

Power and Society in Ancient Greece

Dossier

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Elites, Elitism, and Community in the Archaic *Polis**²

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Samos, around 540 BCE (probably), at the shrine of Hera—full of big, fine things. Two colossal marble statues of naked youths stand out (quite literally, for they are over five meters tall), but other monuments offer striking sights: statues of women in finery, a multi-statuary family group on a long base.¹ These ostentatious dedications structure the sacred space of the shrine—surely the appanage of an aristocratic society? Yet the space is dominated by a new, massive temple, dedicated on a vast scale thanks to the mobilization of public resources dwarfing the fortunes displayed by the private dedications. What is the relationship between the two? The conundrum is posed by a particular type of source: the archaeological evidence for the material culture and social spaces of the communities of Archaic Greece. This source constitutes a major basis for our understanding of the cultural, social, and political history of these communities—and for the hypotheses that I would like to explore and pursue in this paper.²

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1. Jürgen Franssen, *Votiv und Repräsentation. Stattuarische Weihungen archaischer Zeit aus Samos und Attika* (Heidelberg: Verlag Archäologie und Geschichte, 2011).

2. Anthony Snodgrass, *Archaeology and the Emergence of Greece* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); Tonio Hölscher, *Öffentliche Räume in frühen griechischen Städten* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1998). Roland Étienne, ed., *La Méditerranée au VII^e siècle av. J.-C. Essais d’analyses archéologiques* (Paris: De Boccard, 2010).

Sparta, around 600 BCE (perhaps). A golden bowl and its tripod, gloriously blazing, never exposed to fire—an old aristocratic object, redolent of the glory of dedication, choral song and victory, exchange, heroism, and essential value. Yet the Spartan poet Alcman asks us to imagine this tripod filled with warm bean soup, for the poet, an undiscerning eater, does not consume dainty food, but craves the same simple fare (*ta koina*, quite literally “the common things”) as the people (*damos*).³ This is perhaps not quite what we usually mean by “Spartan austerity.” Soup and tripod occur in a literary source, a snatch of poetry known only through a truncated quotation of an “Archaic” poet in a much later source, the Roman-era polymath Athenaeus’s book on consumption (where the passage is interpreted as a sign of Alcman’s own gluttony).

Colophon, a city located in Ionia, Western Asia Minor, around 600 BCE (again, perhaps). A man swaggers down a street in the urban settlement on its hilltop, the effect of bravado heightened by his coiffed and scent-doused hair, his long purple cloak. Surely here is the quintessential representative of the elite, the Ionian aristocrat? Yet we see him falling in step with one, then more men who look exactly like him: the streets teem with such men. They all converge on the main public space of the city, the agora. Here, the surprise is not diversity but its lack, in a paradox of mass luxury, for there are well over a thousand of these men, probably the whole body of enfranchised adult males of the city. Should we still call them aristocrats? Here, too, the source is another truncated quotation, from a poem by Xenophanes, writing in the second half of the sixth century and reflecting back on an earlier time.⁴ The context for the quotation is again Athenaeus, where it is part of a collage of sources, old (Xenophanes) and rather less old (the fourth-century historian Ephorus of Cyme).

These three vignettes from the “Archaic” period of Greek history (conventionally, ca. 730–480 BCE) are united by a set of problems. Some are immediately obvious: first, the layered, composite nature of the sources, which require sensible critical method as well as sensitive historical imagination; second, the expressive but enigmatic shapes taken by political activity in the Archaic world, puzzling to modern interpreters and perhaps even to members of Archaic communities themselves. Looking back on Colophon, Xenophanes’s judgment is negative and

3. Alcman, frag. 17, in David A. Campbell, ed., *Greek Lyric*, vol. 2, *Anacreon, Anacreonta, Choral Lyric from Olympus to Alcman* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014, hereafter referred to as “Campbell”). See Victor Ehrenberg, “Der Damos im archaischen Sparta,” *Hermes* 68, no. 3 (1933): 288–305; Reinhard Förtsch, *Kunstverwendung und Kunstlegitimation im archaischen und frühklassischen Sparta* (Mainz: Von Zabern, 2001). On Alcman more generally, see Gloria Ferrari, *Alcman and the Cosmos of Sparta* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

4. Xenophanes, frag. 3, in Hermann Diels and Walter Kranz, eds., *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker. Griechisch und Deutsch*, 3 vols. (Berlin: Weidmann, 1906–1910). See Cecil M. Bowra, “Xenophanes, Fragment 3,” *Classical Quarterly* 35, no. 3/4 (1941): 119–26; Alain Duplouy, “Les Mille de Colophon. ‘Totalité symbolique’ d’une cité d’Ionie (VI^e–II^e s. av. J.-C.),” *Historia. Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 62, no. 2 (2013): 146–66. On the problematic nature of using later “sound-bites” to write Archaic Greek history, see Jonathan M. Hall, *A History of the Archaic Greek World*, 2nd ed. (Malden: Blackwell, 2014), 202.

satirical—but is his portrayal a sign of his own lack of understanding of older cultural meanings, or a deliberate, political distortion? Archaic politics intrigued Aristotle and even Herodotus, the major literary sources for Archaic Greece. The latter, writing in the second half of the fifth century, recounts that the Athenian tyrant Peisistratos was brought back to his city by Athena herself, riding on a chariot (probably in 556 BCE)—in fact a large young lady from the countryside, disguised as the goddess. Herodotus finds the incident baffling, and comments on the credulity of the Athenians over a century earlier.⁵

Beyond the City of the *Muthetai*: Writing the History of Archaic Greece

An illustration of the methodological problems posed by the layeredness of the sources and the potential for misunderstandings arising from the expressive politics of the Archaic period has found a niche for itself in the standard Greek-English dictionary, the celebrated *Liddell-Scott-Jones*. The words *muthetai* and *mutharchoi* are there defined as *stasiotai*, “members of a political faction” (and hence *muthos* is given the meaning of *stasis*, or “strife,” in addition to its normal meanings of “speech” or “tale”). The definition is derived from late-antique grammarians (themselves drawing on earlier philological work, probably of Roman date), and rests especially on a poem attributed to the sixth-century BCE poet Anacreon, in which a political faction (the “fishermen,” likely a satirical term of abuse) is said to rule over an island (Samos). But here literal-minded philology misleads: the word *muthetai* must be a construction based on *polietai*, “citizens,” and used as a political insult. The members of a particular faction are lampooned or attacked as “citizens of *muthos*” and “rulers of *muthos*” rather than members and leaders of a real political community (the poem, of which we possess only a fragment, no doubt went on to berate this group for inflicting collective harm on the city, hence the later lexicographers’ understanding that the term itself referred to factional politics).⁶

5. Herodotus, *Histories* 1.60.1–5. See Josine H. Blok, “Phye’s Procession: Culture, Politics and Peisistratid Rule,” in *Peisistratos and the Tyranny: A Reappraisal of the Evidence*, ed. Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 2000), 17–48; Brian Lavelle, *Fame, Money, and Power: The Rise of Peisistratos and “Democratic” Tyranny at Athens* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 99–107 and 112–14; Sarah Forsdyke, *Exile, Ostracism, and Democracy: The Politics of Expulsion in Ancient Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 112–18.

6. Anacreon, frag. 353 [Campbell]. The same text is edited as frag. 16, *Anacreontis carminum reliquias*, ed. Theodor Bergk (Leipzig: Reichenbachiorum fratum, 1834), and frag. 31, *Anacreonte*, ed. Bruno Gentili (Rome: Ed. Dell’Ateneo, 1958). Gentili cites Friedrich Bechtel, *Die griechischen Dialekte* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1921–1924), 3:317, who observes that *muthetes* literally means “word-maker.” The term should not, however, be restored in the work of the late fourth-century Ionian poet Phoinix, as suggested in John U. Powell, *Collectanea Alexandrina* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), 231. The “double speech” (*dichthadios muthos*) in Panyassis must refer to a situation of *stasis* (*ibid.*), without requiring the term *muthos* to mean *stasis* in itself: see Edgar Lobel, “Trivialities

The expressive, even festive, politics of the Archaic age have seemed to require an anthropological reading: Peisistratos's entry into Athens can be understood as a pageant, expressing and negotiating the relations between the faction leader and his community, in an attempt to capture something of a lost, alien world of symbols, mentalities, and political gestures. The anthropological approach has fueled a long-standing interest in the politics of Archaic song and other practices, studied as cultural texts with generic rules and themes, often drawn from the world of myth and literature. Applying interpretive techniques borrowed from literary criticism, this movement has benefitted from the traditional disciplinary proximity between ancient Greek history and the study of ancient literature, and, concomitantly, from the historical turn undergone by Classics, especially in the Anglo-American world, in the 1980s and 1990s.⁷ The problem here is that of the politics of meaning: our delight in the gorgeous expressive vignettes and Archaic song risks leaving us with a pure city of the *muthietai* and the *mutharchoi*, the members and leaders of mentality, myth, and ritual.

