 rightly states that, for Polybius, the tax-qualification criterion is not essential.

democracy as stated by him, which implies an equal access (*isotes*) to power for all citizens and the freedom (*eleutheria*) to act as they please.<sup>35</sup> Polybius, even more than Aristotle, hates the rule of the mob, the wildest and brutal of all regimes. He defines democracy at a social level, as a matter of piety towards the gods, respect for parents and elders, and, at a political one, as the obedience to the laws and the decisions of the majority<sup>36</sup> – all these parameters already existed in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, but were far from enough to define a true democratic regime. Polybian democracy certainly praises freedom of speech (*isegoria* and *parrhesia*),<sup>37</sup> and that's why the Achaian *koinon* had the most authentic democratic constitution according to him,<sup>38</sup> but certainly not freedom of action of the mass (*plethos*) equated to social disorder. At an external level, in terms of relations with other states and outside global classifications, democracy in Polybius is clearly opposed to “the kings”: in 185 BCE, concerning gifts offered by Eumenes II of Pergamon, Apollonidas of Sikyon reminds the Achaians that “the interests of democracies and kings are naturally opposed”,<sup>39</sup> a *leitmotiv* to be observed also in the inscriptions.

To give a brief conclusion on literary evidence, the texts show, as we've seen, that there are two kinds of uses for *oligarchia* and *demokratia*, often overlapping: a legalistic one, where these political words are included in global classifications of *politeiai* and analysed in a technical manner for the way power is distributed and exercised when these regimes are in place; and an ideological one, recalling Thucydides, where they become values or anti-values. That can be found also in the epigraphic record.<sup>40</sup>

35 Arist. Pol. 4.4.22 f.

36 Pol. 6.4.4 f.

37 Both Nicolet 1983: 23–32 and Musti 1995: 294–310 emphasize the role played by *isegoria* and *parrhesia* in the way Polybius defines *demokratia*.

38 Pol. 2.38.6. Cf. Walbank 1957: 221 f.

39 Pol. 22.8.6 (transl. ΡΑΤΟΝ): τῶν δὲ πραγμάτων ἐναντίαν φύσιν ἔχόντων τοῖς βασιλεῦσι καὶ ταῖς δημοκρατίαις. Pol. 24.9.2 (about the political conduct that prevails towards the Romans in 180 BCE): ἐν πάσαις ταῖς δημοκρατικαῖς πολιτείαις, “in all democratic states”, has probably the same meaning. The same applies to Pol. 31.2.12 (164/3 BCE), about the division of Macedonia in four districts: συνέβαινε γὰρ τοῖς Μακεδόνας ἀήθεις ὄντας δημοκρατικῆς καὶ συνεδριακῆς πολιτείας στασιάζειν πρὸς αὐτοὺς (“It happened that *stasis* started among the Macedonians who were not used to a democratic and representative government”).

40 Neither historical texts nor inscriptions use the word *aristokratia* to describe any kind of political regime: one finds only one occurrence in a Hellenistic hymn from Epidauros (IG IV<sup>2</sup>, 1. 128, c. 280 BCE) in a context that has nothing to do with political theory or practice. This word belongs to philosophers as rightly underlined by Mogens H. HANSEN in a recent and synthetic survey of this terminology; cf. Hansen 2015: 54 f.

### 3. Epigraphic terminology

In the early Hellenistic period, *oligarchia* and *demokratia* still form in the epigraphic record a couple in clear opposition, *oligarchia* being the hated regime and *demokratia* the one to maintain at any price, both sometimes referring to previous historical episodes. Following famous Classical examples, *oligarchia* tends to be associated with tyranny, so that everything that is not tyrannical must be democratic! That is best seen through the law of Ilion in Asia Minor protecting democracy in the 280s, which explicitly condemns the person “who will become a tyrant or the head of an oligarchy, or anyone who will install a tyrant or participate in a revolution or dissolve democracy”.<sup>41</sup> Such a concern is expressed by different cities in the third century BCE, like Athens in 270/269 in the decree honoring Kallias of Sphettos for the way he fought against the oligarchy allegedly set up by Demetrios Poliorketes in 295,<sup>42</sup> or in Cos, at the very end of the third century BCE, during the renewing of the *homopoliteia* (“common constitution”) with the neighbouring island of Kalymna, a text in which the participants swear “not to install any oligarchy, tyrant, or any regime other than *damokratia* under any pretext”.<sup>43</sup> The word *demokratia* functions here more as a slogan than anything else, while *oligarchia* is raised as a spectre. These texts do not specify what the word means in a technical sense. It seems pretty obvious, though, that it designates any attempt at restricting the civic body by instituting a *timema*, a tax-qualification, just as it happened during the famous oligarchical episodes that took place in Athens at the end of the fifth century BCE in 411 and 404<sup>44</sup> or, later, at the very beginning of the Hellenistic period, between 317 and 307, when Demetrios of Phaleron was in charge: the civic body was then restricted to Athenians testifying of a wealth of

41 I.Ilion [IK 3] 25, ll. 116–119: δὲς ἂν τύρανν[ος] ἢ ἡγεμῶν γένηται ὀλιγαρχίας, ἢ τύραννον στ[ή]σι ἢ συνεπαναστήι ἢ δημοκρατίᾳ καταλύσει κτλ. Such a vocabulary recalls the Eretrian “law” against tyranny and oligarchy (c. 340 BCE), cf. Knoepfler 2001 and 2002.

42 SEG 28, 60: ll. 80–83: [κ]αταλελυμένου τοῦ δήμου, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν τὴν ἐ[αυτοῦ] προέμενος δόσιν δοθῆναι ἐν τεὶ ὀλιγαρχίᾳ ὥστε μ[η]δὲν ὑ]πεναντίον πράξει μήτε τοῖς νόμοις μήτε τεὶ δημοκ[ρατί]αι τεὶ ἐξ ἀπάντων Ἀθηναίων (“... when the democracy had been overthrown, [but] during the oligarchy he gave up his [own] property, so as not to act [in any way] against the laws or against the democracy of all the Athenians”; transl. Austin 2006<sup>2</sup>, n°55). On Demetrios and this episode, see Habicht 1997: 87–97 and Knoepfler 2011: 442.

