

Homer, Tyranny, and Democracy

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IN THE LAST DECADE scholars have taken increasing note of the complexity of Homeric political organization.¹ Where before issues of authority were placed in the context of the *oikos*, so that leadership appeared largely as patrimonial and legitimacy as an issue of "might,"² recent arguments have begun to place these questions in the context of the emergence of the *polis*.

¹The following will be cited by authors' names:

Walter Donlan, "The Pre-State Community in Greece," *SymbOslo* 64 (1989) 5–29

—, "The Relations of Power in the Pre-State and Early State Polities," in *The Development of the Polis in Archaic Greece*, ed. L. G. Mitchell and P. J. Rhodes (New York 1997) 39–48

M. I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus*² (New York 1979)

Kurt Raaflaub, "Homer to Solon: The Rise of the Polis, The Written Sources," in *The Ancient Greek City-State*, ed. M. H. Hansen (Copenhagen 1993) 41–105

—, "Equalities and Inequalities in Athenian Democracy," in *Dēmokratia: A Conversation on Democracies, Ancient and Modern*, ed. J. Ober and C. Hedrick (Princeton 1996) 139–174

—, "Homeric Society," in *A New Companion to Homer*, ed. Ian Morris and Barry Powell (1997: a)

—, "Politics and Interstate Relations in the World of Early Greek *Poleis*," *Antichthon* 31 (1997: b) 1–27

—, "Power in the Hands of the People: Foundations of Athenian Democracy," in *Democracy 2500? Questions and Challenges*, ed. Morris and Raaflaub (Dubuque 1997: c)

—, "Soldiers, Citizens and the Evolution of the Early Greek *Polis*," in Mitchell/Rhodes (1997: d) 49–59

Max Weber, *Economy and Society* I, ed. G. Roth and C. Wittich (Berkeley 1978).

Translations of Homer are Lattimore's with occasional modifications.

²Finley writes that the "principle of legitimacy" by which the *basileus* rules is "might" (87). For Finley, "non-kinship institutions of the community" were shaped in the "image of the household and the family." The king appears in the image of the father. "In certain of his functions—in the assembly, for example, or in offering sacrifices to the gods—the king in fact acted the patriarch." Terms for ruling, as in the verb *anassein*, are used "with almost complete indifference" to describe rule of a community and rule of a household (83).

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Scholars have found persuasive evidence for the development of a community identity, the consolidation of an aristocracy, and the emergence of citizenry. But less clear is the relationship between the three. That is, within the emergent community, how can we understand relations of authority between the leaders and the led?

The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* seem to point in contradictory directions. The people do not initiate action, but neither are they simply quiet. The *basileus* appears at times to be interested in the tide of "public" opinion while at other times willing to suppress violently the expression of this opinion. And though an assembly of the people exists in which leaders present courses of action, the leaders appear free to follow or ignore whatever might be the expressed sentiment. Difficulties of interpretation are exacerbated both by the nature of epic poetry, which seeks to tell a story rather than convey history or social change, and by the paucity of knowledge about the nature of politics in the ninth and eighth centuries B.C.

To fill in some of these gaps, scholars have often sought to locate Homeric society either by looking back to a Mycenaean past or by looking forward to the emergence of a *polis*. There is a danger, however, in reading into Dark Age community organization either the residue of earlier forms of monarchy or the evolutionary telos of later *polis* development. As Donlan points out, in talking about attempts to locate Homeric community in a Mycenaean past, "we know almost nothing about the social organization of the Mycenaeans, and nothing at all about the social structure of the 'Dorian' newcomers."³ Furthermore, *polis* development does not follow a neat evolutionary trajectory, as suggested by the widespread emergence of tyranny in the seventh and sixth centuries. Any model of Homeric politics, thus, must be able to explain both the importance of the

³W. Donlan "The Social Groups of Dark Age Greece," *CP* 80 (1985) 293–308, at 293–294.

developing role of the people without, in turn, assuming an evolutionary trajectory from kingship to *polis*.

Three models, in particular, have been important in framing our understanding of authority relations. First, a royal model sees Homeric political relations as developing out of earlier forms of monarchy. In this approach, the Homeric *basileus* appears as a king who, invested with sacred authority, rules by personal prerogative over quiescent subjects.⁴ A second model, influenced by a Marxian notion of class competition, posits an increasing division and conflict developing in the eighth century between an exploitative aristocracy and an exploited, but increasingly resistant, people. The epic is placed in the context of class conflict in which the poem appears as an ideological tool of the elite to legitimate the exploitative relations of power.⁵ A third approach notes aspects of stratification and