Another problem is that the recent historical anthropology of Archaic politics has drawn on a conventional master narrative, rather than shaping such a narrative itself.⁸ This can be summarized as follows: thanks to an eighth-century BCE revolution (political, demographic), cities emerged out of primitive political arrangements (involving clans, tribes, and kings); a generalized crisis led to the rise of "tyrants," autocratic rulers supported by an emergent middle class of "hoplites," or armored citizen soldiers; as these tyrants fulfilled their historical mission of destroying aristocratic rule, the hoplitic reform (ca. 650 BCE) brought about the transfer of power to the people, and ultimately democracy, which attained its developed form in Classical Athens, the end-point of the teleological rails. This narrative has a historiography of its own, driven by the need to make sense of the layered, incomplete literary evidence, to integrate the plentiful archaeology (which supposedly supplies the evidence for the "eighth-century revolution"), and to explain the expressive

of Greek History," *Classical Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1927): 50–51, which points out that the word also appears in a fragment by the Hellenistic scholar Antigonos of Carytos, in a commentary on a Samian chronicle: "[a white swallow was sighted] at the time of those who were first called *muthietai*."

7. W. Robert Connor, "Tribes, Festivals and Processions: Civic Ceremonial and Political Manipulation in Archaic Greece," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 107 (1987): 40–50; Leslie Kurke and Carol Dougherty, eds., *Cultural Poetics in Archaic Greece: Cult, Performance, Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Kurke and Dougherty, eds., *The Cultures within Ancient Greek Culture: Contact, Conflict, Collaboration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

8. William G. Forrest, *The Emergence of Greek Democracy: The Character of Greek Politics, 800–400 B.C.* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), provides a simple and clear statement of a party line followed by many specialized works published in the anglophone world up to the 1970s and 1980s. The concept of an eighth-century revolution appears in the papers published in Snodgrass, *Archaeology and the Emergence of Greece*, and Ian Morris, *Burial and Ancient Society: The Rise of the Greek City-State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). But it also emerges very strongly, self-consciously, and deliberately in John L. Bintliff, *The Complete Archaeology of Greece: From Hunter-Gatherers to the 20th Century A.D.* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

politics of the Archaic age. Its simplicity has assured its longevity and popularity, especially within textbooks or outside academic ancient history (comparable to existing vulgates for “feudalism,” “Near-Eastern monarchies,” or “absolutism”).

The problem is that this master narrative is turning obsolete, its details shown up as ill-documented constructs. The hoplitic phalanx was not a feature of the seventh century, but rather of the early Classical period; Archaic warfare was diverse, involving missile weapons, duels, loose-order fighting, and elite bands.⁹ Likewise, source criticism makes it clear that the evidence for popular support for “tyrants” is problematic, much of it late and shaped by subsequent political debates. The rare documented examples (at Corinth in the seventh century, or Athens in the mid-sixth century) suggest factional fighting, albeit with each group seeking legitimacy by appealing to metaphors of community or justice. It is simpler to see the Archaic tyrants as the continued manifestation of the possibility of monarchical rule over communities or regions—an important, if often neglected, phenomenon in Greek history.¹⁰ In particular, the place of the so-called “middle classes” in the social structure of the Archaic *poleis* has proved elusive.

Most importantly, the “primitive” tribal and gentilician structures out of which the *poleis* are meant to have emerged can be shown to be invented traditions and constructed political and civic forms, which performed constitutive, kinship-imitative but in fact non-familial bonding functions within the Archaic communities.¹¹ The consequence is that there were no entrenched aristocratic clans awaiting overthrow by “new men”; even the society portrayed by the Homeric poems, under the ideological cover of divinely appointed rulers, was likely a fluid assemblage of “big men” competing for eminence rather than a stratified ensemble.¹²

9. George L. Cawkwell, “Orthodoxy and Hoplites,” *Classical Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (1989): 375–89; Hans van Wees, *Greek Warfare: Myths and Realities* (London: Duckworth, 2004). See also Adam Schwartz, *Reinstating the Hoplite: Arms, Armour and Phalanx Fighting in Archaic and Classical Greece* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 2009), whose claim that that “hoplitic warfare” did not change between 750 and 338 BCE cannot be accepted: the upper limit is far too early and the lower limit is meaningless, neglecting both change in the intervening period and the continuity that was characteristic of the Hellenistic period.

10. George L. Cawkwell, “Early Greek Tyranny and the People,” *Classical Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (1995): 73–86; Loretanade Libero, *Die archaische Tyrannis* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1996); Daniel Ogden, *The Crooked Kings of Ancient Greece* (London: Duckworth, 1997); John Salmon, “Lopping Off the Heads? Tyrants, Politics and the *Polis*,” in *The Development of the Polis in Archaic Greece*, ed. Lynette G. Mitchell and P. J. Rhodes (London: Routledge, 1997), 60–73; Sian Lewis, *Greek Tyranny* (Exeter: Bristol Phoenix Press, 2009); Lynette G. Mitchell, *The Heroic Rulers of Archaic and Classical Greece* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

11. Denis Roussel, *Tribu et cité. Études sur les groupes sociaux dans les cités grecques aux époques archaïque et classique* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1976); Alain Duplouy, *Le prestige des élites. Recherches sur les modes de reconnaissance sociale en Grèce entre les X^e et V^e siècles avant J.-C.* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2006).

12. On the absence of an aristocracy, see Nick Fisher and Hans van Wees, “The Trouble with ‘Aristocracy,’” in “*Aristocracy* in Antiquity: Redefining Greek and Roman Elites,” ed. Nick Fisher and Hans van Wees (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2015), 1–57. On Homeric society, see Christof Ulf, “Konsumption, Lebenstilen und Öffentlichkeiten,” *Klio. Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte* 96, no. 2 (2014): 416–36, which summarizes much earlier

The dismantling of the old master narrative has favored a new paradigm of Archaic Greek history, based on three postulates. The first is the paltriness of the state, and hence the low priority granted to the formation of the city-state. This position underlies hard-nosed studies which view central phenomena of Archaic history such as “colonization” (the spread of Greek settlements in the Mediterranean) or fighting between factions as the result of individual enterprises rather than as collective ventures.¹³ The *polis* has been deconstructed as a “stateless society,” a network of groups and associations, or a modern, Eurocentric obsession.¹⁴ The consequence (and second postulate) is the great importance accorded to elites—entrepreneurial, acquisitive individuals and families whose activities, concerns, and interests are considered the central feature of Archaic society. Finally, the third characteristic of this paradigm is the crucial place given to cultural history of the type mentioned above: collective activities and social bonds are considered primary and more important than state institutionalization. In the absence of entrenched aristocracies, individual claims were performed through gestures and objects, such as lavish funerals, splendid dedications, constructed genealogies, and imported luxuries or exotica. In Alain Duplouy’s striking conceptualization, such gestures accumulated prestige in a competitive space where status and eminence were achieved performatively and dynamically.¹⁵

research and debate. Pierre Carlier argues against the idea of “big men” and in favor of a more institutionalized society: Carlier, *La royauté en Grèce avant Alexandre* (Strasbourg: Association pour l’étude de la civilisation romane, 1984); Carlier, “Αὐτὸς and βασιλεὺς in the Homeric Poems,” in *Ancient Greece from the Mycenaean Palaces to the Age of Homer*, ed. Sigrid Deger-Jalkotzy and Irene S. Lemos (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 101–9.

13. Robin Osborne, “Early Greek Colonization? The Nature of Greek Settlement in the West,” in *Archaic Greece: New Approaches and New Evidence*, ed. Nick Fisher and Hans van Wees (London: Duckworth, 1998), 251–70; Hans van Wees, “The Mafia of Early Greece: Violent Exploitation in the Seventh and Sixth Centuries BC,” in *Organized Crime in Antiquity*, ed. Keith K. Hopwood (London/Swansea: Duckworth/Classical Press of Wales, 1999), 1–51; Greg Anderson, “Before *Turannoï* Were Tyrants: Rethinking a Chapter of Early Greek History,” *Classical Antiquity* 24, no. 2 (2005): 173–222; Robin Osborne, *Greece in the Making, 1200–479 BC*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2009), along with the review by Marek Wecowski, “Greece in the Making and the *Polis*,” *Palamedes* 4, no. 1 (2009): 167–76.