43 IG XII.4, 152: ll. 21–22: ὀλιγαρχίαν δὲ οὐδὲ τύραννον οὐδὲ ἄλλο πολίτευμα ἐξω δημοκρατίας οὐ καταστάσω παρευρέσει οὐδεμίᾳ.

44 On these two episodes, see Shear 2011. About the body of the 5000 citizens, Aristotle (AP 29.5) writes that τὴν δ’ ἄλλην πολιτείαν ἐπιτρέψαι πᾶσαν Ἀθηναίων τοῖς δυνατωτάτοις καὶ τοῖς σώμασιν καὶ τοῖς χρήμασιν λητουργεῖν (“The rest of the government was to be in the hands of those Athenians most able to serve the city with their persons and their property”; transl. Shear 2011: 32).

1000 drachmas,<sup>45</sup> which explains why Plutarch calls him an oligarch.<sup>46</sup> There is, in this respect, a clear continuity in the epigraphic terminology, between the Classical and the early Hellenistic periods.

There is also an “external” use of *demokratia*, already mentioned about literary texts. It appears at the end of the fourth and flourishes during the third century BCE in diplomatic documents<sup>47</sup>. It tends to designate the capacity of a city to self-government against any attempt of domination and certainly does not tell us much about how the city is ruled internally. It often shows up when a *polis* deals with a king, as in the case of Smyrna with Seleukos II, praised to “have confirmed to the *demos* its autonomy and democracy” around 241 BCE.<sup>48</sup>

The use of these terms tends to change in the Late Hellenistic period. One could object that there is less interesting “normative” material in this period, as decrees ceased progressively to be engraved to the benefit of honorary inscriptions especially in the first century BCE,<sup>49</sup> but not every aspect of the lexical evolution can be attributed to a change in epigraphic habits. *Oligarchia* seems to disappear from common political use: among the occurrences of this word, the earliest ones are dated from the fifth century BCE, but, to my knowledge, none is later than the 200s BCE. *Demokratia* stops therefore being opposed to its counterpart and is limited to its second “external” meaning, especially when the Romans enter the scene and are perceived as the defendants of Greek freedom: that also fits the way the contemporary Polybios uses the term, as previously noticed. As shown by J.-L. FERRARY and Ph. GAUTHIER, *demokratia* is henceforth the equivalent of *eleutheria*, that is the freedom for a city from any monarchic domination.<sup>50</sup> A decree issued in 184/3 BCE by the Delphic Amphictiony in honor of the Thessalian Nikostratos of Larissa mentions, side by side, the “autonomous people (*ethne*) and democratic cities” that form the Council (*koinon*), while the character is said “to have accomplished everything that was in the common interest of the Amphictyons and the other Greeks attached to freedom (*eleutheria*)

45 Habicht 1997: 52. Diod. 18.74.3: τὸ πολίτευμα διοικεῖσθαι ἀπὸ τιμῆσεων ἄχρι μινῶν δέκα (“The civic body was organised on the base of a tax-qualification reaching 100 minas”).

46 Plut. Demetr. 10.2: The government was ruled λόγῳ μὲν ὀλιγαρχικῆς, ἔργῳ δὲ μοναρχικῆς καταστάσεως γενομένης διὰ τὴν τοῦ Φαληρέως δύναμιν (“nominally as an oligarchy, but really as a monarchy, owing to the great influence of the Phalerean”); cf. Grieb 2008: 66–68.

47 Hamon 2009: 369 f.

48 I.Smyrna 573.1 (decree of Smyrna concerning a treaty with Magnesia ad Sipyllum): Seleukos II ἐβεβαίωσεν τῷ δήμῳ τὴν αὐτονομίαν καὶ δημοκρατίαν (l. 10/11).

49 Hamon 2009: 375.

50 Ferrary 1987–1989: 203–216; Ferrary 2014 [1988]; Gauthier 2011 [1993]: 359 f.

and democracy”.<sup>51</sup> Another telling example is that of Pergamon, freed from monarchy when Attalos III died bequeathing his kingdom to the Romans: in a decree for a citizen dated after 125 BCE, the *polis* is said to have shifted to “democracy”, meaning here simply “self-government” as the first step taken is to elect a *synedrion* (“council”) of the best men!<sup>52</sup> But the most obvious example remains the bilingual dedication by the Confederation of Lykian cities in 167 BCE of a statue of Rome to Jupiter Capitoline and the *Populus Romanus* to celebrate the restitution of their *patrios demokratia* (instead of *patrios politeia*, a much more common phrase), translated into Latin as *maiorum libertas*.<sup>53</sup>

The question is therefore the following: do these changes in political terminology reflect evolutions in Greek societies and, if so, which evolutions?

## II. The accumulation of wealth and its display in social institutions

### 4. Are Hellenistic cities democracies or régimes de notables? *The terms of the debate*

For the last thirty years, a major debate, to which I alluded in the introduction, has arisen to identify continuities and changes in the political and social history of the Hellenistic period. To make it short, following L. ROBERT’s studies and the French epigraphic school, Ph. GAUTHIER has promoted the following ideas: democratic regimes shaped on the Athenian classical *demokratia* were flourishing in the Early Hellenistic period, in continuity with the Classical period; but around the middle of the second century BCE, they progressively changed: the elites stopped behaving as citizens competing for power and recognition inside the frame of civic institutions to exert a real patronage upon the masses and obtain more or less hereditary powers, with the difficult question of the potential Roman influence.<sup>54</sup> In this situation, euergetism, i. e. the system of benefactions granted to a city and its inhabitants by rich individuals

51 CID 4.106, ll. 3/4: ἔδοξ[εν τῶι] κ[οι]νῶι τῶν Ἀμφικτιόνων τῶν ἀπὸ τῶν αὐτονόμων ἔθνῶν καὶ δημοκρατουμένων πόλεων; ll. 18/19: ἐπέτελεσεν πάντα τὰ κοινῆ συμφέρον[τα] τοῖς τε Ἀμφικτιόσιον καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις Ἕλλησιν τοῖς αἰρουμένοις τὴν ἐλευθερίαν καὶ δημοκρατίαν. See Ferrary 2014 [1988], 161–163.

