

4. The *Athenaion Politeia* and Aristotle's Political Theory

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ABSTRACT – This contribution addresses the issue of the mutual influence between the *Athenaion Politeia* and Aristotle's political theory as developed in the *Politics* and elsewhere. It surveys previous approaches to this issue, analysing problems both with deterministic approaches and with those approaches that deny any influence of theory on the historical treatment of the *Ath. Pol.* It focuses in particular on the theory of the *metabole* and on the constitutional transitions in the *Ath. Pol.*, and examines in detail the various *metabolai* of Athens vis-à-vis the treatment of *Politics* V and VI. It argues that the influence of Aristotle's political theory in the *Ath. Pol.* is clear and detectable, but not deterministic. Theory is used as a key aid to understanding the logic of events.

KEYWORDS – Aristotle's political theory; Athens; *metabole*; *stasis* – Atene; *metabole*; *stasis*; teoria politica di Aristotele.

1. SUMMARY OF THE ISSUE

The issue has been partially created by Aristotle himself when, in the sketchy outline of the *Politics* in *EN X 9* (1181b 16-20), he announced: «First, then, if there is anything that has been correctly said by our predecessors on some part of the subject, let us try to go through it and then, on the basis of the collection of constitutions, try to get a theoretical grasp on what sorts of things preserve and destroy cities, what sorts of things preserve or destroy each sort of constitution, and what causes some cities to be well governed and others the opposite. For when we have gotten a theoretical grasp on these matters, maybe we shall also be better able to see which constitution is best, how each should be arranged, and what laws and habits it should use» (transl. Reeve). Here Aristotle establishes a close connection between the collection of constitutions (probably still unfinished) and what we now refer to as books IV-VI of the *Politics*. Whoever reads

these three books cannot help but notice the extraordinary amount of historical detail which wide-ranging research on the institutions, *politeiai* and specific historical cases of cities large and small requires¹. Therefore, it is not surprising that, up to the '60s of the past century, the mainstream perspective about the relationship between the collection of 158 constitutions and the *Politics* was still that provided by Wilamowitz in his *Aristoteles und Athen* of 1893: «Aristotle undertook this enormous enterprise in order to provide the inductive material for his political theory»². This view was reiterated and applied to other historical-ethnographical works by R. Weil, in his depiction of Aristotle as a historian in *Aristote et l'histoire* (1960), whose main point can be summarised in this formulation: «sans histoire, pas de matière pour la *Politique*»³.

In 1962 a book by two American classicists, James Day and Mortimer Chambers⁴, which has been rather famous for some time, introduced a second angle on the problem. They did not concern themselves with the general relationship between Aristotle's historical inquiry and the *Politics*, but especially with that between the *Politics* and the main extant work among the *politeiai*, the only one still available almost in full, the *Athenaion Politeia*. While we can generally postulate a relationship between the *syngemenai politeiai* and the *Politics* by which the former constituted inductive material for the latter (while keeping in mind Rhodes' scepticism about Aristotle waiting for the collection to be complete before writing the *Politics*⁵), the relationship must be the inverse in the case of the *Ath. Pol.* The *Ath. Pol.* must have been written after the *Politics*, for apparent chronological reasons: the *Ath. Pol.* was probably written between 330 and 322⁶, although it was likely revised and expanded repeatedly. Day and Chambers' book unquestionably focused the attention on the possible – for the two scholars, undeniable – relationship between the *Ath. Pol.* and the *Politics*, although the solutions they proposed for this issue were – and still are – extremely questionable.

Day's and Chambers' thesis can be briefly summarised as follows: (a) the first 41 chapters of the *Ath. Pol.* provide a teleological account of the evolution of the Athenian constitution, whose end (*telos*) is the radical democracy of the late 5th and 4th century. This teleological structure

¹ For a general outline of Aristotle's political geography see Bertelli 2012.

² My translation of Wilamowitz 1893, I, 361.

³ Weil 1965, 161 ff.; 1960.

⁴ Day - Chambers 1962.

⁵ Rhodes 1981, 59; see also Weil 1960, 308.