14. Moshe Berent, “Anthropology and the Classics: War, Violence, and the Stateless *Polis*,” *Classical Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (2000): 257–89; Paulin Ismard, *La cité des réseaux. Athènes et ses associations, VI^e–I^r siècle av. J.-C.* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2010); Kostas Vlassopoulos, *Unthinking the Greek Polis: Ancient Greek History beyond Eurocentrism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

15. Duplouy’s *Le prestige des élites* represents the first serious attempt to integrate findings concerning the absence of initial stratification in Greek cities into the elitist paradigm. See also François de Polignac, “Sanctuaires et société en Attique géométrique et archaïque. Réflexions sur les critères d’analyse,” in *Culture et cité. L’avènement d’Athènes à l’époque archaïque*, ed. Annie Verbanck-Piérard and Didier Viviers (Brussels: Fondation archéologique de l’Université libre de Bruxelles, 1995), 73–97.

The historiographical aspects of this elite-driven paradigm need perhaps not detain us long, nor its politics.¹⁶ It is more important to note here that this paradigm coexists with a long-standing model centered on community and on “stateness.”¹⁷ This model places emphasis on political discourse and its creativity, but also on institutions, constitutional arrangements, and politics. Stateness allows for the generation of public spaces and public goods, in the sense of non-monopolizable goods that are open to all and guaranteed by the community to avoid the “tragedy of the commons” in the form of their capture or overuse. The publicness of public goods is itself constitutive, generating both symbolical forms and practical consequences.¹⁸ The generative power of the political idea of sharing in concrete forms is explicitly at the heart of Jean-Pierre Vernant’s foundational 1962 essay *On the Origins of Greek Thought*, or the essay on political space in Pierre Vidal-Naquet and Pierre Lévêque’s *Cleisthenes the Athenian* (1964): the central notion here is that of political rationality.¹⁹ The same sense of the importance of shared goods

16. Suffice it to note that the individualist or “neoliberal” paradigm, based on the power of the elites, emerged in anglophone academia at the same time as the post-Thatcher and post-Reagan rollback of the state, and that it coincided with similar moves away from the notion of the state in political science and in history. See Anna Stilz, *Liberal Loyalty: Freedom, Obligation, and the State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

17. On stateness, see Mogens Herman Hansen, “Was the *Polis* a State or a Stateless Society?” in *Even More Studies in the Ancient Greek Polis*, ed. Thomas Heine Nielsen (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 2002), 17–47; Greg Anderson, “The Personality of the Greek State,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 129 (2009): 1–22 (arguing against Berent, “Anthropology and the Classics”); Christophe Pébarthe, “Sur l’État... grec ? Pierre Bourdieu et les cités grecques,” *Revue des études anciennes* 114, no. 2 (2012): 543–65—a discussion of Pierre Bourdieu, *On the State: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1989–1992*, trans. David Fernbach (Paris: Éd. Raisons d’agir/Éd. du Seuil, 2011); Paulin Ismard, “The Single Body of the City: Public Slaves and the Question of the Greek State,” *Annales HSS (English Edition)* 69, no. 3 (2014): 505–32. See also Ismard, *Democracy’s Slaves: A Political History of Ancient Greece*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), where the state is much more present, although with nuances, than in his earlier book *La cité des réseaux*.

18. On the ancient conception of public goods, see Arnaud Macé, ed., *Choses privées et chose publique en Grèce ancienne. Genèse et structure d’un système de classification* (Grenoble: J. Milion, 2012); and Macé, “Two Forms of the Common in Ancient Greece,” *Annales HSS (English Edition)* 69, no. 3 (2014): 441–69 (the present essay is an attempt to work out the historical and institutional consequences of Macé’s findings). More generally, see Raymond Geuss, *Public Goods, Private Goods* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). It is worth affirming the importance of public goods, though the relations between public and private were (unsurprisingly) complex and negotiable: see the essays collected in Edmond Lévy, ed., “Public et privé en Grèce ancienne. Lieux conduites, pratiques,” special issue, *Ktēma. Civilisations de l’Orient, de la Grèce et de Rome antiques* 23 (1998).

19. Jean-Pierre Vernant, *The Origins of Greek Thought* [1962] (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982); Pierre Vidal-Naquet and Pierre Lévêque, *Cleisthenes the Athenian: An Essay on the Representation of Space and Time in Greek Political Thought from the End of the Sixth Century to the Death of Plato* [1964], trans. David Ames Curtis (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1996). However, some structuralist works turned toward a holistic anthropological interpretation of Archaic Greek society, and hence downplayed state institutions: see Pauline Schmitt Pantel, *La cité au banquet. Histoire des repas publics dans les cités grecques*

can be seen in Tonio Hölscher's insistence on reading the Archaic *poleis* as political spaces.²⁰ It is important to keep in mind the force of such "communitarian" assumptions about the primacy of organized community over groups, families, and individuals, since they also underlie more institutional and constitutional work on the Archaic *poleis*. Such studies defend the statal nature of the *polis* and its conception, or focus on Archaic Greek law and the state-creating efficacy of its procedures and assumptions.²¹ For their authors, the precocity and sophistication of state institutions, especially financial ones, explains the gradual success of the *poleis* in producing public goods such as monumental political and sacred spaces (the Samian Heraion invoked above is just one example), economic instruments such as state-guaranteed coinage from the end of the seventh century, or the means of pursuing collective policy, including expensive warfleets made up of advanced, multi-banked, oar-powered ships of the line (*triereis*).²²

The sketch given above establishes a classification based on whether one conceptualizes the city-state as secondary or primary in relation to social phenomena. Ultimately, both models have to deal with the emergence of the *polis* as an organized state formation. In the individualist, non-institutionalist, or "organicist" model, the problem is to locate and explain a relatively late crystallization of the state out of the ecology of associations and entrepreneurs. In the communitarian, institutionalist, or "Aristotelian" paradigm, on the other hand, the primary position of the state means considering that it emerged very early on, in a relatively well-formed and efficient shape. The essential question is whether these competing paradigms yield a clearer understanding of the expressive politics of Archaic Greece than the traditional master narrative of the *poleis* and their origins.

(Rome: École française de Rome, 1992); de Polignac, "Sanctuaires et société," 73–97; Ismard, *La cité des réseaux*.

20. Hölscher, *Öffentliche Räume* (which amounts to a critique of earlier archaeological works on the Archaic period, including Morris, *Burial and Ancient Society*); Tonio Hölscher, "Die Entstehung der griechischen Polisgemeinschaft im Bild: Lebende, Vorfahren, Götter," in *Leibhafte Kunst. Statuen und kulturelle Identität*, ed. Dietrich Boschung and Christiane Vorster (Paderborn: Fink, 2015), 13–53; Giovanni Marginesu, *Gortina di Creta. Prospettive epigrafiche per lo studio della forma urbana* (Athens: Scuola archeologica italiana di Atene, 2005), 29–59.

21. Michael Gagarin, *Writing Greek Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

22. Hans van Wees, *Ships and Silver, Taxes and Tribute: A Fiscal History of Archaic Athens* (London: Tauris, 2013). On coinage, see Georges Le Rider, *La naissance de la monnaie. Pratiques monétaires de l'Orient ancien* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2001); Henry S. Kim, "Small Change and the Moneyed Economy," in *Money, Labour and Land: Approaches to the Economics of Ancient Greece*, ed. Paul Cartledge, Edward E. Cohen, and Lin Foxhall (London: Routledge, 2002), 44–51. See also David M. Schaps, *The Invention of Coinage and the Monetization of Ancient Greece* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), for the revolutionary impact of coinage, and the more cautious conclusions of John H. Kroll, "The Monetary Background of Early Coinage," in *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Coinage*, ed. William Metcalf (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 33–42.

The Limits of the Elitist Hypothesis

The two stories, elitist-entrepreneurial and communitarian-statist, overlap exactly: the seventh century witnessed both the emergence of constitutional arrangements and the manifestation of elite display in the shape of great antiquarian tombs; the sixth century saw urban monumentalization and a consolidation of the state toward arguably democratic forms, conjointly with the elite politics of tyranny and factionalism. Let me focus, to begin with, on the elites-driven model. This paradigm rests on the visibility of elite groups in the material record for luxury, funerary and religious display, and small-group activities such as dining, as well as the literary sources attesting freebooting and acquisition, and the politics of factional struggles. The strangeness of much of Archaic political culture seems to recede or make sense within the context of a coherent model assuming a low degree of stateness and widespread elitism.

Thus, institutions and written law have been interpreted as unsystematic ad hoc arrangements designed to defuse conflict within the elite and to protect its position.²³ The structures of the Archaic *polis* are then interpreted as elite practice and networks. Archaic Athens starts to look less like a state than a chieftain society, shaped and dominated by the power relations of elite groups and families: the real world of *polis* politics and its true actors, far from the shadow-world of law and institutions, whose role may have been to feebly regulate or to legitimize the power-sharing arrangements of the aristocratic families.²⁴ But (according to this model) the very entrenchedness of elites furthered conflict between these groups and their communities. A generation ago, Leslie Kurke and Ian Morris argued that there was an ideological conflict between an “elitist” worldview and a “middling” worldview, the former claiming political power for a small elite whose status was naturalized through signs of distinction (luxury goods and practices), the latter foregrounding the importance of the political community and adopting a political culture of restraint and simplicity.²⁵ This model has known tremendous success, in seeming to connect political anthropology and the new “elitist” paradigm of Archaic history.