52 SEG 50.1211 (decree of Pergamon in honor of Ménodóros), ll. 11/12: μεταπεσόντων τε τῶν πραγμάτων εἰς δημοκρατίαν [κα]ὶ τοῦ δήμου συνέδρους χειροτονήσαντος τῶν ἀρίστων ἀνδρῶν, “the regime having shifted to democracy and the People having elected by hand councillors among the best men”.

53 CIL I<sup>2</sup>, 725: cf. Ferrary 2014 [1988]: 185 f.

54 For a synthesis on democratic civic institutions in the Hellenistic period, see Wiemer 2013.

and rewarded by civic honors, proved an essential tool.<sup>55</sup> P. HAMON has followed and extended this trend of thinking and suggested that the elites of the Late Hellenistic period were “en voie d’aristocratisation”.<sup>56</sup>

In opposition to this opinion, some historians see no real rupture between the Early and Late Hellenistic times, arguing either that democracies never stopped being democratic at all or that the so-called democracies were only fake ones hardly concealing oligarchical systems. C. HABICHT, for instance, considers Greek democratic regimes as remarkably stable and rejects the idea that a new elite deprived the masses from their power after 150 BCE: any modifications in vocabulary and legal procedures visible in the decrees throughout the period should therefore be seen as merely formal.<sup>57</sup> Fr. QUASS, on the contrary, sees the *Honoratiorenschicht*, the “group of prominent citizens”, as the key to understand the Greek city in the *longue durée*.<sup>58</sup> According to these historians, whatever their final verdict on the true nature of political regimes, “the balance between the active minority and the mass of passive citizens”,<sup>59</sup> was not deeply modified between the end of the fourth and the first century BCE.

Such a debate (Are Greek Hellenistic cities democracies or *régimes de notables* and when did change occur if it ever did?) can last forever as the same institutional facts can be given totally contradictory interpretations. In Carian Iasos, for instance, we know that, from the mid-third century BCE, proposals had to be submitted to the board of the *prytaneis* to be examined.<sup>60</sup> That has been taken to signify two opposite things: either that proposals were filtered by this very narrow board (6–8 members) acting as *probouloi* on top of the existence of a proper *boule*<sup>61</sup> and that political power had gradually fallen into the hands of a restricted number of families; or, on the contrary, that individuals were still submitting proposals and therefore that democracy was still vivid, as the procedure called *ephodos* or *prosodos*, “access” or “introduction”, was fairly common in Greek cities.<sup>62</sup> This is an extreme case, but highly significant.

55 See Veyne 1990 [1976] and Gauthier 1985.

56 Hamon 2007: 99, who offers a good overview of all the previous hypotheses and positions.

57 Habicht 1995: “Der Beweis, daß eine neue Klasse von ‘Notabeln’ die demokratischen Institutionen der Städte obsolet gemacht und die Masse der Bürger nach ihrem Willen gegängelt habe, scheint mir nicht erbracht” (92).

58 Cf. Quaß 1992 and Quaß 1993.

59 As put nicely by Hamon 2007: 90.

60 See, for instance, I.Iasos 36 (224/3 BCE), ll. 4–5: πρυτάνεων [γνώμη· περί ὧν] ἐπήλθεν Δημαγόρας Ἐξηκέ[στου, ἵνα κτλ.]: “Proposal of the *prytaneis*, concerning what Demagoras son of Exekestos has presented, so that etc.”

61 Fabiani 2012: 160–165; Fabiani 2015: 295–301.

62 Hamon 2009: 361 f.

This debate also leads to an artificial distinction between, on the one hand, constitutional organs and legal procedures called “institutions” (especially in the French tradition) and perceived as the official frame of Greek societies, and, on the other hand, practices and behaviours seen as the way (real) people lived inside (or outside) the frame.<sup>63</sup> The word “institution” needs in fact to be applied to any kind of norms, uses and social constraints, formal or informal, produced by these societies, including the tensions and dynamics operating in them.<sup>64</sup> I suggest therefore changing the focus and shifting from a purely either constitutional or social/anthropologic perspective to an analysis of oligarchic symptoms, that is of any link between wealth and the power to maintain this wealth,<sup>65</sup> in Hellenistic institutions in a wide sense.

### 5. Spartan imbalances

The first question is that of the accumulation of wealth during the Hellenistic period and my inquiry starts with Sparta, far too neglected by “non-Spartologists”, although there is no better lookout for such a subject. The Spartan civic and social system reaches in the middle of the third century BCE the acme of a crisis that had already started in the fifth century. This crisis has a well-known name, *oliganthrōpia*, which means a dramatic decrease in the number of citizens called the *Homoioi*: the latter were defined by the ownership of a *kleros* (a “land-plot”) and the ability to pay their contribution to the *syssition* or “common mess”, the local form of the tax-qualification and the distinctive legal mark of the Spartan oligarchy.<sup>66</sup> Such a phenomenon had huge consequences on the military capacities of the Lacedaemonian army, as is well-known. There were about 8000 *Homoioi* at the time of the Persian Wars, among

**63** This supposed gap between “institutions” and “practices” has led, in the way French scholars wrote about Greek history, to a divide between epigraphists and anthropologists that tends to disappear with the present generation (see Azoulay 2014), although P. HAMON himself still speaks in terms of a distinction between the “mécanismes institutionnels” (equated to legal procedures) and the “représentations” deployed for instance during banquets (Hamon 2007: 91–93).

**64** This still needs to be put forward in the field we are dealing with, although it would seem very banal to any sociologist or economist, notably the so-called “neo-institutionalists” such as D. NORTH (see, *inter alia*, North 1990). For a recent and excellent reflection on norms and their “production”, see Marmursztejn 2012.

