



THE INSTITUTE
OF
WORLD POLITICS

Ancient and Modern Democracy: Ideology, Morphology, and Pathology

Prof. Christofilis Maggidis

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"Our democracy is getting self-destroyed, for it abused the rights of freedom and of equality; for it taught the citizens to regard insolence as a right, illegality as freedom, impertinence as equality, and anarchy as happiness."
(Isocrates, 436-338 BC).

Democracy first emerged in ancient Athens in 507 BC following a long turbulent period of aristocracy and tyranny, when a nexus of intertwined geopolitical, sociopolitical, economic, and cultural developments led to the morphogenesis of this new political constitution. Athenian Democracy formulated the political ideology and fundamental principles that were later canonized by modern democracies, formalized defensive mechanisms against undue concentration of power and employed innovative integrative mechanisms to propagate its ideology and educate the citizens. Pathogenic traits-catalysts, however, such as the extreme polarization between mass and elite, demagogic, populism, failure of justice, apathy, and poor education caused extensive political ankylosis. Internal corrosion and changing historical conditions caused the decline and fall of Democracy three centuries later.

Isocrates' aphorism, therefore, rings alarmingly all too pragmatic and relevant today, 250 years since the resurgence of Democracy in the modern world (USA, France, Greece). Are we running a similar cycle, repeating old mistakes, standing at the same juncture, heading towards the same dead end? To navigate forward, find solutions, and shape our future, we need first to study our past.



Ancient and Modern Democracy: Ideology, Morphology, and Pathology

- I. Birth of Democracy (Morphogenesis): interacting factors and variables
- II. Principles of Democracy
- III. Ideology of Democracy: integration mechanisms
- IV. Pathology of Democracy: decline and fall
- V. The future of Democracy: dead end or change?



Political Constitutions

Aristotle, *Politics*:

Constitutions

Rule of One

Rule of Few

Rule of Majority

Original:

Monarchy

Aristocracy

Politeia
(democracy)

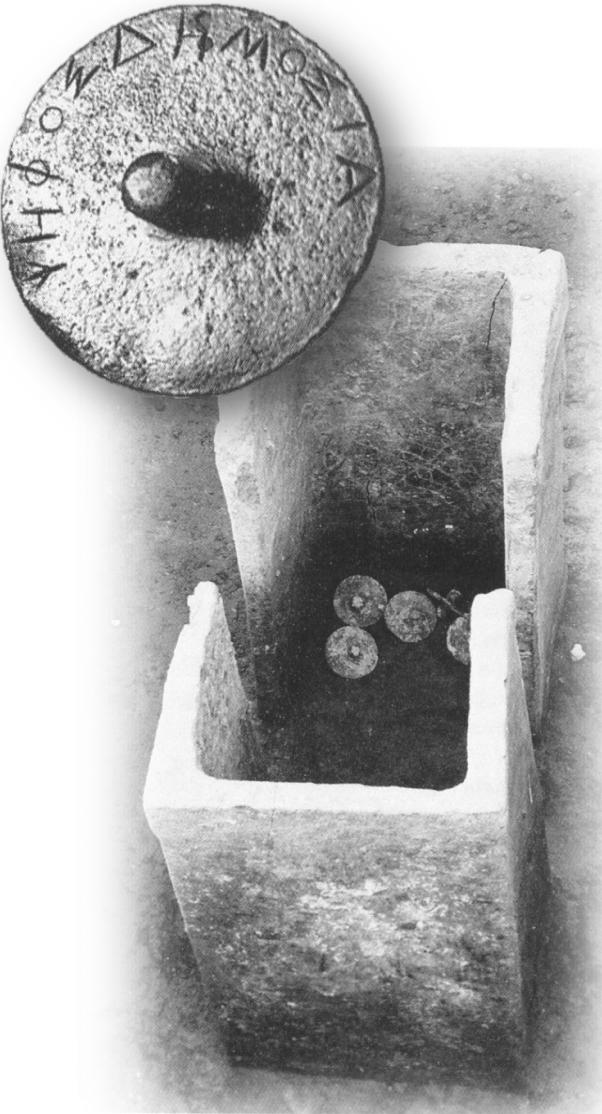
Degenerate:

Tyranny

Oligarchy

Demokratia
(ochlocracy)