23. Karl-J. Hölkenskamp, “Written Law in Archaic Greece,” *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, n.s. 38 (1992): 87–117; Jason Hawke, *Writing Authority: Elite Competition and Written Law in Early Greece* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011).

24. Greg Anderson, *The Athenian Experiment: Building an Imagined Political Community in Ancient Attica, 508–490 B.C.* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), is based on the weakness of the Athenian state before the Peisistratids and Cleisthenes. See also Forsdyke, *Exile, Ostracism, and Democracy*.

25. Ian Morris, “The Strong Principle of Equality and the Archaic Origins of Greek Democracy,” in *Démokratia: A Conversation on Democracies, Ancient and Modern*, ed. Josiah Ober and Charles Hedrick (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 19–48; Morris, “Archaeology and Archaic Greek History,” in Fisher and van Wees, *Archaic Greece*; Leslie Kurke, *Coins, Bodies, Games, and Gold: The Politics of Meaning in Archaic Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). For the case of Sappho’s poetry, see Franco Ferrari, *Sappho’s Gift: The Poet and Her Community*, trans. Benjamin Acosta-Hughes and Lucia Prauscello (Ann Arbor: Michigan Classical Press, 2010). The Morris-Kurke paradigm is

In its vision, the culmination of the processes of conflict between elites and *polis* was, inevitably, revolution—for instance, in the case of the supposed watershed of Cleisthenic Athens.²⁶ The latter is sometimes considered to be the qualitatively different product of a rupture between epochs, but this Athenocentric story is ultimately only a variant on the need which modern historians have felt to posit conflict, radical change, and revolution at the origins of the *polis*. Such an interpretation has even been proposed for Archaic Sparta, whose institutions have been analyzed as the outcome of a crisis between aristocrats and non-aristocrats culminating in extensive reform.²⁷

These elitist interpretations are nevertheless open to serious objection on points of detail. Jason Hawke's two fundamental assumptions, namely the restriction of literacy to a small social elite and the late eighth-century crisis caused by the passage from a “redistributive” to a “market” economy, can be challenged.²⁸ The supposedly restricted nature of literacy in Crete has turned out to be exaggerated, as Paula Perlman has shown, while written law was presented with various assumptions about publicity and legibility.²⁹ The presentation of Archaic law suggests the intention of communication with a wide audience (large lettering, punctuation, accessibility, technological solutions such as prismatic inscription or spinnable beams that could be read from all angles)—the few laws which survive imply others, as well as institutions. The supposed economic crisis is based on a boldly schematic reconstruction by David Tandy, interesting as a model but founded on outdated primitivist assumptions about the ancient economy.³⁰

Likewise, the “elites versus middling” dichotomy elaborated by Kurke and Morris is problematic because of the lack of pertinent evidence for the shape of conflict between a supposed aristocracy and the community or the people. This absence is glaring in the case of Archaic Sparta, where the evidence is simply too late to allow any meaningful study, or concerns subsequent periods. The Spartan horse-racing elites, for instance, were a phenomenon of the fifth century and beyond, not an aristocratic reaction against the ephors, while references to any sort of land reform or “Great Rhetra” are hopelessly obscure and may even be retrojections introduced

systematically and boldly worked out in Richard T. Neer, *Greek Art and Archaeology of the Greek World: A New History, c. 2500–c. 150 BCE* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2012).

26. Philip Brook Manville, *The Origins of Citizenship in Ancient Athens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Anderson, *The Athenian Experiment*; Forsdyke, *Exile, Ostracism, and Democracy*.

27. Mischa Meier, *Aristokraten und Damoden. Untersuchungen zur inneren Entwicklung Spartas im 7. Jahrhundert v. Chr. und zur politischen Funktion der Dichtung des Tyrtaios* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1998).

28. Hawke, *Writing Authority*.

29. Paula Perlman, “Gortyn. The First Seven Hundred Years, Part II: The Laws from the Temple of Apollo Pythios,” in Nielsen, *Even More Studies in the Ancient Greek Polis*; Gagarin, *Writing Greek Law*.

30. David W. Tandy, *Warriors into Traders: The Power of the Market in Early Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

in the fourth century.³¹ But this also applies to other Archaic communities, such as Samos or even Athens (where the available evidence points to precisely the sort of expressive, histrionic politics that later periods found incomprehensible). The absence of clear evidence is compounded by the difficulty of reducing the literary sources to any clear dichotomy between “aristocratic” and “middling” groups. As shown by the case of the tripod and the bean soup, Alcman does not fit either category easily, and the same applies to other pieces of Archaic poetry.³² Generally, it is unclear when one should posit the revolutions which are supposed to have followed upon anti-elite unrest, especially since the processes of institutionalization, including written law, took place early on, starting in the first half of the seventh century—that is, before the preferred sixth-century dates for revolution.

In fact, the elites-driven model all too often depends on the old conventional narrative (aristocrats-tyrants-hoplites), which it sought to displace in favor of a low-state, individuals-centered narrative, but to whose gravitational pull it succumbs. At the very least, the starting point should be to realize that the *polis* did not rise out of a struggle against clans or aristocratic families. There were certainly important men and families whose luck, acquisitive policies, estate management and trade, or freebooting had made them wealthy. But wealth did not translate automatically into eminence, as Duplouy has shown in his important book.³³ The translation had to be made through a whole repertoire of claims and recognition strategies, attested in the material record as well as the literary evidence from the Archaic period. Theognis’s lament about “new men” challenges the claims of a rival group in order to naturalize and embed his own claims; this does not reflect a crisis caused by the rise of a new class of men to the detriment of an established aristocracy.³⁴ The fluid social field of the Archaic Greek cities required individuals, families, and groups to put forward multiple claims in order to achieve “prestige” in the absence of strongly embedded social stratification.

But within a non-stratified social field, what was “prestige” for? The question must be posed in terms of the relationship between prestige, power, and the emergent forces of state institutions and communitarian ideology. Otherwise, to focus exclusively on “prestige” and performativeness only reinforces the failure of the elitist paradigm to confront the problem of the state, this time by evacuating it entirely. Since competitive claims to eminence through gestures were performatively dependent on acceptance by some form of community, they did not reflect

31. Stephen Hodkinson, *Property and Wealth in Classical Sparta* (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2000; repr. 2009), aims to work out the political economy of Archaic and Classical Sparta.

32. Dean Hammer, “Ideology, the Symposium, and Archaic Politics,” *American Journal of Philology* 125, no. 4 (2004): 479–512; Erich Kistler, “‘Kampf der Mentalitäten’: Ian Morris’ ‘Elitist-’ versus ‘Middling-Ideology?’” in *Griechische Archaik. Interne Entwicklungen, Externe Impulse*, ed. Robert Rollinger and Christoph Ulf (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2004), 145–75 (which pays particular attention to the material record in Athens and on Samos); Hall, *A History of the Archaic Greek World*, 202–5.

33. Duplouy, *Le prestige des élites*.

34. Theognis, 53–68.

the dominance of a preexisting ruling class. From there, the spotlight falls back on the communities and their constitution, which emerge once again as the most important phenomenon in the history of Archaic Greece. We might be tempted to start from the claim that the *polis* was not constituted by elites, or in reaction to elites, but that elites were constituted by and within the *polis*.

Play-Acting and Communities

Elitist practice requires precise contextualization not within a master narrative, but within the political cultures of the Archaic period. These cultures, as suggested by the puzzling vignettes at the start of this paper, worked through a complex negotiation of issues related to community, power, and public goods. In spite of the diversity of the Archaic *poleis*, they can usefully be classified into two groups, namely “closed” and “open” polities. This classification was recently proposed by Thomas Brisart, focusing on the seventh-century context: it emerges from different functions of luxury and prestige, and from the political arrangements these differences imply.³⁵

The first group is that of communities which show a curious mix of restraint and luxury in their material culture, the best-known examples being Sparta, Argos, and the cities of Crete, during the seventh and sixth centuries BCE. These communities were generally characterized by restraint in their artistic manifestations and material goods, a trait which intensified throughout the Archaic period, as illustrated by the plain functionality of Spartan art in the sixth century. At the same time, they made a point of granting and regulating access to luxury goods and status: the conditions of diversity in the social field were thereby controlled and simplified.