⁶ Rhodes 1981, 51 ff.; Keaney 1970 proposed an earlier date, 334 BCE.

is modelled on a biological notion of development⁷; (b) the evolution of Athenian democracy in the *Ath. Pol.* conforms to the structure of the four (five) democracies described in *Pol.* IV 4 (five forms), IV 6 (four), and VI 4 (four), in which the different stages necessarily evolve towards their *telos* – or *physis* –, i.e. the most recent demagogic form; deviations towards other constitutional forms, found in the historical section of the *Ath. Pol.*, are merely hiccups that do not alter the Athenian constitution's path to its radical destiny, in obedience to the inescapable rule of «more people more democracy» stated in the *Politics* (III 15, 1286b 8-22).

Despite the criticisms directed at this exceedingly «philosophical» interpretation of the *Ath. Pol.* – especially by Rhodes⁸ – the search for a structure – an organizational framework – in the *Ath. Pol.* derived from the theoretical assumptions of the *Politics* continued. We find the same approach, albeit with different solutions, in the studies of Keaney⁹ and Wallace¹⁰. However, it seems to me, interest in these problems has waned after the '90s of the last century. It is thus, as it were, a problem of historiographical «archaeology», which, however, I believe is still worth investigating.

2. THE METABOLAI OF THE ATHENIAN CONSTITUTION IN THE «POLITICS»

Rhodes' judgement on the applicability of Aristotle's political theory to the narrative of the *Ath. Pol.* was unequivocal: after confuting Day's and Chambers' theoretical construct – despite acknowledging the existence of points of contact between the *Politics* and the *Ath. Pol.* – he concluded: «I find remarkably few traces of Aristotelian theory in *Athenaion Politeia*»¹¹. Now, it seems to me perfectly clear that in the description of the evolution of the Athenian constitution in chapters 1-40 and, especially, in the summary of its phases in chapter 41, Aristotle¹² employs a hermeneutic tool elaborated in books IV-VI of the *Politics*, i.e. the notion of *metabole*

⁷ However, Day and Chambers's use of the notion of *telos* is both partially contradictory and partially imaginative; see Day - Chambers 1962, esp. 52-61.

⁸ Rhodes 1981, 10 ff.; see also the reviews by K. von Fritz, *Gnomon* 39 (1967), 673-681; N.G.L. Hammond, *CR* 14 (1964), 34-37; Gilliard 1971.

⁹ Keaney 1963; 1992, 50 ff.

¹⁰ Wallace 1993.

¹¹ Rhodes 1981, 13.

¹² I accept the traditional attribution to Aristotle.

*politeion*¹³. I find it extremely hard to think that Aristotle could find in his sources (Athenian, attidographic or otherwise) an arrangement of Athenian constitutional facts based on this category, even though this was not unknown to historians such as Herodotus and Thucydides¹⁴. After all, this notion was the only instrument available to Aristotle for interpreting constitutional change in evolutionary terms, since his aim was to describe the evolution of a constitution rather than writing an *archaiologia* of the Athenian political system similar to what we find in Thucydides or in the Attidographers (assuming a historiographical model is in fact identifiable in the remains of the *Atthides*)¹⁵.

However, before comparing the *metabolai* of Athenian democracy in the *Politics* and in the *Ath. Pol.*, we need to define summarily what Aristotle meant by *metabole politeion* and, especially, rule out a misunderstanding which characterises Day's and Chambers' analysis, and which none of their critics appears to have noticed. According to the two scholars, the scheme of the constitutional *metabolai* in the *Ath. Pol.* is modelled on the four (five) forms of democracy described in *Pol.* IV 4, IV 6, and VI 4: in other words, they understand the list of forms of democracy in the *Politics* as evolutionary steps towards the final form. However, while in IV 6 (1293a 1) the fourth type of democracy is called last in chronological order, just as in VI 4 (1319b 1-2), what Aristotle provides in both *Politics* IV and VI is not an *evolutionary series* of democratic forms, but rather a *typology* of the different *eide*, in terms of criteria of ascription to the *politeia* to different typological forms of *demoi*. Furthermore, this typology is not based on an Athenian model, but on democracy in general, according to ideal-typical forms: arguably nothing in Athenian democracy is even remotely similar to the pastoral democracy of *Pol.* VI 4 (1319a 19-24); or, in the phase of demagogic democracy, to the legalized access to citizenship for the *nothoi* and those of irregular birth on either the father's or the mother's side, which, in *Pol.* VI 4 (1319b 9-10), is one of the features of the *teleutaia demokratia*.