I. Birth of Democracy (Morphogenesis): interacting factors and variables



*Public ballot box & bronze ballot
Athens 4th century BC*

- Geopolitics
- Landscape and Environment
- Political
- Economic
- Social
- Military/warfare
- Religion/Athletics
- Education/Writing

I. Birth of Democracy (Morphogenesis): interacting factors and variables



GEOPOLITICS

Geopolitical importance of Greece's *strategic location in the cross-roads of sea and land trade routes in the Mediterranean:*

- gateway between 3 continents
- multicultural contacts
- integration of foreign influences



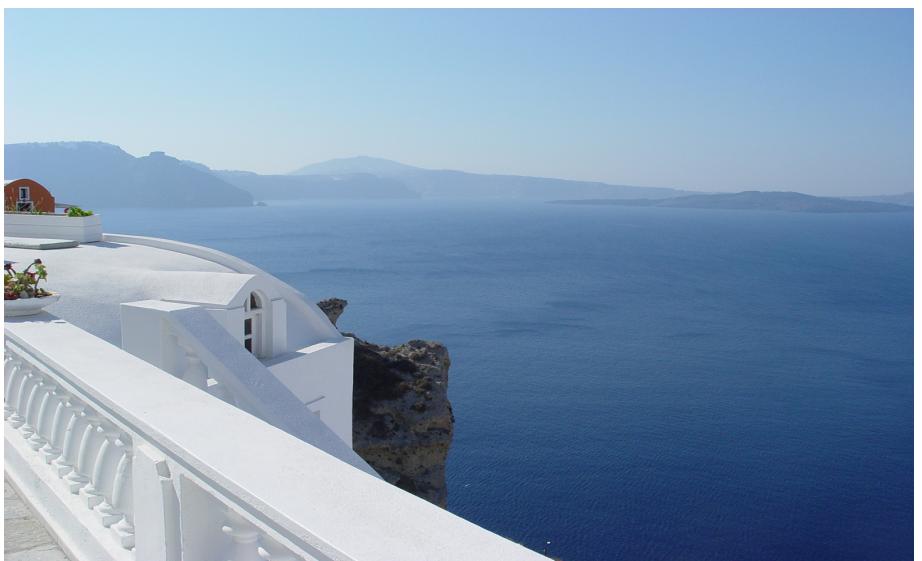
I. Birth of Democracy (Morphogenesis): interacting factors and variables



LANDSCAPE & ENVIRONMENT

Mountainous landscape divides the land into smaller regions:

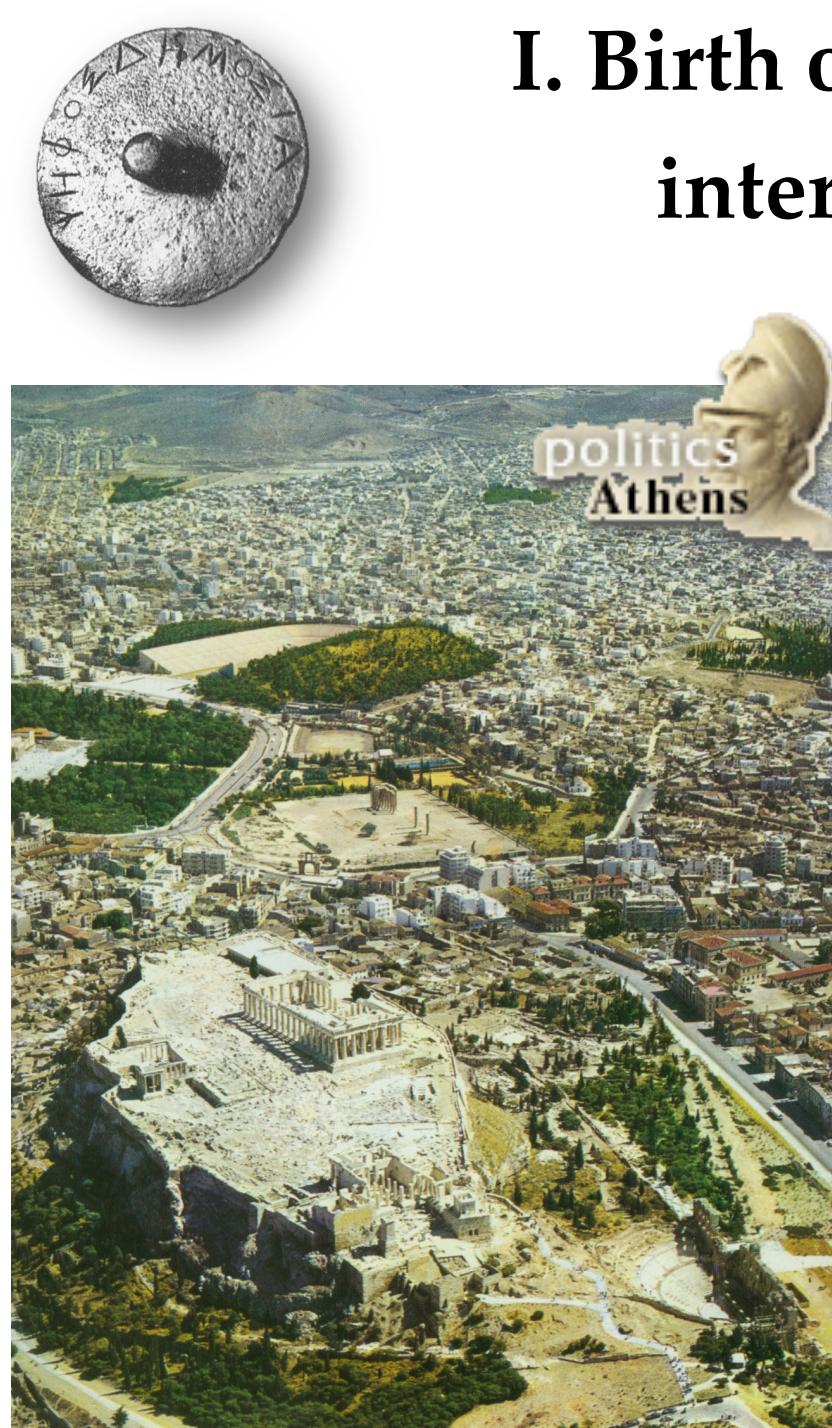
- political fragmentation in small units
- Regionalism



Limited land resources and severe environmental constraints led the Greeks to seafaring and commerce (8,500 miles of coastline and 3,000 islands):

- exchange of physical goods and ideas
- contacts and influences

I. Birth of Democracy (Morphogenesis): interacting factors and variables



POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Political fragmentation of palace states & emergence of the *polis* (city-state) as the main political unit (9th-4th c. BC):

- small sized
- autonomous & independent
- self-contained & self-sufficient
- homogeneous populations culturally integrated
- urban-centric
- socioeconomic classes (dominated by a strong middle-class)

I. Birth of Democracy (Morphogenesis): interacting factors and variables



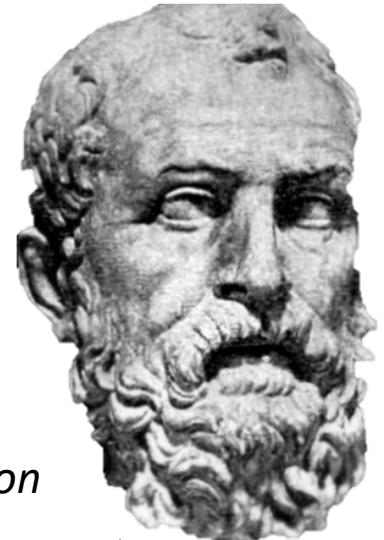
Hoard of ancient Greek coins

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS

- *Change of economy from agricultural to trade-based* (from 7/6th c. BC)
- *Coinage* vs barter economy: portable wealth accumulates in the hands of merchants, sailors, craftsmen (from 6th c. BC)
- Formation of a rising *middle class* and eventually of a new aristocracy of wealth (*timocracy*)



I. Birth of Democracy (Morphogenesis): interacting factors and variables



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENTS

- *Social strife between elite and mass:* aristocracy of birth (nobility/landowners) vs rising middle class (6th c. BC)
- Demand for justice (*legislation instead of customary law*) and participation of wealthy middle class in political administration (6th c. BC): legislation of Lycourgos (Sparta), Dracon and Solon (Athens)
- Tyranny (7/6th c. BC) broke down aristocratic allegiance and solidarity, thus empowering the mass over the elite: Pheidon (Argos), Periander (Corinth), Polykrates (Samos), Peisistratos (Athens)
- Democracy: domination of middle class: Kleisthenes 507 BC (Athens)