In Crete, this can be seen in the distribution of Orientalizing visual arts, which were accessed in the communal context of group dining: common contributions in kind were stored in, and shared out of, large Orientalizing *pithoi* that stood in public buildings.³⁶ In Sparta, certain forms of vestimentary and personal styling became generalized as visual signs of identity, but also of an individual's share in the communal good life (the crimson cloak, the characteristic long coiffure, the delight in festivals and dance); the generalization and regulation of the banquet (as well as communal meals) contributed to the same social goals. The celebration of finery and Eastern delicacy in choral songs performed at civic festivals offered another venue for displaying, or simply thinking about, luxury as a community. At the same time, Sparta saw the generalization of claims to status through birth or

35. Thomas Brisart, “Les pithoi à reliefs de l'atelier d'Aphrati. Fonction et statut d'une production orientalisante,” in *Shapes and Uses of Greek Vases (7th–4th Centuries B.C.)*, ed. Athena Tsingarida (Brussels: CReA-Patrimoine, 2009), 137–51; Brisart, *Un art citoyen. Recherches sur l'orientalisation des artisanats en Grèce proto-archaïque* (Brussels: Académie royale de Belgique. Classe des lettres, 2011), where the author builds on his earlier insights about Cretan city-state culture.

36. For evidence and analyses of a shared elite culture, see Brisart, “Les pithoi à reliefs de l'atelier d'Aphrati.”

through essential heroic values such as courage, endurance, and equanimity in the face of death in battle, as shown by the exhortatory poetry of Tyrtaios and by the iconographical choices apparent in Laconian art during the late seventh and sixth centuries BCE. This splicing of strategically deployed frugality, communal identity, and rationed luxury is the context in which the playful images in Alcman must be understood.³⁷ The same ideological stance might explain the deliberate choice of lead and iron for the tens of thousands of dedications famously found at the shrine of Artemis Orthia, where a combination of lowly materials, rich texture, and mass production participated in the Spartan paradoxes of restraint and display, luxury and moderation.³⁸

This political culture reflects a specific organization based on the restriction of full membership to a small group which had achieved consolidation, capture of public goods, and domination over the socially and geographically excluded. It is a pattern well known in Laconia, Argos, and Crete. The disfranchised also included the men living in dependent communities in the ambit of the ruling community. This type of community may have been fairly widespread in the seventh century BCE; the Spartan and Cretan versions are the result of very visible sixth-century adaptations and evolutions.

The balanced distribution of luxury and restraint fulfilled symbolical functions in such closed communities. It manifested the limited access to public goods, which were highly developed in Sparta, Argos, or the Cretan cities: monumental urban and extra-urban spaces (both sacred and profane), written law, state institutions. The distribution of luxury and restraint also maintained a fiction of fairness within membership, through solidarity, uniformity, and rationing. The claim to justice was furthered by the generalization of ethical traits: some drawn from the heroic register in a politics of deserts (those who rule do so because of their inherent excellence), others from the politics of social justice, through an aggressively proclaimed austerity. This particular gesture was metaphorical. Since the restricted, closed group of citizens was the *dēmos*, the people, in the sense that they made up the whole political community, this ruling group adopted tokens of simplicity in a piece of political play-acting, drawing on the other acceptation of the *dēmos*—the “common people.” In Alcman’s poem, the bean soup in the gold tripod explicitly

37. Alcman, frag. 95 and 96 [Campbell] and perhaps frag. 19 [Campbell] for private *sympo-sion* where, on tables set before dining couches, fancy breads were served alongside a high-calorie honey and seed mix that might have had military uses; Massimo Nafissi, *La nascita del kosmos. Studi sulla storia e la società di Sparta* (Naples: Ed. Scientifiche Italiane, 1991), 214–18.

38. Hodkinson, *Property and Wealth*; Förlsch, *Kunstverwendung und Kunstlegitimation* (on the material and visual culture of Archaic Sparta); Nafissi, *La nascita del kosmos*; Robin Osborne, “The Spartan Exception?” in “Debating Dark Ages,” ed. Marianne Maaskant-Kleibrink and Marja C. Vink, special issue, *Caeculus* 3 (1996): 19–24. For an analysis of the paradoxes of exclusion and integration linked to Archaic banquets, see Marek Wecowski, *The Rise of the Greek Aristocratic Banquet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); for the importance of consumption (defined very broadly, beyond the material realm) as a political marker of choice and identity within broader social contexts, see Ulf, “Konsumption, Lebenstilen und Öffentlichkeiten.”

symbolizes the common people and their taste for *ta koina*, a word which also has political meanings and designates “communal goods.” The fiction put forward by symbolical austerity sought to identify the ruling group with the commons, and hence assert a claim on justice and equality in the community. It also grounded their right to rule, not only by eliding the disfranchised population, but also by limiting any egalitarian overspill from the conceptions of justice and sharing that were coterminous with the production of public goods.

Political play-acting, and the resulting solidarity, may explain the self-conscious dynamism of Argos, and especially Sparta, during the sixth century in the Peloponnese and beyond. Sparta asserted itself as the city of urban spaces and festival activities, social justice, and military prowess.³⁹ Likewise, Cretan cities showed an energetic tendency toward conquest and expansion.⁴⁰ Since this type of *polis* justified membership in the form of military participation and rule over others, it was structurally ready to extend its domination by imposing relations of dependency on neighboring communities. The case of Sparta is the best known, but similar relations radiated out from even small Cretan cities, such as Arcades or Dreros. But play-acting and closed-polity solidarity did not necessarily create stable political situations. The claim by small, closed polities to embody justice as the manifestation of the *dēmos* was open to evolution in two different directions. It might create the temptation, within the ruling group, to try to achieve distinction through elitist displays, *as if* the fiction of the community as a *dēmos* of equals were true (hence the increasing problem of wealth inequality in Sparta). This historical problem may explain why “group luxury” as a way of negotiating these issues gradually fell out of favor, to be replaced with generalized austerity in the sixth century, since the prestige-laden meanings of luxury goods or Orientalizing art might prove too difficult to control, and introduce breaks and tensions within the small franchise group. Alternatively, this play-acting might raise the question of the relation between the fictional *dēmos* of the rich and the mass of individuals, families, and communities excluded from the full exercise of power. When the ruling group of Argos was devastated by military defeat and slaughter at the hands of the Spartan king Cleomenes I, the peripheral communities gained their independence, and power in the *polis* was seized by “slaves” (presumably inhabitants excluded under the previous closed political system).⁴¹

39. On Sparta and shared goods, see Terpander, frag. 7 [Campbell] (probably dating from the seventh century BCE, though the source is indirect and the attribution traditional).

40. Didier Viviers, “La cité de Dattala et l’expansion territoriale de Lyktos en Crète centrale,” *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique* 118, no. 1 (1994): 229–59 (on Lyttos). For a counterargument, see Brice L. Erickson, “Aphrati and Kato Syme: Pottery, Continuity, and Cult in Late Archaic and Classical Crete,” *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens* 71, no. 1 (2002): 41–90; and Marginesu, *Gortina di Creta*, 90–96 (on Gortyn).

41. Herodotus, *Histories* 6.76–82; Marcel Piérart, “L’attitude d’Argos à l’égard des autres cités d’Argolide,” in *The Polis as an Urban Centre and as a Political Community*, ed. Mogens Herman Hansen (Copenhagen: Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab, 1997), 321–50.

Another type of *polis* developed complex claims and political gestures, but in configurations that were diametrically opposed to the communities described above. These “open” or “inclusive” communities abounded in prestige-laden gestures: for instance, in the form of statuary dedications by individuals and families (including, among a wide variety of types, the freestanding naked male and clothed female statues which moderns call *kouroi* and *korai*). But such gestures coexisted with very large-scale common projects. Between approximately 580 and 520 BCE, the archaeological record of Samos is remarkable for big projects such as the breakwater in the harbor, the waterworks tunnel through the mountain above the urban site, and the enormous temple of Hera evoked above. At Miletos, the monumentalization of the temple of Apollo at Didyma (ca. 550 BCE) coincided with an extraordinarily rich and varied set of statuary dedications in various sites across the Milesian territory. In Athens, at the same time as the (still obscure) early sixth-century monumentalization of the temple of Athena on the Acropolis, and generally of the Acropolis itself as a sacred landscape, this landscape teemed with a rich and diverse dedicatory practice by individuals, intensifying at the end of the sixth century. The same dynamic can be seen at the small Boiotian city of Acrailphia, characterized by the equally spectacular public monumentalization and private dedication at the shrine of Apollo Ptoos.⁴²

Another striking feature of sixth-century Acrailphia is the sudden appearance of densely occupied cemeteries south of the urban settlement, where thousands of tombs have been excavated. The phenomenon reflects wide access to formal burial, mirroring the recognition of membership granted to a broad segment of the population.⁴³ Extensive access to enfranchisement thus constitutes the context for prestige gestures within open communities (such a gesture is attested at Acrailphia, in the form of a sixth-century funerary stele set up by a man for a younger lover: the stele was sculpted in an Attic workshop, and inscribed with an epigram in Ionian, a non-local dialect used for specialized poetical effect).⁴⁴ The political basis of

42. Miletos is explored in detail in Duplouy, *Le prestige des élites*. For Samos and Athens, see Franssen, *Votiv und Repräsentation*. For Acrailphia, see Pierre Guillon, *Les trépieds du Ptoion* (Paris: De Boccard, 1943); Jean Ducat, *Les kouroi du Ptoion. Le sanctuaire d'Apollon Ptoieus à l'époque archaïque* (Paris: De Boccard, 1971), nos. 240–50; Nassos Papalexandrou, “Boiotian Tripods: The Tenacity of a Panhellenic Symbol in a Regional Context,” *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens* 77, no. 2 (2008): 251–82; Jean Ducat, “Le Ptoion et l’histoire de la Béotie à l’époque archaïque. À propos d’un livre récent,” *Revue des études grecques* 77, no. 364/365 (1964): 283–90; Mogens Herman Hansen and Thomas Heine Nielsen, *An Inventory of Archaic and Classical Greek Poleis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), no. 198; Emily Mackil, *Creating a Common Polity: Religion, Economy, and Politics in the Making of the Greek Koinon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 171–73.