**65** See the introduction to this paper.

**66** The major importance of the *syssition* is very clearly underlined by Aristotle in the *Politics* (2.32 [1271a 34–37]): μετέχειν μὲν γὰρ οὐ ῥάδιον τοῖς λιαν πένησιν, ὄρος δὲ τῆς πολιτείας οὗτός ἐστιν αὐτοῖς ὁ πάτριος, τὸν μὴ δυνάμενον τοῦτο τὸ τέλος φέρειν μὴ μετέχειν αὐτῆς (“Indeed, it is not easy for the very poor to participate, but their ancestral boundary for citizenship is that the one who is unable to pay this tax doesn’t take part in the *politeia*”).



whom 5000 took part in the battle of Plataiai, says Herodotus;<sup>67</sup> at Leuctra, they were only 700 on the battlefield according to Xenophon;<sup>68</sup> and when Agis IV became a king in 244 BCE, there were 700 Spartans left altogether, according to Plutarch.<sup>69</sup> Although the drop appears to have been more severe between the fifth and the fourth centuries, the crisis felt worse in the third century and led to a *stasis* that finally gave rise to three successive episodes of turmoil under the so-called “revolutionary kings” of the third and second centuries: Agis IV (244–241), Cleomenes III (237–221), and Nabis (207–192).<sup>70</sup>

The richest of the rich were the kings themselves, described by Plutarch as Hellenistic monarchs, like Seleucids or Ptolemies, even if their wealth could not compete with the latter’s. Agis IV had been brought up “in wealth (*ploutos*) and luxury (*tryphe*) by two women, his mother Agesistrata and his grand-mother Archidamia, who possessed the most considerable fortune (*pleista chremata*) of Lacedaemon”: Sparta therefore started looking like a miniature Hellenistic kingdom.<sup>71</sup> But the main reason for the *stasis* situation clearly rests on a massive accumulation of wealth by some individuals, that had reached unbearable levels for the society: the concentration of land into a few hands, through acquisition from people unable to maintain their domains, had considerably reduced the number of landowners who could not access the *syssition* anymore. Plutarch’s text is worth quoting here, as it clearly shows the entire mechanism and its consequences:

The men of power at once began to acquire estates without scruple, ejecting the rightful heirs from their inheritances; and speedily prosperity (*euporia*) streamed into the hands of a few men (*oligoi*), and poverty (*penia*) became the general rule in the city, bringing in its train indifference to the good and servility (*aneleutheria*), along with envy and hatred towards the men of property; thus there were left not more than seven hundred Spartans, and of these there were perhaps a hundred who possessed land (*ge*) and allotment (*kleros*); while the ordinary throng (*ochlos*), without resources (*aporos*) and without civic rights (*atimos*), lived in enforced idleness, showing no zeal or energy in fighting external enemies, but

67 Hdt. 7.234 and 9.10.

68 Exactly 938, according to Figueira 2003: 195, but Xen. Hell. 6.4.15, says that the Spartans numbered 700.

69 Plut. Agis 5.6.

70 On Hellenistic Sparta, see Cartledge/Spawforth 2002.

71 Plut. Agis 4.1: ἐντεθραμμένος δὲ πλούτοις καὶ τρυφαῖς γυναικῶν, τῆς τε μητρὸς Ἀγησιστράτας καὶ τῆς μάμης Ἀρχιδαμίας, αἱ πλεῖστα χρήματα Λακεδαιμονίων ἐκέκτηντο.

ever watching for some opportunity to subvert and change affairs (transl. B. Perrin 1921, modified).<sup>72</sup>

There is no reason to doubt Plutarch's figures when he says that the people owning some land (*ge*) on top of their *kleros*, the big landowners, were only a hundred, a real negative peak. Property had always been unequal in Sparta and the myth of a fair distribution by the famous legislator Lycurgus certainly originates in the Hellenistic propaganda meant to justify the social measures and anchor them in a glorious past, as shown by S. HODKINSON.<sup>73</sup> These measures, listed in Agis IV's program,<sup>74</sup> are well-known and recall processes of the Archaic period: the cancellation of debts (*chreôn apokope*), the redistribution of the land (*ges anadasmus*), and the filling up of the civic body (*anaplerôsis*), to which Cleomenes and Nabis added the freeing of helots.

This is not the place to elaborate on these reforms and I will simply underline two points. Firstly, Sparta gives a paradigmatic example of the mechanisms underlying the concentration of wealth and the consequences of the links between wealth and power in a super-oligarchic regime (Plutarch says *oligoi* for the few landowners), when rich people lead the system to its breaking point. Historians should therefore stop making it a separated case, simply because it has not yielded any decent epigraphic material before the second century BCE, when the Spartan regime normalizes,<sup>75</sup> or because of their idea of Sparta's peculiarity. The Spartan case was so important to contemporary cities or confederations that their leaders feared to be contaminated by *metabole* and *metastasis*, "revolution", especially in the Peloponnesus.<sup>76</sup> Polybius often expresses his hatred of social changes in Sparta, both a *topos* and a real concern: at some point, he sketches a brief history of the Spartan state of affairs from the ideal constitution of Lycurgus till the destruction of the *patrion politeuma* by Cleomenes and the tyranny of Nabis, with a special mention of the numerous *anadasmoi*.<sup>77</sup> Secondly, these episodes take place right in the middle of the third century BCE and not in the Late Hellenistic

72 Plut. Agis 5.3 f.: ἐκτῶντο γὰρ ἀφειδῶς ἤδη παρῳθούντες οἱ δυνατοὶ τοὺς προσήκοντας ἐκ τῶν διαδοχῶν καὶ ταχὺ τῆς εὐπορίας εἰς ὀλίγους συρρυνείσης πενία τὴν πόλιν κατέσχευ, ἀσχολίαν τῶν καλῶν καὶ ἀνελευθερίαν ἐπιφέρουσα μετὰ φθόνου καὶ δυσμενείας πρὸς τοὺς ἔχοντας, ἀπελείφθησαν οὖν ἑπτακοσίων οὐ πλείονες Σπαρτιᾶται, καὶ τούτων ἴσως ἑκατὸν ἦσαν οἱ γῆν κεκτημένοι καὶ κληῖρον, ὁ δ' ἄλλος ὄχλος ἄπορος καὶ ἄτιμος ἐν τῇ πόλει παρεκάθητο, τοὺς μὲν ἔξωθεν πολέμους ἀργῶς καὶ ἀπροθύμως ἀμνόμενος, αἰεὶ δὲ τίνα καιρὸν ἐπιτηρῶν μεταβολῆς καὶ μεταστάσεως τῶν παρόντων.

73 Hodkinson 2000: 60.

74 Plut. Agis 8.

75 On Late Hellenistic Spartan 'normalisation', see Kennell 2009.

76 In the year 226/5 BCE, the Achaian leader Aratos for instance was more than afraid of Cleomenes' influence: Plut., Cleom. 16 f.