At the end of his analysis of the metabolic changes of constitutions, Aristotle challenges Plato's straightforward mutation of constitutions from

¹³ For the use and meaning of this notion see Bertelli 1989 (now in Bertelli 2017, 67-115).

¹⁴ See generally Ryffel 1949; Contogiorgis 1978.

¹⁵ Jacoby's dogma that the *Atthides* (especially those of Cleidemus and Androtion) were «politically biased» (see Jacoby 1949, 76-77) has long dominated the scholarship on this historiographical genre (see, however, Harding 1977); but stating that the *Atthides* were politically oriented is an entirely different thing from assuming that they employed a predetermined theoretical scheme to interpret facts.

the *ariste politeia* to tyranny through timocracy, oligarchy, and democracy (Resp. V 12, 1316a-b). Aristotle factually demonstrates that there is no such linearity in the transformations, since a type can be followed equally by its opposite or by a cognate, even though the rule mostly contemplates transformation into the opposite. Furthermore, causes for change are specific for each constitutional type, depending on its social components. To draw a concise scheme from the complex analysis of *metabole* in *Politics* V is almost impossible. Limiting our attention to the general causes for *metabolai*, with or without *stasis* (conflict), Aristotle boils down conflicts and causes of change to different notion of justice endorsed by opposing sides (generally, the wealthy and the poor). Justice is understood by the one side in a distributive sense (equality based on merit) wrongly implemented (whoever regards himself as unequal in something expects to be unequal in everything); by the other in an egalitarian sense (arithmetic equality), also implemented to excess (whoever regards himself as equal in something, such as freedom, expects equality in everything else). Since constitutions are mainly oligarchies or democracies, and these two notions of justice belong especially to oligarchs and democrats, this divergence is the most widespread cause for conflict in constitutional changes. Its aims are generically stated in the *kerdos* – or desire to possess more wealth – and in honour (*time*), that is in an unequal distribution of political prerogatives. Aristotle numbers seven causes that depend on specific circumstances, although he admits that they could be more. I have attempted to summarize these in a chart, which includes possible ensuing effects of constitutional change.

CAUSE	M/S*	DEM.	OLIG.	POLIT.	ARIST.	TIR.	MON./DYN.
<i>Kerdos</i>	S	<----->					
<i>Time</i>	S	<----->					
<i>Hybris</i>	S	<----->					
<i>Phobos</i>	S	<----->					
<i>Hyperoche</i>	S	<----->					
<i>Kataphronesis</i>	S	<----->					
<i>Auxesis</i>	M	<----->					
<i>Oligoria</i>	M	<----->					
<i>Eritheia</i>	M	<----->					
<i>Mikrotos</i>	M	<----->					
<i>Anomoiotes</i>	S	<-----> (Thurii)					

M = gradual *metabole* S = *stasis*

On the basis of the constitutional types, then, the tendency of each *metabole* is complicated by the fact that Aristotle does not consider just the pure types of regime (such as democracy and oligarchy), but also the