I. Birth of Democracy (Morphogenesis): interacting factors and variables

MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

Change in warfare tactics: defense of the *polis* now rests on the *phalanx* and battle ships (*triremes*) manned by middle and lower citizens (from 6th c. BC) (previously defended by cavalry and chariots of aristocratic 'knights')





I. Birth of Democracy (Morphogenesis): interacting factors and variables

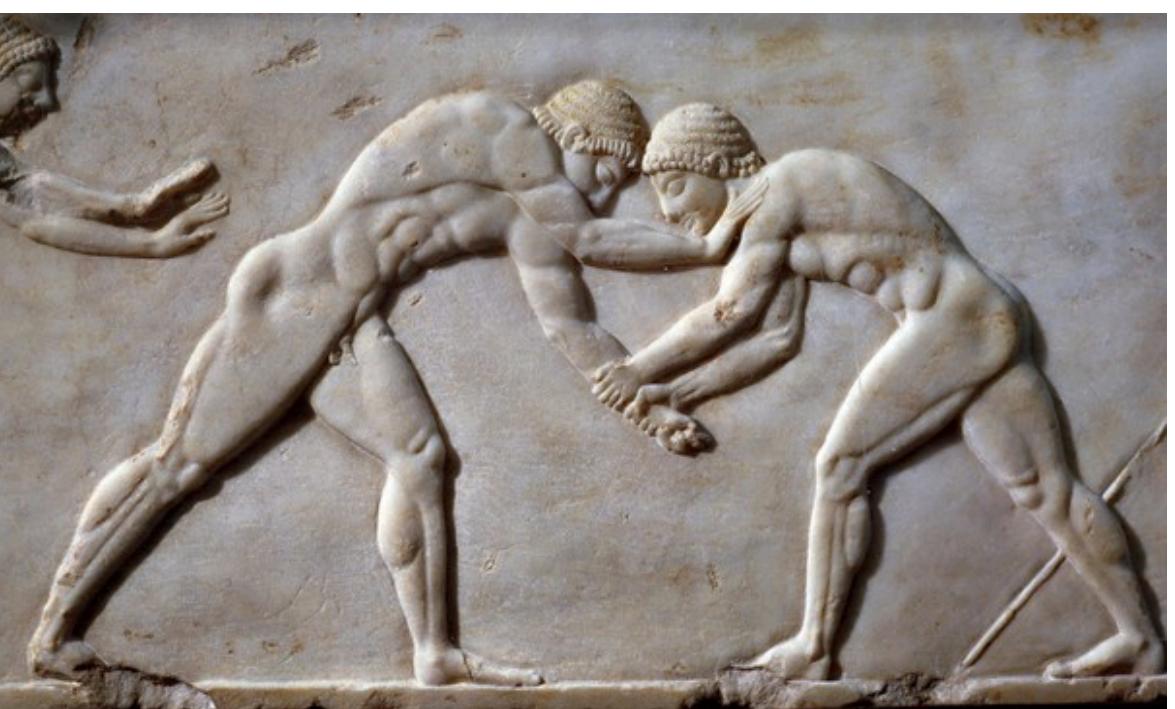


GREEK ATHLETICS

Athletics originally started as an expression of aristocratic ideology (776 BC)

*By the 6th c. BC, participation of all Greeks regardless of class & wealth status and the need for well-trained armies of common citizens led to a change in athletic ideology (*aien aristeu ein*):*

- athletes are judged solely on *merit and ability* (they compete in the nude stripped of all socio-economic or ethnic distinctions)
- the stadium becomes an *arena for personal, social, ethnic distinction, and a platform for cultural and ethnic integration of all Greeks*
- the athletic facilities of the *polis* (*palaistra & gymnasium*) facilitate the *socioeconomic integration of population and equality between social classes*: athletics become outlet for social/ethnic tensions; contact leads to familiarization, acceptance, integration in the democratic *polis*



I. Birth of Democracy (Morphogenesis): interacting factors and variables



EDUCATION & WRITING

The development of the *Greek alphabet* since the 8th c. BC facilitated

- the *diffusion of writing and education in Greek society* (diachronically a prerogative of aristocracy)
- written communication (law, politics, religion, trade, art)
- scientific research and literature