77 Pol. 4.8.12 f.

period: therefore neither do they owe anything to the Romans, nor do they fit the chronological scheme established by epigraphists. One will object that the latter was made for cities listed as “democratic” and not Sparta, but it’s a very pervasive frame that tends to give a shape to the whole of Greek Hellenistic history.

### 6. *Euergetism as a financial transaction*

I turn now to the case of other cities where inscriptions form an essential part of the documentation. In these places, the accumulation of wealth is made particularly visible through euergetism, which affects vital financial processes. Till now, this phenomenon has been studied mostly from a social and political point of view, and has given rise to a controversy about the role and place of benefactors in Greek societies, which is part of the larger debate on the nature and functioning of Hellenistic cities previously mentioned. This controversy opposes P. VEYNE, in his major opus *Bread and Circuses*, which came out in French in 1976, and Ph. GAUTHIER who published *Les cités grecques et leurs bienfaiteurs* in 1985.<sup>78</sup> According to VEYNE, euergetism must be seen as a “fait social total” that goes back to the Late Classical period and, thanks to the weakness of Hellenistic cities, developed without any substantial modification between the third century BCE and the early Roman Empire. GAUTHIER does not accept this view. According to him, the great benefactors replacing the kings in their role do not appear before the 150s, and alongside the famous *megistai timai*, the “biggest honors”, such as a statue, a meal in the *prytaneion* or the *proedria* (“front-row seating”) during the festivals, or even cultic honors.<sup>79</sup> Since the 1980s, euergetism has been a major topic for historians, and everything has been said about the mechanisms of “don/contredon” operating between benefactors and cities, the use of rhetoric in honorary decrees and the expanding honors granted to benefactors.

Therefore, a more interesting angle to read these texts is that of the level of wealth displayed by benefactors and the use they make of it in terms of power and in their relationship with the city.<sup>80</sup> I will take here three examples, each of them belonging to a century of the Hellenistic period. The first one is that of Polykritos of Erythrai, in Asia Minor, who greatly helped his city some time around 270 BCE.<sup>81</sup> The decree praises

78 On this controversy, see Müller 2011a: 346–348.

79 Gauthier 1985: 72: “C’est dans le cours du II<sup>e</sup> siècle, semble-t-il, que le rôle et la place des évergètes dans les cités se modifient. Alors, et alors seulement, l’évergétisme devient peu à peu l’équivalent d’un ‘système de gouvernement’: une minorité de citoyens riches et influents rend des services et obtient des honneurs tels qu’ils semblent dominer leurs concitoyens”.

80 Cf. Müller 2011a.

81 Bielman 1994, n°21 (I.Erythrai I.28).

him for different actions accomplished while he was holding offices, such as military commander, ambassador or *agoranomos* (“clerk of the market”). But the leitmotiv of the text is money. Polykritos is so rich that he can repeatedly meet civic expenses: he pays for the ransoms of hostages, the grain for the city-fund, or the wages of the seamen. One figure is very telling: he is able to lend 6000 *drachmai* for the grain fund (l. 41). The same amount is lent, in 243/2 BCE, by another benefactor, Boulagoras of Samos,<sup>82</sup> to his mother-city for a trip to Alexandria in honor of King Ptolemy III and Queen Berenice. This sum, 6000 *drachmai*, is the equivalent of a talent, which represented in Classical Athens an important level of wealth. For the fourth century BCE, J.K. DAVIES has proposed to identify a sort of “liturgical tax-qualification” of three talents to be able to hold the liturgy called trierarchy, the most expensive one, as the cost to equip a trireme would oscillate between half and one talent.<sup>83</sup> Although one should be very careful about such conclusions, it might be that the wealth of the wealthiest gradually increased during the Hellenistic period, on the model of Sparta, which cannot be that exceptional.

If Polykritos and Boulagoras are able to put 6000 *drachmai* on the table, it means that they have much more cash in reserve. Where does this cash come from? Probably from diverse resources, including land-ownership, but also commercial activities: Polykritos obviously has contacts with merchants (*emporoi*) whom he has protected (from war or pirates) and he is able to activate his network to make these merchants import grain into the city. But that’s not all. Polykritos, just like Boulagoras, invests money and gets more cash from it. Both characters are said to have lent money to their fellow-citizens: their benefaction lays in the fact they have done this for free, but a loan is not a gift. GAUTHIER, in a remarkably non-economical interpretation of this gesture, sees it as a form of modesty on the part of someone who does not want to create a clientele by continuous gifts and, on the city-side, as the proof that the city is not depending on her *euergetai*, as in theory she gives back the money.<sup>84</sup> But one can look at this behaviour in a completely different manner: if benefactors lend money for free here and are rewarded for it, it means that in other circumstances, *de facto* absent from the decrees, they have done interest-bearing loans. A careful analysis of the sums mentioned leads to the idea that benefactors were alternatively giving and lending money to their city, the loans implying that the latter would pay back. And, in general, loans and credit induce a high degree of dependency on the part of the indebted

82 IG XII 6, 11 (Austin 2006<sup>2</sup>, no. 132).

83 Davies 1971 and Davies 1981.

84 Gauthier 1985: 69 (about Boulagoras): “Ce riche citoyen ne cherche pas à se constituer une clientèle par des dons répétés”.

community or individual. This financial game was not played first and foremost in the interest of the *polis* and its *politai*, contrary to the “music” of the decrees, but in the interest of the wealthy, busy maintaining their wealth. The *atokon* (“zero-interest”) loan can be seen as a way to keep one’s place on the credit-market.

This system reaches a sort of acme with the case of Protogenes of Olbia in the Black Sea, around 200 BCE: a calculation of all his expenses reveals that his family has spent in total more than 13000 staters of gold in gifts and loans for public or private use, which is the equivalent of 260,000 *drachmai* or 43 talents.<sup>85</sup> His father and he himself certainly achieved this in several years. But I don’t see how to avoid the conclusion that Protogenes’ family had bigger financial capacities than its home-city.<sup>86</sup> Next to him, but below, one identifies other rich men, called *euporoumenoi* (A l. 66), which draws the image of a highly stratified society. I don’t imply that the city had no means of any sort, but it suffered from a cash crisis and was perpetually indebted, just as were indebted the fellow-citizens of Protogenes. Neither do I think that the *polis* was totally paralysed in terms of power. Protogenes is accountable for his magistracies (B l. 72–75) and democracy is still vivid in Olbia. But this constitutional side of affairs is not incompatible with an oligarchical situation, where a little group of very rich and influential men, that can be called a lobby in some cases, retains and perpetuates its wealth and power, in a context of major disruptions in the financial balances.