mixed types, such as the *politeia* (unity of democracy and oligarchy moderated by «virtue»): in these cases, *metabole* does not occur, as is the case for democracy or oligarchy, *mainly* between opposites, but according to «inclination» (*apoklinein* or *enclinein*) towards one of the extreme components of their mixed nature. Furthermore, the same pure types can mutate not just towards the opposites, but also towards cognate forms, more rigid or more «relaxed» according to the circumstances: for example, this happens to «ancestral democracy» (moderate democracy) changing into the most recent form (rule of the *demos*) (1305a 28-32), or to oligarchy changing into a form of *dynasteia* by a small circle through familiar inheritance of power (1306a 12-19), or in a quasi-democratic system when census is not sufficient anymore to exclude the majority from power (1306b 6-15). Both oligarchy (1305b 41 - 1306a 6, 1306a 23-26) and the democracy of archaic times, when the «demagogues» were also military leaders (1307a 7-28), contemplate transformation into tyranny. The most common cause for the fall of democracy is the violence of demagogues trying to oppress «the wealthy» and «the notables» especially through economic vexation (agrarian redistributions, liturgies). These actions result in a subversive reaction by «the few». Yet, oligarchy dominates the conflictual scenario according to the principle, stated in *Pol.* IV 11, 1296a 11-13, that «in small cities [*scil.* in the oligarchies] it is easier to divide up the whole in two parts, so that nothing remains in-between and the whole of the citizens body is divided between poor and rich». This is repeated in *Pol.* V 3, 1303b 14-16 through reference to the conflict of «virtue» and «meanness», wealth and poverty. In oligarchic regimes, in fact, in addition to the intrinsic social conflict (rich vs poor), «competition» for political supremacy (1306a 23: *philonieikia*, a Thucydidean theme) results in conflict within the very restricted class of those who are in power. Conversely, democracies are more stable than oligarchies because in the former conflict happens only against oligarchs, and there are no known cases of the people revolting against itself (*Pol.* V 1, 1302a 10-15); an additional element of stability in democracies is provided by the more numerous presence of middling citizens (*mesoi*), who balance the numerical superiority of the *aporoï* (the poor) (*Pol.* IV 11, 1296a 13-18).

We shall now move on to the ways in which Aristotle's intricate web of democratic *metabolai* acts as a tool to interpret Athenian constitutional change.

The instances in which the Athenian experience is brought in as examples of democratic *metabole* are in fact few. This seems commensurate to the (empirical) norm according to which the phenomenon is less frequent in democracies:

1. In the section about «disproportionate growth» (*auxesis para to analogon*) of a part of the citizen body (*Pol.* V 3, 1302b 33 ff.), namely that of the *plethos* of the poor, Aristotle reminds us that the «fortuitous» (*dia tychas*) losses among the notables in the «first» war against Sparta shifted the balance in favour of the mass of the people (1303a 8-10): the casualness obviously refers to the unpredictability of war. In this case, the *auxesis* of the demos does not depend on the growth of the poor, but on the reduction of the *gnorimoi*, which results in an increase in power of the opposite part.
2. Excessive *auxesis* can also affect an office, such as the Areopagus during the Persian wars (V 4, 1304a 20-24), whose supremacy made the constitution more rigid in oligarchic fashion. This is followed by its opposite, the growth in power of the demos as a consequence of the victory at Salamis and the ensuing naval hegemony.
3. The «subversion through violence or deception» type (1304b 9 ff.) deals with the Athenian example of the Four Hundred of 411: the mechanism of this constitutional change is based on consensus earned through deception and held through violence «against the will of the people». But this regime, along with that of the «Thirty», is also listed among the cases of subversion in oligarchies due to domestic rivalries caused by the demagogic methods of some members (VI 1305b 24-28), i.e. Phrynichus for the «Four Hundred» and Charicles for the «Thirty»; note that some of these names are absent from the *Ath. Pol.*, whereas the government of the 5,000, well attested in the *Ath. Pol.* (33), is not mentioned in *Pol.* V.
4. Peisistratus' tyranny is mentioned in the chapter dedicated to the *metabole* of democracy due to the impudence of demagogues who attempt to seize the wealth of the notables by rousing the people against them (V 5); however, Aristotle differentiates between current demagogy, represented by the rhetors, and archaic demagogy practiced by *strategoï* and high officials. While the type of demagogy practiced through speech has (rather surprisingly) no Athenian examples, archaic demagogy is exemplified by Peisistratus and the *stasis* against the *pediakoi* (V 1305a 23-24). It is even more surprising that, for the transformation of ancestral democracy (*patria demokratia*) into the most recent one (*neotate*) (V 5, 1305a 28-33) no Athenian example is provided, despite the fact that in *Pol.* II 12, 1273b 35 - 1274a 22 Aristotle presents Solon's constitution as a *demokratia patrios* which put an end to an earlier *oligarchia lian akratos* (an excessively violent oligarchy) and established a mixed constitution based on the balance of powers (the Areopagus as the oligarchic element, the election of magistrates as the aristocratic one, and the demos' access to lawcourts and authority over the election and accountability of magistrates as the

democratic one). The section of *Pol.* II 12 dedicated to Solon is interesting for yet another reason: not only does it describe the structure of Solon's constitution, but it also illustrates – with the purpose of defending Solon's work – how the later change into «the present democracy» took place. This process, which was not part of Solon's plans, depended on the later demagogues, starting from Ephialtes, who deprived the Areopagus of its authority, and Pericles, who introduced pay (*misthophoria*) for the *dikastai*, as well as from fortuitous circumstances such as the supremacy of the *demos* due to the victory at Salamis, which opened the way to the worst demagoguery. This account describes the *metabole* from the ancestral democracy to the later phase and introduces elements which we do not find elsewhere in the *Politics*, such as Ephialtes' action against the Areopagus and Pericles' introduction of the heliastic pay.