ΕΩΝ ΕΙΔΕΝ ΖΑΙ ΟΙ ΚΡΑΤΟΣ Η
ΖΕΛΕΩΝ ΟΑΙ ΔΕΙΓΜΑΤΟΔΕΣ Η ΜΙΑ
ΤΟΣ ΣΡΥΤΑΖΕ ΖΕ ΚΑΙ ΤΕΛΒΟΛΕ
ΖΕ ΔΕΤΕΧΙΑ ΛΙΓΙΩ Ι ΓΟΛΕΙΗ Η
Ι ΤΙ ΖΕΩΝ ΘΕΖΑ ΛΟΝΔΡΧΟΣ Ι ΕΖΗ
ΕΙ ΗΥΠΕΡΟΠΙΑΙ Η ΟΤΙ ΖΗ ΚΑΩ
ΤΟΙ ΔΥΝΑΤΟΙ ΟΣ Ι ΝΗΟΣ ΑΛΛΕΑΔ
ΚΟΝΤΑΙ Ε ΔΟΧΜΕΝΤΕΙ ΒΟΛΕΙ
ΚΑΙ ΤΟΙ ΔΕΜΟΙ ΔΑΝΤΙΟΧΙ ΖΕ ΠΡΥ
ΤΑΝΕΙ ΖΕ ΖΑΡΟΙ ΔΔΕΣΕ ΛΡ ΑΛΛΑΤ



Ι Τ Σ Ε Κ Ι Δ Σ Ε Γ Ο Τ Η



II. Principles of Democracy

(Aristotle *Politics* 1317a 40-67; 1317b 17-18a3)



Pnyx, Athens

- **freedom of action** (*eleutheria* – $\varepsilon\lambda\epsilon\nu\theta\epsilon\rho\alpha$)
- **freedom of speech** (*isegoria* – $\iota\sigma\eta\gamma\omega\rho\alpha$)
- **equality before the law** (*isonomia* - $\iota\sigma\omega\nu\omega\mu\alpha$)
- **majority rule** (mass *vs* elite) (*pleiopsefia* - $\pi\lambda\epsilon\iota\omega\psi\eta\varphi\alpha$)
- **accountability** (*euthyna* – $\varepsilon\nu\theta\acute{\nu}\nu\eta$)
- **tripartite division of government** (legislative, executive, judicial)
- **the *demos* is all-powerful:** public officials are empowered by the people to govern and are accountable to the people (Assembly or *Ecclesia*)

Control mechanisms (checks and balances) are set in place to avert undue concentration of power and safeguard Democracy:

- **election by lot and/or vote**
office eligibility not dependent
on economic or social status
- **limited service time** (1 year) and
alternation in power (max. two
non-consecutive terms)
- **salary for public offices**
(motivation for poor citizens,
averting corruption)
- principle of **collectivity** in public
offices (collective bodies)



Lot machine, Athens



- **eligibility screenings**
(*dokimasia* – δοκιμασία)
- monthly **confirmation hearings** (by the Boule and Ecclesia) during term
- **impeachment**
(*eisangelia* – εισαγγελία)
- **public account of office** at the end of term (*euthyna* – ευθύνη)
- **ostracism**
(*ostrakismos* - οστρακισμός)
- **liturgies** (*λειτουργία*) wealth tax, redistribution of wealth
(*χορηγία, τριηραρχία*, etc.)



Ostraka, Athens



Choregic monument of Lysikrates, Athens



III. Ideology of Democracy: integration mechanisms

1. Realism

Democracy is based on realistic admission that “*absolute power corrupts even the best of people*” regardless of good intentions or ‘holy aims’ (subjective social constructs). Democracy is all about *maintaining procedures* that safeguard a defined frame for *conflict of ideas (not of people)* through dialectics and *compromise of conflicting interests*.

2. ‘Real Time’

Democracy focuses on the *present and future* (unlike monarchy/aristocracy)

3. From ‘*Thesmos*’ to ‘*Nomos*’

transition from a society based on customary law (aristocratic ideals/morals, ritual reciprocity) to a society based on recorded law, equality and justice



III. Ideology of Democracy: integration mechanisms

4. **From traditional conservatism to radical criticism of old '*Ethos*' and past ideologies:** strong criticism and satire of current structures, ideas, and people through philosophy, oratory and comedy
5. **From clan-based elite (aristocracy) to the rule of the mass & individualism (democracy)**
6. **Rise of Rhetoric** (courts of law and political debates in public fora) developed by the **Sophists and professional public orators** (5/4th c. BC)
7. **From Mythology to Historiography** (Herodotus) and **History** (Thucydides): transition from fiction to historical fact (5th c. BC)