In the first century BCE, the situation gets worse. An extreme example of what I call “euergetic transactions” is that made by Gytheion, a city in Southern Peloponnesus and the old port of Sparta. In 71/0 BCE, the city which owes money to M. Antonius Creticus for his war against the pirates is forced to borrow from two Roman brothers, Nemerius and Marcus Cloatii.<sup>87</sup> The *polis* considers this loan as a benefaction (hence the honorific decree), because the two loan sharks have agreed to lend money when nobody else would, and have reduced the interest to 24 % instead of 48 %! One reaches here the breaking point of the euergetic system, when foreigners whose sole aim is the exploitation of the situation to their own benefit detain wealth and power with potentially dramatic consequences on the local population.

85 IOSPE I<sup>3</sup>, 32 (SIG<sup>3</sup>, 495; Müller 2010: 391–399, no. 21). I summarise here the main arguments given in Müller 2011b, where one finds a thorough study of this inscription.

86 That is also VEYNE’s position (Veyne 1976: 235 f.).

87 IG V.1.1146 (SIG<sup>3</sup>, 748). See Migeotte 1984: 90–96, no. 24.

III. Wealth and the *archai*: the oligarchisation of civic legal institutions

## 7. Privatisations

In connection with but besides the institution of *euergetism* and its financial implications, one must look at constitutional organs and legal procedures to see if they show any sign of oligarchisation during the Hellenistic period. A major clue for such a phenomenon is the privatisation of public institutions by wealthy people. The transformation of *archai*, “offices”, into *leitourgiai*, i. e. offices accomplished by rich citizens or resident foreigners at their own expense, is a good example, mostly visible in honorific decrees praising benefactors for their generosity during the tenure of their magistracy. In relationship with this phenomenon, one observes a progressive loosening of the control exercised on *euergetai*-magistrates by the cities, mostly from the end of the second century BCE, although probably not everywhere at the same pace.<sup>88</sup> One goes naturally with the other, as the city cannot hold accountable someone who pays her expenses from his own pocket. Protogenes of Olbia, already mentioned, belongs to a sort of “transitional phase”: he gives or lends huge amounts of cash for which he is not accountable, but when he’s in charge of the financial administration of the city, he manipulates a lot of money during three years, for which he is constantly accountable.<sup>89</sup>

Another excellent example of the way wealthy people took hold of civic offices is that of Hellenistic Rhodes. While living under a so-called democratic regime, the richest seized power by practising adoption and therefore being recorded in two different demes so that they could multiply their chances to get the highest priesthoods, notably of Athana Lindia, from the middle of the third century onwards, and mostly during the second and first centuries BCE: in this case, one can say they diverted a legal procedure to their own benefit and perturbed the democratic turnover.<sup>90</sup>

Finally, the case of the *ephebeia*, especially in Athens, is also very telling. This institution evolved on two major points during the Late Hellenistic period: it opened to foreigners in the second half of the second century BCE with a neat increase of their number during the first century BCE.<sup>91</sup> These *xenoi* had in common to belong to wealthy families often coming from royal courts. The second element, linked with

88 Fröhlich 2004: 453–508 (Attica and Boeotia) and 532 f. Cf. Hamon 2007: 92 f.

89 IOSPE I<sup>3</sup>, 32, ll. 72–75: πλείστα δὲ χειρίσας τῶν κοινῶν, τρία ἔτη συνεχῶς πάντα διώκησεν ὀρθῶς καὶ δικαίως, τοὺς μὲν λόγους ἐν τοῖς ὀρισμένοις χρόνοις ἀποφέρων (“Having manipulated a lot of common money, he has been during three years a fair and just administrator, giving his accounts within the time limits allowed”).

90 Gabrielsen 1997: 112–136.

91 Perrin-Saminadayar 2005: 76 and 83 f.

the first one, is that the ephebes had to pay for the activities implied by the system.<sup>92</sup> As soon as the beginning of the Hellenistic period, the city stopped giving them the four-obols indemnity that existed at the end of the fourth century BCE<sup>93</sup> and, on the contrary, the young people started paying for sacrifices, dedications and even the maintenance of the *gymnasion* itself. *Ephebeia* turned into a private club, having its own agenda and not organised by the city anymore.<sup>94</sup> This evolution corresponds to the fact that the *cosmétès*, i. e. the magistrate in charge of the ephebic system, ceased to be accountable for his office at the end of the second century: the last *euthynai* (“accounts”) are given in 106/5 BCE, which makes sense if the city had stopped giving any money.<sup>95</sup> Also, after the Mithridatic War, the recruiting of the teachers was no longer controlled by the city.<sup>96</sup>

### 8. Late Hellenistic timocracies

The last point concerns the legal definition of civic bodies in the Hellenistic period. It's a well-known fact that a massive part of the population, including women, foreigners and slaves, had always been kept apart from political power in Greek cities, whatever the regime.<sup>97</sup> But the narrowing in civic participation in the Hellenistic period, linking wealth and power (here the power to hold offices) through the introduction of a tax-qualification, seems to take us a step further. This can be observed for the *boule* (“council”) in some regions, like Boeotia and Euboea. In Boeotia for instance, after the dissolution of the *koinon* by the Romans in 171 BCE during the Third Macedonian War, the *bouleutai* changed their names for that of *synedroi*. The word obviously came from the political terminology provided by the federal system, where a Council named *synedrion* is attested in the third century BCE.<sup>98</sup> As there is no reason why such a change should be a purely linguistic matter, it has been interpreted in a highly probable manner as an evolution in the recruitment of the counsellors with the introduction of a *timema*. A good example of it, and the oldest one in Boeotia, is a proxeny decree by the city of Akraiphia dated between 170 and 167 in honor of a Roman, Gaius Oktaios, son of Titos, where the proposal is made by the *archontes* (the “magistrates”

92 Perrin-Saminadayar 2004: 94.

93 See Ps.-Arist. Ath. Pol. 42.3.

94 Perrin-Saminadayar 2004: 101 f.

95 IG II<sup>2</sup>, 1011, ll. 41/2: καὶ περὶ πάντων τῶν κατὰ τὴν ἀρχὴν ἔδωκεν τὰς εὐθύνας ἐν τῷ δικαστ[ηρίῳ] ἢ κατὰ τὸν νόμον (“And concerning all expenses pertaining to his office, he has been accountable in front of the judges as prescribed by law”).