Whatever our hypotheses about the chronology of this chapter of book II of the *Politics*¹⁶, the fact remains that this section represents Athenian constitutional evolution as a *metabole* (see 1274a 7: *metestesan*) through arguments which are consistent with the analysis of the decay of democracy in *Pol.* V (demagogues).

The transition from Peisistratic tyranny to Cleisthenic democracy is also absent from *Pol.* V, despite the discussion of the transition from tyranny to democracy (V 12, 1316a 32-33, with the example of Syracusan democracy after the Gelonian tyranny). Cleisthenes is mentioned in *Pol.* III 2, 1275b 35, but only with regard to the extension of citizenship to «aliens and *metoikoi*», and in VI 4, 1319b 21-27, about the decision to increase the number of tribes with the aim of blending the citizen body.

The least we can say is that the theory of constitutional mutations in *Pol.* V is definitely not Athenocentric: statistically, Athens is mentioned as many times as Argos, Corinth, Sparta, and far less than Syracuse's eleven occurrences. Above all, even from the few cases considered by the *Politics*, it is clear that the history of the Athenian *politeia* witnessed an evolution open to multiple possibilities.

3. THE 11 METABOLAI OF THE «ATHENAION POLITEIA»

The list of 11 *metabolai* the Athenian constitution went through before reaching its final form obviously employs the notion of *metabole* extensively. Above all, it shows that constitutional evolution does not follow a

¹⁶ On different hypotheses see Pezzoli 2012, 382 ff.

straightforward path but, as stated by both Weil¹⁷ and Rhodes¹⁸, should be rather regarded as «une ligne brisée ou multiple» (Weil) or as a process that reaches its end through «a series of advancements and setbacks» (transl. Rhodes). To describe the final stage described in *Ath. Pol.* 41, 2 as the achievement of the *telos* or *physis*, as Day and Chambers did (note that in the *Ath. Pol.* the present constitution, established in 403, is defined neither as *telos* nor as *physis* of the democracy), is a major misunderstanding of the meaning of *telos* and *physis*: to Aristotle, *physis* is the fulfilment of *telos* in the optimal form of the object according to its function, that is *to beltiston* (*Met.* V 2, 1013b 25-27), and this is the meaning we find in the *Politics* as well (I 2, 1252b 34 - 1253a 2; V 9, 1309b 18-34); on the other hand, the final form of democracy in the *Ath. Pol.* is modelled on the ultimate degeneration which takes place in the types of democracies discussed in *Pol.* IV 4, when democracy loses even its nature of *politeia* once the laws have been replaced by arbitrary popular will. This depiction of the «present» democracy is strongly «ideological» and influenced by theory, as shown by Aristotle's observation that «the *demos* has made itself master of everything, and it administers everything through decrees and lawcourts, in which it is the *demos* which has the power» (transl. Rhodes), and has deprived the *boule* of its judicial prerogatives – something that actually never happened, as proven by Rhodes¹⁹. Besides, the latter part of the *Ath. Pol.* clearly shows that the *ekklesia* was subject to preliminary control by the *boule* and had no absolute authority of the kind stated in *Ath. Pol.* 41, 2, in line with *Pol.* IV 4. Moreover, the slightly contradictory claim that the Athenians were right in limiting the powers of the *boule* «because the few are more corruptible than the many» echoes the theory of *Pol.* III 11, 1282a 3 - b 41 (cf. III 15, 1286a 25-37).