III. Ideology of Democracy: integration mechanisms

8. Emergence of Theater and Dramatic poetry (6th c. BC)

- By contrast with epic poetry (heroic deeds of nobility) and lyric poetry (personal sentiments), **tragedy** addresses ethics, law and justice, political and moral dilemmas, civic identity through allegorical myths balancing between the elite (actors) and the mass (chorus)
- **Comedy:** expands the right of *parrhesia* (boldness of speech limited to citizens) to all Athenians
- *Laughter is the weapon of the weak against the powerful* and, thus, controls and checks the power of leaders (Aristotle)

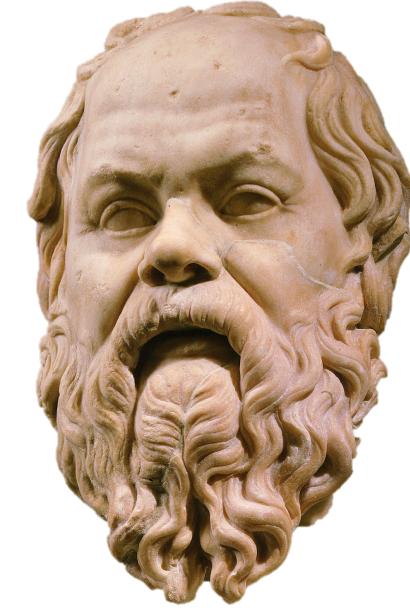




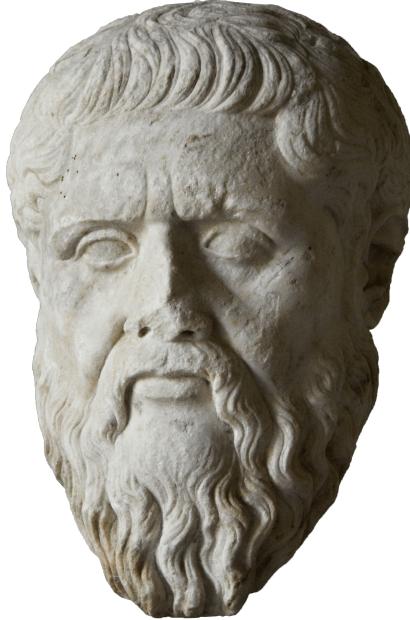
III. Ideology of Democracy: integration mechanisms

9. From Natural Philosophy to Political & Ethics Philosophy

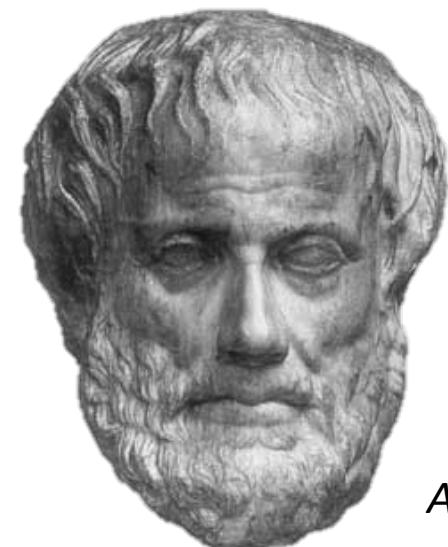
- focus of philosophy shifts from nature, cosmology, and cosmogony to man himself ('*man is the measure of all things*') and political, socioeconomic, and ethical issues
- shift from abstract theoretical thought (inductive method) to *empirical research* (*deductive method*), *reasoning*, and *factual analysis*.