96 Perrin-Saminadayar 2004: 100. See also Perrin-Saminadayar 2005.

97 See the contribution of Clifford ANDO to the present volume.

98 Müller 2005: 114–117.

in general) and the *synedroi*.<sup>99</sup> In other decrees, the *synedroi* appear as the authors of the decision with the *demoi*.<sup>100</sup> In the first century BCE, the *synedroi* started to form a consistent group that could be called an “embryonic *ordo*”,<sup>101</sup> whose advice was still needed even after they had been discharged of their office, as one can see in a decree from Megarian Pagai dated between 65/4 and 57/6 BCE.<sup>102</sup> The same tendency is observable in the formal organisation of banquets given by the great benefactors from the end of the second century BCE. Banquets reflect how rich individuals chose to organise and present the community in a way that considerably differs from what happened during public ceremonies of the same type. One of the best examples is that of Archippe, a wealthy heiress from Kyme in Asia Minor (c. 120 BCE), who, on two occasions, set up a banquet for her fellow-citizens, ordered according to their ‘social group’, in a hierarchical way that she created: the *bouleutai*, the 12 tribes of the civic body and the resident foreigners (*paroikoi* or *metoikoi*).<sup>103</sup> Social change is here revealed, if not shaped, by the wealthy benefactor, whose power touches the community deeply.

The introduction of a *timema* has been considered a powerful innovation, as the Greeks started drawing lines inside the civic body, which they had not done for a long time according to P. HAMON.<sup>104</sup> I don’t completely subscribe to this judgment, as it’s a way to set apart again Spartan-type *politeiai*. Also we can’t take for granted that this potential evolution has left a visible trace in every period and every city where it might have happened. One should not forget how stable the political vocabulary has been on the long term, potentially hiding multiple changes: the word *demoi*, “People”, for instance is one that never disappeared from the official texts! Finally, the possible in-

**99** IG VII 4127, l. 3, [τὸ ἄρχοντες κὴ τὸ σ]ύνεδρον ἔλεξαν (“the magistrates and the *synedroi* have proposed etc.”). The change is probably to be observed elsewhere and might provide a key to improve local chronologies, as in Arcadia where *synedroi* appear in an honorific decree from Mantinea/Antigoneia (IG V 2, 263, l. 5).

**100** E. g., in a decree from Thisbe (Boeotia), where the city accepts ca 120/110 BCE to recognise as a penteteric festival the Akraiphian Ptoia, IG VII 4139 (+ BCH 44 [1920], 247–249, no. 9, ll. 17/18: δεδογμένον εἶναι τοῖς τε συνέδροις καὶ τῶι δήμῳ Θισβέων: “Be it resolved by the *synedroi* and the People of the Thisbaeans ...”).

**101** Hamon 2007: 88.

**102** IG VII 190, improved by Wilhelm 1907 (1984). The enactment formula reads ll. 38/39 (new ed.): ἔδ[οξε τοῖς] ἀρχουσι καὶ συνέδροις τοῖς ἐκ πάντων[υ τ]ῶν ἐτέων καὶ τῷ δάμ[ω] (“It was resolved by the magistrates, the *synedroi* of all the years and the People”).

**103** As suggested by Hamon (2005: 126–129) who deals extensively with the case: SEG 33, 1035–1041.

**104** Hamon 2007: 88: “Cette innovation fut d’une importance capitale, car elle définissait pour la première fois depuis bien longtemps en Grèce une frontière entre les citoyens ordinaires et ceux qui participaient activement aux affaires”.



roduction of a *timema* for *bouleutai* and maybe other magistracies did not mean, contrary to the Spartan model, that the ordinary citizens had no access to the assembly.<sup>105</sup> All depended on what the *timema* aimed at and how restricted the civic body was. Yet, the introduction of a *timema* in the government of Greek democracies meant that only the richest families could hold the charges and therefore that the turnover among citizens would gradually stop to the benefit of the wealthiest, although without eliminating potential new people, as there is no proof that office holding became hereditary. This phenomenon might be associated with the fact that the leading families of the Imperial period can often be traced back in the second century BCE. That much is true for cities like Thespias and Tanagra, free and flourishing Boeotian *poleis* during the early Empire.

Such an evolution fits well the historical context of the settlement of the Third Macedonian war by the Romans in 168/7 BCE, at least in mainland Greece. Boeotia for instance endured a harsh and massive political cleansing in the cities that had embraced Perseus' side.<sup>106</sup> The question is therefore to identify the possible influence of the *imperatores* and the Senate in these changes. Part of the changes obviously came from internal evolutions in the way cities governed themselves.<sup>107</sup> But in some cases, there have been authoritarian modifications of *politeiai* by the Roman victors.<sup>108</sup> In 194, Flamininus reorganised Thessaly so that members of the Councils and judges would be recruited according to a tax-qualification;<sup>109</sup> in 167, the Romans, having put an end to the Antigonid kingdom, set up four *merides* (districts) administered by magistrates and a "federal" Council composed of *synedroi*, access to which was probably limited to people reaching the tax-qualification;<sup>110</sup> in 146, in mainland Greece, L. Mummius Achaicus is said by Pausanias to have put an end to democracies and

105 Cf. Hamon 2009: 355 f.

106 Cf. Müller 1996.

107 Cf. Hamon 2007: 374.

108 Ferrary 1987–1989: 206–213, has gathered all the relevant cases.

109 Liv. 34.51.6: *a censu maxime et senatum et iudices legit potentioioremque eam partem civitatum fecit cui salva et tranquilla omnia esse magis expediebat* ("He chose the senate and magistrates mainly on the basis of property and strove to make that element in the communities more influential which found it advantageous to have everything peaceful and quiet"). The measure has been understood as concerning only the federal level in Thessaly (Hamon 2005: 131), but in my view that is not what Livy writes since he explicitly talks about *civitates*.