43. Angheliki K. Andreiomou, “Les nécropoles de Levadia and d’Acrailphia à l’époque hellénistique. Une comparaison,” in *Recherches récentes sur le monde hellénistique. Actes du colloque en l’honneur de Pierre Ducrey*, ed. Regula Frei-Stolba and Kristine Gex (Bern: Peter Lang, 2001), 155–90, provides a synthesis of earlier work. Morris, *Burial and Ancient Society*, claims that formal burial played a central role in membership of a community.

44. *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* (hereafter “SEG”) 49.505; Albio Cesare Cassio, “Scultori, epigrammi e dialetti nella Grecia arcaica. La stele di Mnasitheos (SEG 49, 1999,

such communities was social and geographical inclusiveness, manifested through the avoidance of a fortune criterion for membership and the enfranchisement of inhabitants of smaller settlements around the main site. The best known example is sixth-century Athens, where a series of reforms (the *seisachtheia* or “shaking-off of burdens”) attributed to a single figure, the lawgiver Solon, suppressed a penumbra of arrangements involving debt bondage, sharecropping, and corvée labor. These reforms distributed enfranchisement on a broad social and geographical basis, accompanied by institutional development on both the political and judicial levels. Similar situations were probably obtained in Miletos and Samos, after the end of small-group rule.⁴⁵ Widespread political rights thus coexisted with a high level of social diversity within the *polis*. The intensification of state institutions, and the launching of large-scale common projects, funded by common resources, were also intended to give a strong image of shared purpose, while ensuring the general accessibility of public goods.

The coexistence of politically inclusive context and prestige is perhaps best illustrated by the “Solonian” property classes. At the same time as membership in the community was widely distributed, issues of eminence among the most affluent citizens were addressed publicly via an official system of ranking based on agricultural wealth. The ranks bore striking, metaphorical names (*pentakosiomedimnoi*, *hippeis*, and *zeugitai*, or “five-hundred-bushel men,” “horsemen,” and “yoke-men”), which made them sound like small elitist factions, but in fact integrated them within centralized purposes (such as financial assessment for contributions to central funds).⁴⁶ The “Solonian” attempt at clarifying issues of eminence points to the main problem generated by inclusiveness, namely uncertainty about status within the community. This was the context for the proliferation of prestige-laden gestures or claims that can be observed during the sixth century. These were not acts of resistance, protest, or affirmation against the *polis* by embittered, embattled, or displaced aristocrats (as the “elitist versus middling” model suggests): on the contrary, prestige-laden gestures were themselves the product of integration into the *polis* along inclusive lines, as wealthy groups and individuals tried to claim status through community recognition.

Were these claims culturally driven by the need for recognition, or were they part of a hardball power politics aimed at controlling institutions and exacerbated

NR. 505)” in *L’epigramma greco. Problemi e prospettive*, ed. Giuseppe Lozza and Stefano Martinelli Tempesta (Milan: Cisalpino, 2007), 1–18.

45. For Athens, the main ancient source is the Aristotleian *Constitution of Athens* (chapters 5–13). See Manville, *The Origins of Citizenship*; Josine H. Blok and André Lardinois, *Solon of Athens: New Historical and Philological Approaches* (Leiden: Brill, 2006). Corvée labor is based on the (contested) interpretation of Thomas W. Gallant, “Agricultural Systems, Land Tenure, and the Reforms of Solon,” *Annual of the British School at Athens* 77 (1982): 111–24. For Samos, see Franssen, *Votiv und Repräsentation*.

46. Van Wees, *Ships and Silver, Taxes and Tribute*. For a different interpretation, based on a performative, elitist model, see Alain Duplouy, “The So-Called Solonian Property Classes: Citizenship in Archaic Athens,” *Annales HSS (English Edition)* 69, no. 4 (2014): 411–39.

by the formalization and intensification of available public goods? These two possible motivations were of course linked within a continuum. Occupying positions of power within the community could have been driven by a desire for status, thus functioning as the ultimate resolution of the competition for prestige. Conversely, positions of power could circulate among competing groups, as each sought to acquire markers of status and prestige. In Attica during the first half of the sixth century, political competition pitted against each other three factions, each led by a different family and named after a region of the peninsula; around the same period, two factions with colorful names competed in Miletos (“Sailors” against “Fighters” or perhaps “Artisans”). The *hetairoi* (companions) attested on a fragmentary dedicatory inscription from Acraphia might have been a similar group, active in the political life of their city.⁴⁷ This sort of competition, conducted through riots, pageants, and alternations of power and exile, probably acted as the extension of the prestige competition visible archaeologically, and constituted the political life that went with inclusive polities, with their broad-based membership, institutional framework and public goods. The politics of competition acted as a process of negotiation and integration with community sanction, as on Samos or even in Peisistratid Athens. Such processes can clearly be seen at work in the negotiation of individual eminence in the case of athletic and agonistic celebration.⁴⁸ Elitist claims in this type of polity were hence a form of play-acting: they allowed the wealthy to show themselves *as if* they wielded rule on the basis of natural or essential traits, even though the context of institutionalized state power and wide access to institutions and public goods in fact made recognition dependent on community approval, and hence reenacted the wide distribution of power among the community.

Just like closed-polity play-acting, inclusive polities and their elitist games were full of possibilities for instability. Within the semi-autonomous field of politics, competition for prestige could escalate into actual violence and power struggles. These could take place on the ideological level (a small group claiming the right to represent synecdochically the interests of the community and justice, in contrast with rival groups’ evil intent). Or they could be much more concrete: in Athens, the Peisistratids sought positional advantage through recourse to foreign money and mercenaries, outside the field of prestige competition. Another possibility was social conflict, because competition demanded and consumed resources, which would-be elites had to acquire, if necessary from within their communities.

47. For Miletos, the titles are recorded, as nearly always, in Plutarch, *Quaestiones Graecae* 32, a much later source that provides ample but suspect detail. For Acraphia, these “companions” are recorded in a fragmentary, enigmatic inscription from the sixth century, found at the shrine of Apollo Ptoos. See Henri van Effenterre and Françoise Ruzé, *Nomima. Recueil d’inscriptions politiques et juridiques de l’archaïsme grec*, vol. 1, *Cités et institutions* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1994), no. 69.

48. Leslie Kurke, *The Traffic in Praise: Pindar and the Poetics of Social Economy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Rosalind Thomas, “Fame, Memorial, and Choral Poetry: The Origins of Epinician Poetry—An Historical Study,” in *Pindar’s Poetry, Patrons, and Festivals from Archaic Greece to the Roman Empire*, ed. Simon Hornblower and Catherine Morgan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 141–66.

Seventh-century, pre-Solonian Athens, often viewed as an aristocratic polity, in fact already illustrates the experimental diversity and the risks inherent in elitist competition in a context of inclusive membership. By the early seventh century, the huge territory of Attica was integrated as a *polis* grouping secondary sites around a major center, Athens. Its unity as a *polis* is shown by the operation of the constructed, fictive kinship groups of “phratry” and “tribe,” and its stateness is attested by institutionalization—administrative as well as financial—and by the emergence of written law later in the same century.⁴⁹ These processes of integration created the inclusive context for prestige-laden claims and uncertainty about status. Wealthy families and groups engaged in competitive display in the form of large stone sculpture dedications, various forms of spectacular burial ritual, small-group dining, and religious activity on eminent sites—competitive elitist behavior that must have required a heavy outlay of individual or familial resources.⁵⁰ Competition also led to acquisitive behavior abroad (such as colonization or freebooting), and increased internal pressure on various arrangements between wealthy and non-wealthy. But this situation did not prove sustainable, and the outcome was paradoxically a break with elitist escalation and a drive toward further inclusion, in the form of the Solonian reforms.