But, apart from this unfavourable assessment of the «present» democracy, which could be read as an isolated instance of excessively rigid adherence to the theory of democracy, we are left with the problem of examining if – and to what degree – the theory of the *Politics* might have steered the interpretation of constitutional changes in Athens. I use «steered» because we must exclude that Aristotle ever converted theory into facts, as assumed by Day and Chambers: the representation of the object – that is, the Athenian *politeia* – was determined by the sources and by its real historical evolution. Aristotle could not adopt the same theoretical freedom of the constitutional *eide* in *Pol.* IV-VI when determining the causes of *metabole*.

¹⁷ Weil 1965, 186.

¹⁸ Rhodes 1981, 8.

¹⁹ Rhodes 1981, 489-490, 537 ff.

Compared to real constitutions, these *eide* were ideal-types modelled on the combination of multiple empirical factors; they were not identical their copies, as Day and Chambers believed.

Following the order provided by *Ath. Pol.* 41, the first two *metabolai* – the one under Ion and then the one under Theseus –, which are missing from our text but can be retrieved through Heracleides Lembus' *Epitome*, only state that a deviation from monarchy took place under Theseus: it would be hard to find in these brief statements echoes of the theories on the evolution of the polis extolled in *Pol.* III 15, 1286b 9-20 and IV 13, 1297b 16-30, even though the situation before Solon (we leave aside the controversial chapter 4 on Draco), which saw a transition from an aristocracy based on nobility and wealth (*aristinden kai ploutinden: Ath. Pol.* 3, 6) to an extreme oligarchy which enslaved the people (*Ath. Pol.* 2-3; 5, 1), recalls the involution of a primitive aristocracy focused on profit in *Pol.* III 15. However, the outcome expected in *Pol.* III – from oligarchies to tyrannies and then to democracies – is unsuitable to explaining the origin of the third constitutional change in *Ath. Pol.* 5. This, despite originating from a *stasis* between *demos* and *gnorimoi*, results not in tyranny but in Solon's mediation and in the establishment of the *demokratia patrios*. This transformation is instead consistent with the representation of Solon's work in *Pol.* II 12.

The long section dedicated to the Peisistratid tyranny (*Ath. Pol.* 14-19: fourth change) is introduced by a *stasis* among the three factions of the *Paralioi*, *Pediaikoi*, and *Diakroi*: Aristotle's statement that Peisistratus, as a demagogue, won popular support and won the competition for power against the Pediaikoi is consistent with the *Politics* (*Pol.* V 5, 1305a 22-25; generally, V 10, 1310b 30 on the tyrannical outcome of an oligarchic strife). However, these passages are based on a common source (Herodotus), while it is more interesting to note Peisistratus' respect for the law, exemplified by his appearance on the Areopagus (*Pol.* V 12, 1315b 21-23), in accordance with the advice to the good tyrant that he should use the courts for punishment²⁰. We find the same episode again in *Ath. Pol.* 16, 8, but in this case we cannot postulate a common source since the episode is otherwise unattested. Generally, the representation of Peisistratus' power as «constitutional», while partially suggested by the sources (Her. I 59, 6 and also Thuc. VI 54), is consistent with the version of the tyrant as a «good administrator» and «guardian» of his subjects outlined in *Pol.* V 11, 1315b 1-10, which seems modelled on Peisistratus' example. We detect, on the other hand, a remarkable divergence in the narrative about the end of the Pei-

²⁰ See already Rhodes 1981, 219.

sistratid tyranny which, in *Pol.* V 10, 1311a 36-39, validates the patriotic tradition of the «insult» to Harmodius (cf. also V 10, 1311a 36-39), while in *Ath. Pol.* 18-19 Aristotle aligns himself with the tradition found in Herodotus (V 55, 62 ff.) and Thucydides (VI 53-59), which explained the end of tyranny with reference to Hippias' harsher rule and the concurrent actions of Cleomenes of Sparta and the Alcmaeonidai.

The other concordances and divergences between the *Ath. Pol.* and the *Politics* deal with, respectively:

1. Cleisthenes: according to *Ath. Pol.* 21, the Cleisthenic constitution aims at greater political participation of the *demos* and at the *anameixai* (re-mixing) of the population through the increased number of tribes; the mention of «new citizens» in *Ath. Pol.* 21, 4 hints to the addition of new elements to the citizen body²¹: the aforementioned references to Cleisthenes by *Pol.* III and VI are entirely consistent with this representation.