Socrates



Plato



Aristotle

III. Ideology of Democracy: integration mechanisms



10. Narrative Art

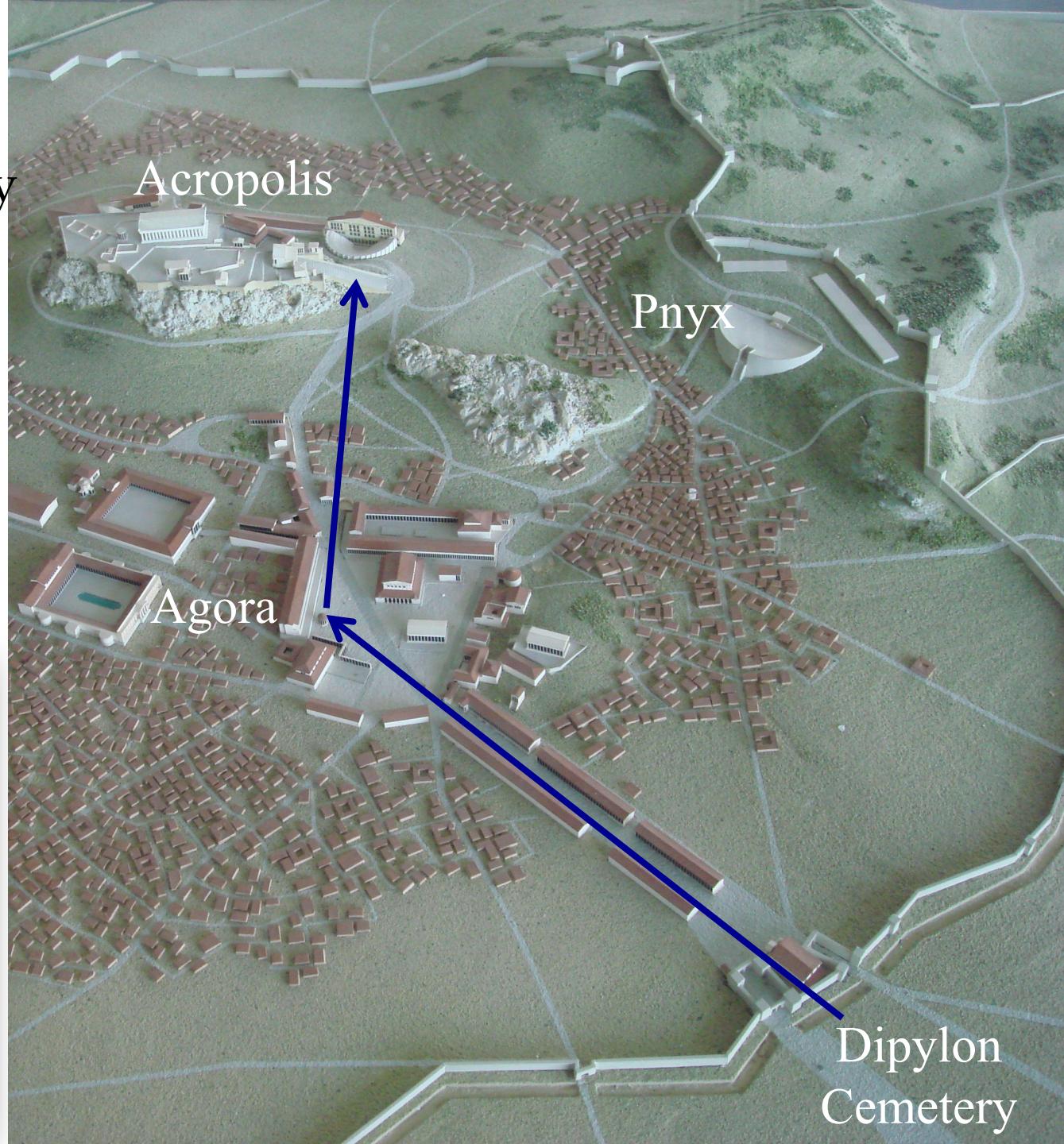
- transition from generic, symbolic (iconic) monoscenic art (of aristocratic, timeless, emblematic value) to *narrative polyscenic and polysemic art*
- change from mythological themes legitimizing aristocratic birth rights (archaic Attic BF pottery) to *everyday-life scenes illustrating life of common citizens* (classical Attic RF pottery)
- *elimination or replacement of politically charged symbols* (Heracles/Theseus, Archaic kouroi/korai)



11. Processions & festivals

- mass participation
- cultural integration & collective memory
- common civic identity & bonding
- social ranking & hierarchy

Panathenaic procession (*pompe*) connects like a human thread the past (cemetery/ancestors), present (Agora) and timeless future (Acropolis/gods)