Finally, elitist competition could spread beyond the social circles of the wealthy and ambitious, to be adopted, in yet another form of play-acting, by broader sections of society. In the second half of the sixth century, dedications of statues and reliefs on the Athenian Acropolis were made by private individuals who do not seem to have been wealthy landowners (the social group which had probably produced the earlier dedications), while small-party dining and drinking (*symposia*) seem to have become widespread in Athenian society in the late sixth century.⁵¹ Another example of this phenomenon is the curious case of Archaic Colophon,⁵² a community using particular signs of wealth and luxury, but as symbols of franchise extended to the whole citizen population (or most of it), alongside such practices as small-group banqueting (hence, perhaps, the memory of pervasive

49. In favor of the early unity of Attica around the Athenian state, see Michael Stahl, *Aristokraten und Tyrannen im archaischen Athen. Untersuchungen zur Überlieferung, zur Sozialstruktur und zur Entstehung des Staates* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1987); Uwe Walter, *An der Polis teilhaben. Bürgerstaat und Zugehörigkeit im archaischen Griechenland* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1993); Dietmar Kienast, “Die Funktion der attischen Demen von Solon bis Kleisthenes,” *Chiron* 35 (2015): 69–100; Van Wees, *Ships and Silver, Taxes and Tribute*; and more generally and cautiously Robert Parker, *Athenian Religion: A History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 10–17. The contrary argument, in favor of a loosely federated Attica, united symbolically, culturally, and religiously, but without a strong political center, is expressed in Manville, *The Origins of Citizenship*; De Polignac, “Sanctuaires et société”; and Anderson, *The Athenian Experiment*.

50. Sanne Helene Houby-Nielsen, “‘Burial Language’ in Archaic and Classical Kerameikos,” *Proceedings of the Danish Institute in Athens* 1 (1995): 129–91.

51. Franssen, *Votiv und Repräsentation*; Kathleen M. Lynch, *The Symposium in Context: Pottery from a Late Archaic House near the Athenian Agora* (Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 2011).

52. Duplouy, “Les Mille de Colophon.”

and constant drunkenness in Xenophanes). In other words, Colophon appropriated certain “elitist” tropes as signs of membership in its commons. Inclusive polities could thus diffuse signs of luxury as symbols of membership—as a widely adopted sign of the whole community’s status above any elitist claim, or as a reminder of the general entitlement to public goods. Nor did the process necessarily stop at any particular point. The Colophonian appropriation of elitist markers was followed by a period of “tyranny,” perhaps as the result of small-group competition escalating into the success of one small group at monopolizing office: Xenophanes bitterly views the world of the Colophonian sharp dressers through the hindsight of this tyrannical outcome.

The simple point here is that *un train peut en cacher un autre*: egalitarianism and restraint were alibis or acts put on by small ruling elites, whereas display and luxury characterized complex claims about community, staked out within inclusive polities. Paradoxically, inclusive gestures could serve to exclude and dominate, whereas the exclusive implications of prestige-laden gestures, supposedly reserved for a narrow elite, could in fact reflect, or even contribute to the construction of, broad-based, inclusive communities. All these situations are much more complicated and dialectic than the simple homologous model (elitist community = elitist style) developed by Morris and Kurke within the old master narrative. The combination of play-acting and dynamic possibilities explains the complexity and apparent opacity of cultural politics during the Archaic period, as well as the difficulty of formulating one-to-one explanatory hypotheses or schemas. An appeal to the “middling” could be a symbolical alibi and an ideological system of rationing that cast a power group as the “commons,” while elitist style could be an ideological means to find balance within inclusive polities or even to make visible access to public goods. In both scenarios, play-acting lay at the heart of the *polis*.

This is not some simple expression of Archaic mentality; nor it is merely a metaphor covering concrete negotiations (as in Robert Connor’s interpretation of Peisistratos’s pageant). Play-acting was political, in that it made claims about entitlement and justice in the form of fairness of distribution and membership enjoyed by the right people. In other words, the complex metaphors and the symbols of political play-acting are about the intersection of interests, institutions, and ideas. Most strikingly, the forms of play-acting practiced by both the closed, small-group polities and the inclusive polities addressed the same interlocking political ideas and issues: membership in the political community and its consequences, the meanings and contents of status, the relationship between status and leadership, access to the public goods provided and embodied by the state, and the possibility of justice.

The Politics of Coalescence: Elites, Communities, and the History of the Archaic *Polis*

The definition of elites in relation to public goods raises the problem of the way in which these public goods were created. The broader context for elitism and

community in the Archaic cities was the characteristic lack of stratification (and hence of aristocracies), a legacy of the Early Iron Age.⁵³ The aftermath of the end of the Mycenaean hierarchical micro-empires left a diversity of groups and settlements, of local producers and former power-holders, all occupying their own ecological and economic niches, with their own power arrangements. These settlements underwent a long process of concentration into larger communities (involving big proto-urban sites and rural sites) between the tenth and eighth centuries BCE: these processes may have been driven by economic pressures and choices, leading to integration and centralization, a “Protogeometric” revolution (to use the conventional periodization, based on pottery shapes) first theorized by Chester Starr.⁵⁴ The absence of clear social stratification resulted in a complex ensemble of different political styles and claims that had to be negotiated within these same communities. In the world of Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, the kings (*basileis*) of the big site of Thespiae and the estate-owners of the smaller settlement of Ascra are not bound by formal links of subordination, but by their role as “big men” in their respective communities, negotiating relations of integration.⁵⁵ The same social complexity is visible in Early Iron Age Athens, for instance in burial practices, or in the variety of images and décor found on the monumental, “elitist” funerary amphorae of the Late Geometric period (ca. 730–700 BCE).⁵⁶

The *polis* was the result of long processes of problem-solving, negotiation, and integration—not by “aristocratic” or “elite” groups (or not always and not exclusively), but by a diversity of actors and constituencies that included wealthy elites and would-be warrior groups, but also non-elite farmers and producers. The economic and practical choices involved in integration, even if driven by calculation and rationality, or struggled over, had moral and ethical consequences. Community, and concomitant institutional solutions, needed to be negotiated around a

53. For renewed interest in the historical implications of studying the Early Iron Age, see Julien Zurbach, “The Formation of Greek City-States: Status, Class, and Land Tenure Systems,” *Annales HSS (English Edition)* 68, no. 4 (2013): 617–57; and Wecowski, *The Rise of the Greek Aristocratic Banquet*.

54. Chester G. Starr, “The Early Greek City-State,” *La parola del passato. Rivista di studi antichi* 12 (1957): 97–108; Starr, *The Origins of Greek Civilization, 1100–650 B.C.* (New York: Knopf, 1961); Wecowski, *The Rise of the Greek Aristocratic Banquet*.

55. Anthony T. Edwards, *Hesiod’s Ascra* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

56. Theodora Rombos, *The Iconography of Attic Late Geometric II Pottery* (Jonsered: P. Åström, 1988); Anthony Snodgrass, “Descriptive and Narrative Art at the Dawn of the Polis,” in *Alba della città, alba delle immagini?* ed. Bruno D’Agostino (Athens: Scuola archeologica italiana di Atene, 2008), 21–30; Wecowski, *The Rise of the Greek Aristocratic Banquet*. The problem of social relations in the “colonies” of the North Aegean, Sicily, and Italy requires a separate treatment: see Franco De Angelis, *Megara Hyblaia and Selinus: The Development of Two Greek City-States in Archaic Sicily* (Oxford: Oxford University School of Archaeology, 2003), and Mathaios Besios, *Methônē Pierias I: Epigraphes, charagmata kai emporika symbola stē geōmetrikē kai archaikē keramikē apo to “Hypogeio” tēs Methônēs Pierias stē Makedonia* (Thessaloniki: Kentro Hellénikēs Glōssas, 2012).

set of legitimate and ideally interlocking ideas about justice, worth and equality, entitlement, and membership: Starr's Protogeometric revolution was ultimately also an ethical one (closely related to the ideas of rationality and justice which Vernant or Vidal-Naquet placed at the heart of the Archaic *polis*).⁵⁷

These ideas animated the evolutions which appear suddenly to determine the shape of the early seventh-century *poleis*: first, the end of the world of big-man politics so visible in the Homeric poems; second, and perhaps most strikingly, the emergence of formalized institutional processes which produced statehood, public goods in the concrete and abstract spheres, and communitarian ideology (indeed, statehood itself was the ultimate public good); and, finally, constant debate and enactment, through play-acting or through increasingly articulate discussion, around the boundaries and the consequences of membership. These institutions and these debates formed the political *koinē* at the heart of the diverse forms taken by the Archaic *poleis*. Even when public goods were vulnerable to elite capture, as happened not infrequently and from an early date across the Greek world, they retained their constitutive shape and meaning.