2. The rule of the Areopagus and the later strengthening of the democracy thanks to Athens' naval empire and higher revenues (*Ath. Pol.* 23-25): these are found in *Ath. Pol.* 41, 2, as the sixth and seventh constitutional transformations respectively. The two parallel passages of *Pol.* V 4, 1304a 18-22 (to which one should add the brief reference to the transformation of the Solonian constitution in *Pol.* II 12, 1274a 11-15) and *Ath. Pol.* 23, 1-2 represent a well-known exegetical *crux*²².

As stated already, the supremacy of the Areopagus during the Persian wars in *Pol.* V 4 is mentioned as an example of *auxesis* of the power of a magistracy (*archeion*). Actually, this passage has wider implications. It does not simply deal with the increased power of an office, but also with the growth in power of «a part of the city» (*morion tes poleos*)²³. This example from Athens was suited to illustrating both the growth in power of a magistracy – the Areopagus – along with the deviation towards a «harder», i.e. oligarchic, regime²⁴, and the increase in power of the *nautikos ochlos*, «who were responsible for victory at Salamis, and so for hegemony based on sea power» and therefore «made the democracy more powerful» (1304a 21-24, transl. Reeve). The turning point towards a stronger democracy is

²¹ See Rhodes 1981, 254-256.

²² For a review of various interpretations and a discussion of *Ath. Pol.* 23 see Rodes 1981, 283-88; Bertelli 1994, 92-93; Berti 2004.

²³ Historical examples mentioned in this section refer to the «notables» (*gnorimoi*) of Argos, the *demos* of Syracuse, that of Chalcis, and that of Ambracia (1304a 25-33).

²⁴ This is the only possible meaning of *syntoteran* (*politeian*) in 1304a 21; cf. Barker 1968⁶, 213; Keyt 1999, 98.

introduced by the adverb *palin*, which signals a movement in the opposite direction, not *at the same time*²⁵ but rather progressively²⁶, as is shown by the parallel text of *Pol.* II 12, 1274a 12-15.

Compared with the rather brief account in *Pol.* V 4, which provides no explanation for the greater prestige acquired by the Areopagus during the Persian wars, the *Ath. Pol.* is not only more exhaustive, but also explicitly more sympathetic to the role of the Areopagus in those circumstances. The prestige acquired by the Areopagus Council at the time of Salamis is justified by its distribution of eight drachmas to the naval crews (*Ath. Pol.* 23, 1)²⁷. This was one of the causes of the victory, for which the Areopagus is held «responsible», and of its consequences – the foundation of the empire, the increase of the city’s wealth (*Ath. Pol.* 23, 2-5; 24). The rule of the Areopagus, regarded as «good government» (*Ath. Pol.* 23, 3), lasted for seventeen years (*Ath. Pol.* 25, 1), despite «gradually degenerating» (*Ath. Pol.* 25, 1: *kaiper hypopheromene kata mikron*), due to the growth in power of the *plethos* (*auxanomenou plethous*), until the definitive demise of its supremacy by Ephialtes (*Ath. Pol.* 25, 1-2) in 462 BCE. We shall not discuss here the origin of this philo-Areopagitic version of the seventeen years between Salamis and 462²⁸. There is no visible contradiction between the events in *Pol.* V 4 and the *Ath. Pol.*, despite Rhodes’ views²⁹, although the *Ath. Pol.* clearly puts greater emphasis on the «good government» of the Areopagus, underlined by the later degeneration of the democracy in the seventh *metabole* (*Ath. Pol.* 26, 1: «What happened after this was that the constitution became more loosened, on account of those engaging enthusiastically in demagogy», transl. Rhodes).

3. The Four Hundred: we have seen (above) that in *Pol.* V 4, 1304b 8-16 this *metabole* is characterized by deceit and violence. While *Ath. Pol.* 32, 2 calls this government an oligarchy (cf. *Pol.* V 4, 1304b 15-16), it fails to mention openly the deceitful promises of the oligarchs³⁰. The assessment provided by the *Politics* seems closer to Thucydides’ narrative, and it is unclear whether the ambiguous *enankasthesan* that introduces the willing

²⁵ On the oppositional meaning of this adverb see Arrighetti 1993, 120-121.