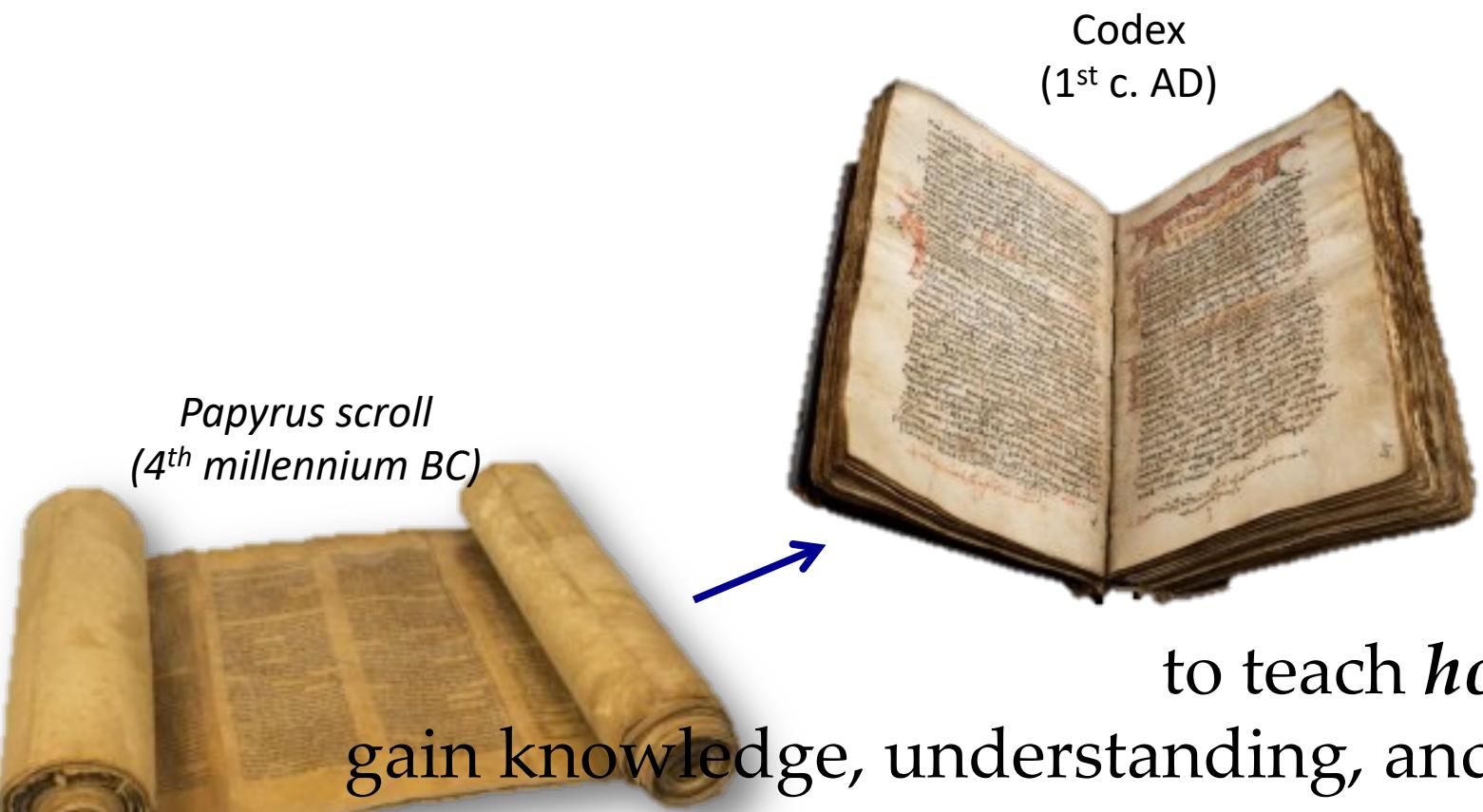
IV. Pathology of Democracy: decline and fall

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Isocrates, ancient Greek orator (436-338 BC)

- 1. Power struggle between mass and elite (polarization)**
- 2. Demagogues and populism**
- 3. Prosopocentric political parties (not formed on principles or ideology)**
- 4. Lack of continuity of government**
- 5. Justice: judicial system failure**
- 6. Apathy & indifference: decreasing political participation of citizens**
- 7. Education**

V. The future of Democracy: dead end or change?

EDUCATION
prepares thinking citizens, reinforces Democracy



EDUCATION
turns mirrors into windows

Aim of Education:
to teach *how* to think, *not what* to think
gain knowledge, understanding, and critical ability in order to *act*
(entelecheia)



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