110 Liv. 45.32.2: *pronuntiatum, quod ad statum Macedoniae pertinebat, senatores, quos synhedros vocant, legendos esse, quorum consilio res publica administraretur* ("Concerning the constitution of Macedonia it was announced that senators, whom they call *synhedri*, were to be chosen to form a Council through which affairs of state were to be conducted").

installed offices based on a *timema*;<sup>111</sup> finally, Cicero in 59 calls Temnos' *boule* in Asia Minor an *ordo senatorius*, although that might be simply an *interpretatio Romana* of a much more complex reality.<sup>112</sup> All these testimonies are quite consistent and show that the introduction of a tax-qualification has probably been a major tool used by the Romans to settle the affairs of Greek cities, at least those who had resisted them during the wars: mainland Greece was more and earlier affected than Asia Minor, where the process seems to have been more autonomous and was certainly not achieved before the mid first century BCE.<sup>113</sup>

### Conclusion

It's time to conclude briefly. About the way "oligarchy" evolved during the Hellenistic period, it needs to be underlined, once again and loudly so, that trying to sketch a global evolution is virtually impossible, if not meaningless. The key factor to look for is the level of wealth, private and public, but it is not easy to establish in what proportions material inequalities increased then, compared to Classical times. Also, the differences in the accumulation of wealth and the imbalances implied for the period itself are notably difficult to assess, due to the uneven chronological and spatial distribution of literary and epigraphic sources. The wealthiest people seem to belong to the second and first centuries BCE, but there is no doubt that high levels of riches are already observable during the third century. In this respect, there is no clear-cut limit between an Early and a Late Hellenistic period. One is therefore better off looking at various "oligarchic situations", in which wealth and power associated express themselves through different institutions (euergetism, banquets, *ephebeia*, citizenship, civic offices ...) in a variety of places, to the benefit of the wealthiest. The only general noticeable trend might be the changes in legal procedures, and especially the access to offices, from the second third of the second century BCE. But, even then,

**111** Paus. 7.16.9: πόλεων δέ, ὅσα Ῥωμαίων ἐναντία ἐπολέμησαν, τείχη μὲν ὁ Μόμμιος κατέλυε καὶ ὄπλα ἀφηρεῖτο πρὶν ἢ καὶ συμβούλους ἀποσταλῆναι παρὰ Ῥωμαίων: ὡς δὲ ἀφίκοντο οἱ σὺν αὐτῷ βουλευσόμενοι, ἐνταῦθα δημοκρατίας μὲν κατέπαυε, καθίστα δὲ ἀπὸ τιμημάτων τὰς ἀρχάς ("The walls of all the cities that had made war against Rome Mummius demolished, disarming the inhabitants, even before assistant commissioners were dispatched from Rome, and when these did arrive, in these places he proceeded to put down democracies and to establish governments based on a property qualification"). On this controversial passage, see Ferrary 2014 [1988]: 199–209: Pausanias has condensed a lot of information here and he's probably wrong for some regions like Boeotia as we have seen that *synedroi* had existed there already from 167.

**112** Cic. Flacc. 18.43. See Hamon 2005: 133 f.

**113** Hamon 2005: 144.

the probable introduction of a *timema* for *bouleutai* can be traced only in mainland Greece, while Asia Minor seems to be affected a century later. In a way, the distinction established by some historians between Early and Late Hellenistic, that has turned into a new orthodoxy,<sup>114</sup> although probably justified in some respects and some cities, can be considered just another version of the “decline” of the Greek city, simply postponed: instead of dying at Chaeronea in 338 BCE or after Alexander’s death in 323, the Greek democratic city is now perceived as disappearing (or changing in substantial proportions) around the time the Romans got to Greece in the first half of the second century BCE.<sup>115</sup>

Nonetheless, all the cases we have looked at display a common point, not immune from paradoxes: the close intertwining of democracy and oligarchy. The two terms are not in opposition, nor do they form the two sides of the same coin.<sup>116</sup> Also, they are not to be put on a continuous line with oligarchy on one end and democracy on the other, as they are not a matter of proportion. If one goes beyond any constitutional aspect of the vocabulary and accepts the central idea that oligarchy means much more than a narrowing of the civic body based on tax-qualification, one can observe how oligarchical practices tend to divert legal procedures, even in places like Rhodes where democracy does not simply mean freedom (from monarchic domination), and still implies an active political participation of most citizens. In other cities, privatisation affects different institutions: in Athens, the city progressively stops being involved in some major institutions as the ephebic system, which is finally privatised, just as one can talk about privatisation when magistracies (*archai*) are transformed into liturgies through benefactions. In this respect, the euergetic system, always labelled as a wonderful invention of the Greeks, works first and foremost for the benefit of the wealthiest through complex credit operations. Such situations clearly show, as WINTERS argues, that democracy and oligarchy are perfectly compatible, with oligarchy operating inside democratic regimes. Troubles begin when the community starts suffering from the imbalances created by the behaviour of the wealthiest who do not hesitate to create, as in Sparta, Olbia or Gytheion, intolerable indebtedness situations leading to *stasis* if not *metastasis*.<sup>117</sup>

**114** See for instance the recent book by J.-M. ROUBINEAU on the social history of Greek cities, which does not contain anything on Spartan history (!) and stops in the middle of the second century BCE, perceived as a global rupture (Roubineau 2015: 11).

**115** Cf. Wiemer 2013: 64–67; Müller 2015: 356 f. On the distinction between the Early and Late Hellenistic period see Gauthier 2005.

**116** Cf. Leppin 2013.

**117** On *stasis*, cf. the contribution by Henning BÖRM to the present volume.

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**Addendum:** It was not before this article was completed and submitted that I could read M. SIMONTON'S book *Classical Greek Oligarchy: A Political History*, which from now on will be the reference on the topic. I especially appreciated the efforts made by the author to define membership in a Classical oligarchy as a matter of wealth (Simonton 2017: 35–40), although he is concerned by the political side of things rather than by economy.