²⁶ Thus, correctly, Keyt 1999, 98.

²⁷ A different version of the episode, derived by Cleidemus’ *Atthis* (*FGrHist* 23 F 21), is found in Plutarch, *Them.* 10, 6-8; see Rhodes 1981, 287-288.

²⁸ On this see Rhodes 1981, 283 ff.; Wallace 1989², 78 ff.; Day - Chambers 1962, 126 ff. regard the «Areopagitic constitution» as an Aristotelian invention.

²⁹ Rhodes 1981, 288; see the objections correctly raised by Arrighetti 1993.

³⁰ See Rhodes 1981, 369.

acceptance of the constitution ruled by few (*Ath. Pol.* 29, 1) is meant to exonerate the people³¹ or rather points to a different, more hidden, plot.

4. The confrontation between Theramenes and the most extremist oligarchic faction (*Ath. Pol.* 36-37) – which, incidentally, never mention Critias: Platonic *pietas*^{32?} – conforms to the type of oligarchic *metabole* that results from rivalry among oligarchic demagogues found in *Pol.* V 6, 1305b 22-27. Here the Thirty are mentioned as a model, despite the fact that oligarchic demagogy is represented by Charicles, rather than by Critias.

5. About the eleventh constitution – the restored democracy of 403 –, Aristotle offers one of the few political remarks found in the *Ath. Pol.*, in regard to the accommodating Athenian disposition towards the payment of war debts (*Ath. Pol.* 40, 2-3): Aristotle points out that, in other cities, when the democratic faction prevails it promotes land redistribution – clearly the application of a topos of demagogic politics, well described by numerous examples in the *Politics* (V 5, 1305a 3-7; 8, 1309a 14-17; VI 5, 1320a 5-7: present-day demagogues!). *Ath. Pol.* 40 provides a positive view of the restored democracy (*Ath. Pol.* 40, 2), due to the moderate attitude and the concord of the men in charge (especially Archinus). This contrasts sharply with the end of *Ath. Pol.* 41, 2, where the present democracy is characterized by the absolute power of the people who, just as in the demagogic form in *Pol.* IV, rule through the lawcourts and the *psephismata*: Rhodes³³ has called this «one of the most strikingly Aristotelian passages in *A.P.*». However, he has not explained this contradiction which, besides, also openly contrasts with the description of the way the Athenian *politeia* operates, provided in the latter part of the *Ath. Pol.*

4. FINAL REMARKS

Between the «few traces» of Aristotelian political theory in the *Ath. Pol.* (Rhodes) and its pervasive presence that governs historical facts (Day and Chambers), the most reasonable position probably lies in the proverbial Aristotelian middle. In Day's and Chambers' view, Aristotle's primary intention was to provide a history of Athenian democracy modelled on its theoretical description of the *Politics*. Actually, Aristotle's aim was to

³¹ See Rhodes 1981, 369.

³² See Rhodes 1981, 430.

³³ Rhodes 1981, 482.

reconstruct the constitutional history, that is the *politeia*, of a city that had gone through the whole constitutional spectrum, from monarchy to tyranny, although not in the order established by political axiology³⁴. The fundamental tool here is, of course, the theory of *metabole* elaborated in the *Politics*. However, if this was the hermeneutic tool of evolution, the chosen arrangement and the choice of events was neither directed nor determined by the theory of democracy in *Pol.* IV-VI, whose typology found no correspondence in the historical phases of the Athenian constitution: rather, the influence of the theory of *metabole* can be seen in the interpretation of specific events or of their causes.

Obviously, in writing the *Ath. Pol.*, Aristotle – assuming he is the author – could not ignore his own theories of constitutional change. Nevertheless, he does not use them, like a bed of Procrustes, in order to crop facts on the basis of theory. He rather employs such theories to understand the logic of events³⁵.

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³⁴ Evidence of this can be found in the short account of constitutional evolution found in *Pol.* III 15, 1286b 8-20, where the stages are monarchy, «government of the citizens» (probably, aristocracy: see Accattino 2013, 226-227), oligarchy, tyranny, and finally democracy. This arrangement is partially the result of Platonic memories and historical observations: see commentary in Accattino 2013, 226-228.

³⁵ I thank Matteo Zaccarini for translating this contribution into English.

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