This explains the need for closed polities to engage in paradoxical play-acting to justify the elite's right to rule both as the *dēmos* and as the best people. In the case of polities where elite capture of public goods did not take place, failed, or faded out, the resulting open polities generated a social field where elitist gestures had to take place in conditions determined by the community. The success or failure of elites in capturing public goods probably depended in large part on contingent factors, which might best be explored through specific test cases by city or by region.⁵⁸ Indeed, such test cases would provide a crucial means of exploring, through particular and local determinants, the bigger question of causation—in other words, why and how integration, self-interest, ethical interrogation, and institutionalization went hand in hand.

The real story of Archaic Greek history is not elites-driven; nor is it that “oligarchy and democracy are nothing but variants of the same type of state,”

57. Starr, *The Origins of Greek Civilization*; Vernant, *The Origins of Greek Thought*; Vidal-Naquet and Lévêque, *Cleisthenes the Athenian*.

58. On path dependency and pragmatism, see John K. Davies, “Democracy without Theory,” in *Herodotus and his World: Essays from a Conference in Memory of George Forrest*, ed. Peter Derow and Robert Parker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 319–35. For Crete, see Saro Wallace, *Ancient Crete: From Successful Collapse to Democracy's Alternatives, Twelfth to Fifth Centuries BC* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Brisart, *Un art citoyen*; Donald C. Haggis et al., “Excavations in the Archaic Civic Buildings at Azoria in 2005–2006,” *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens* 80, no. 1 (2011): 1–70. On Western Greece, see Birgitta Eder, *Argolis, Lakonien, Messenien. Vom Ende der mykenischen Palastzeit bis zur Einwanderung der Dorier* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1998); Catherine Morgan, *Early Greek States beyond the Polis* (London: Routledge, 2003); Birgitta Eder, “The World of Telemachus: Western Greece 1200–700 BC,” in Deger-Jalkotzy and Lemos, *Ancient Greece*, 549–79. On Corinth, see Catherine Morgan, *Isthmia: The Late Bronze Age Settlement and Early Iron Age Sanctuary* (Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1999).

a proposition Finley found absurd.⁵⁹ Rather, it lies in the formation of public goods and in the ideology which was at stake in processes of capture or claim, and indeed generated them. Many of the phenomena on which recent commentators have been fixated (ritual performance, civil society, networks) as profound manifestations of the nature, and indeed the alterity, of the political in ancient Greece, are better viewed as by-products or representations of state consolidation and the guarantees that it offered. In this view, the political (*le politique*) appears as a consequence—rather than the cause—of this emergence of the state, taking on multiple forms depending on the context or the moment: these forms could dramatize access to public goods, and hence ration this access (uniting a small group but excluding others from the construction of community), or recognize the unity of a community, or act as the arena for hardball power politics—or simply fulfil colorful folkloric functions.

Of course, this proposition (meant to solve some of the impasses faced by the mainstream narrative of Archaic Greek history and the individualist-performative, elites-driven paradigm) raises a whole series of issues of its own. The first is simply historiographical. The debates about the Archaic *polis* and its “elites” offer an interesting example of the interplay between explanatory hypotheses, shifting patterns, and especially perceptions of evidence, as well as historiographical moods and models. I have tried above to sketch some of the movements in this historiography, even though the sketch is necessarily incomplete; it mostly illustrates the powerful influence of the old master narrative concerning the origins of the Greek cities, the difficulty of elaborating broad concepts from fragmentary sources, and the problematic relations between ancient history, the social sciences, and other areas within the historical sciences.

The second problem is historical, or rather a bundle of historical questions within which a state-centered model of Archaic history has to fit. I have already raised the question of causation: the origins of the cities lay not in an eighth-century revolution, but in the Protogeometric revolution that took place during the Dark Ages, followed after a long interval by rapid institutionalization shortly after 700 BCE. The phenomena studied in this paper (elite capture of public goods, elitist competition) are secondary to this development. The other question is that of evolution, namely the historical evolution of Archaic political cultures into the much sharper debates of the Classical period, and the elaboration of a particular type of political culture based on the inclusive model, favoring the institutional and ideological capture of the means of elitist expression and recognition. Classical Athens is the best known example, but this culture was in fact widespread, becoming generalized by the late Classical and early Hellenistic period (350–250 BCE).⁶⁰

59. Moses I. Finley, *Politics in the Ancient World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), discusses the positions of Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff as mediated through Victor Ehrenberg on pp. 7–8.

60. Philippe Gauthier, “Les cités hellénistiques. Épigraphie et histoire des institutions et des régimes politiques,” in *Praktika tou 8. Diethnous Synedriou Hellēnikēs kai*

This particular outcome is particularly difficult to explain without making the story of the Greek *polis* a teleological account of the rise of an ancient form of liberal democracy.

The specter of teleology also hovers above the third problem, which is that of the nature of state formation in the Archaic period. I should be clear about what I mean by state and stateness. By the latter concepts, I do not mean the expression of ruling class domination (which is how most theories of the early state interpret it), but rather seek to emphasize the early and determinant formation of public goods, both as an exclusive public sphere (*res nullius*) and as equally distributed goods for individual consumption by all entitled members⁶¹—goods that were produced by collective processes (involving predation but also taxation). In some cases the results could be secondarily captured by elite groups (which turned into ruling classes), but they often escaped such processes to spawn social complexity within a context of growing political equality. Leaving aside causation, the problem is how to work this communitarian model into historical analysis that avoids formalism or idealism, two particular pitfalls of ancient Greek history. The recent debates about politics and Greek history that have been conducted in the *Annales* and elsewhere attempt to grapple with this problem.⁶²

In the particular guise of the *polis* (a city-state or citizen-state with a strong communitarian ideology and an immediacy of relations between citizen body and institutions), the state has often appeared as a “friendly giant” for historians of ancient Greece working within the communitarian paradigm. Symptomatic of this tendency is Josiah Ober’s hugely influential appropriation of the Gramscian trope of hegemony, which he uses to describe democratic control of the “wealth elite” in Classical Athens, in the assembly and in the law courts, through institutions and ideology.⁶³ The radical concept of the state’s power to control not through direct violence but though law and language, is here adapted to speak not of oppression but of equality and justice as an expression of the community’s power to protect its members. The same optimism, or idealism, still underlies the recent turn toward neo-institutionalist economic history: high economic performance now

Latinikēs Epigraphikēs/Actes du VIII^e congrès international d'épigraphie grecque et romaine, ed. A. G. Kalogeropoulou (Athens: Hypourgeio Politismou kai Epistēmōn, 1984), 82–107; Gauthier, *Les cités grecques et leurs bienfaiteurs (IV^e–I^e siècle avant J.-C.). Contribution à l'histoire des institutions* (Paris: École française d’Athènes, 1985); Josiah Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989; Eric W. Robinson, *Democracy beyond Athens: Popular Government in the Greek Classical Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); David A. Teegarden, *Death to Tyrants! Ancient Greek Democracy and the Struggle against Tyranny* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); Christel Müller, “(De)constructing *Politeia*: Reflections on Citizenship and the Bestowal of Privileges on Foreigners in Hellenistic Democracies,” *Annales HSS (English Edition)* 69, no. 3 (2014): 533–53.

61. Macé, *Choses privées et chose publique*; Macé, “Two Forms of the Common.”

62. Vincent Azoulay, ed., “Politics in Ancient Greece,” special issue, *Annales HSS (English Edition)* 69, no. 3 (2014).

63. Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens*.

acts as the practical validation for the ability of the Greek city-states to distribute public goods.⁶⁴ But unless we idealize the *polis*, we must recognize that the friendly giant is principally a Classical phenomenon (and a Hellenistic one, in the guise of the institutional history written from and even by the documentary evidence).⁶⁵ This article has tried to find a way of tracing its history—in full awareness of the particular assumptions and difficulties this revised “statist” model entails. The interest of the Archaic period may lie precisely in the capacity of the presence of public goods to generate advantages, problems, and paradoxes, which were then negotiated in processes such as the play-acting or symbolical gestures explored above—the colorful forms of the craving for common things (*ta koina*) from which all else followed.

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64. Ibid.; Alain Bresson, *The Making of the Ancient Greek Economy: Institutions, Markets, and Growth in the City-States*, trans. Steven Rendall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Josiah Ober, *The Rise and Fall of Classical Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

65. Gauthier, *Les cités grecques et leurs bienfaiteurs*; Pierre Fröhlich, *Les cités grecques et le contrôle des magistrats (IV^e–I^r siècle avant J.-C.)* (Geneva: Droz, 2004).