⁴Gschnitzer makes a credible argument that the *basileus* appears as an heir (at least in name) of a Mycenaean local official: Fritz Gschnitzer, "ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ: Ein terminologischer Beitrag zur Frühgeschichte des Königtums bei den Griechen," *Innsbr.Beitr.z.Kulturwiss.* 11 (1965) 99–112. The argument for sacred kingship takes this view one step further. The contention is that the *basileus* inherits, not just the name, but the vestiges of sacred authority. See G. Glotz, *The Greek City and its Institutions* (New York 1930) 7; Henry Maine, *Lectures on the Early History of Institutions* (New York 1888) 35; R. Bonner and G. Smith, *The Administration of Justice from Homer to Aristotle* (Chicago 1930) 9; E. Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society*, transl. E. Palmer (Coral Gables 1973) 323–326, 382; Rudolf Köstler, "Die Homerische Rechts- und Staatsordnung," in *Zur griechischen Rechtsgeschichte*, ed. E. Berneker (Darmstadt 1968, orig. 1950) 172–195; J. Walter Jones, *The Law and Legal Theory of the Greeks* (Oxford 1956) 28; Sigrid Deger-Jalkotzy, *Herrschaftsformen bei Homer* (Vienna 1970) 80–88; P. E. Easterling, "Agamemnon's *Skēptron* in the *Iliad*," in *Images of Authority*, edd. M. M. Mackenzie and C. Rouché (Cambridge 1989) 104–121, at 114; John Lenz, *Kings and the Ideology of Kingship in Early Greece (c. 1200-700 B.C.): Epic, Archaeology and History* (diss. Columbia 1993); Robert Mondi, "ΣΚΗΠΤΟΥΧΟΙ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΣ: An Argument for Divine Kingship in Early Greece," *Arethusa* 13 (1980) 203–216.

⁵See Ian Morris, "The Use and Abuse of Homer," *ClassAnt* 5 (1986) 81–138; Peter Rose, "Ideology in the *Iliad*: Polis, *Basileus*, *Theoi*," *Arethusa* 30 (1997) 151–199; William Thalmann, *The Swineherd and the Bow: Representations of Class in the Odyssey* (Ithaca 1998); David Tandy, *Warriors into Traders: The Power of the Market in Early Greece* (Berkeley 1997); G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (Ithaca 1981); Ellen and Neal Wood, *Class Ideology and Ancient Political Theory* (Oxford 1978); and J. Bintliff, "Settlement Patterns, Land Tenure and Social Structure: A Diachronic Model," in *Ranking, Resource, and Exchange*, edd. C. Renfrew and S. Shennan (Cambridge 1982) 106–111.

competition in society, but more emphasis is placed on the increased recognition and integration (albeit unwilling, at times) of the people into political association.⁶ Scholars point not only to the formalization of public assemblies, but to the importance of the people in witnessing, and even influencing, decisions about public matters, the distribution of goods, the adjudication of disputes, and the conduct of foreign relations.⁷

While each model points to important elements of the Homeric world, none is sufficient for understanding the authority relations between leaders and led. Both the royal model of kingship and the model of an elite counter-reaction to the emergence of a people rest on an incomplete understanding of relations in the *Iliad*. In particular, too much emphasis is placed on the coercive aspects of rule and insufficient attention is paid to how the emergence of a public space alters the claims to authority made by the elite. More convincing are suggestions that leadership must account for the increasing assertiveness of

⁶See Raaflaub "Homer and die Geschichte des 8.Jh.s v. Chr.," in *Zweihundert Jahre Homer-Forschung*, ed. J. Latacz (Stuttgart 1991) 205–256; 1993; 1997a; 1997b; 1997d; Karl-Joachim Hölkeskamp, "Agorai bei Homer," in *Volk und Verfassung im vorhellenistischen Griechenland*, edd. W. Eder and K.-J. Hölkeskamp (Stuttgart 1997) 1–19; Donlan 1989; 1997; "Political Reciprocity in Dark Age Greece: Odysseus and his *hetairoi*," in *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece*, edd. C. Gill, N. Postlethwaite, and R. Seaford (Oxford 1998) 51–71; Christoph Ulf, *Die homerische Gesellschaft: Materialien zur analytischen Beschreibung und historischen Lokalisierung* (Munich 1990); Hans van Wees, *Status Warriors: War, Violence and Society in Homer and History* (Amsterdam 1992) 31–36; Michael Gagarin, *Early Greek Law* (Berkeley 1986) 27; Jasper Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death* (Oxford 1980) 11; T. Gschnitzer, "Zur homerischen Staats- und Gesellschaftsordnung: Grundcharakter und geschichtliche Stellung," in Latacz 182–204; S. Douglas Olson, *Blood and Iron: Stories and Storytelling in Homer's Odyssey* (Leiden 1995) 188; François Ruzé, *Délibération et pouvoir dans la cité grecque: de Nestor à Socrate* (Paris 1997) 19–29; and Pierre Carlier, *La royauté en Grèce avant Alexandre* (Strasbourg 1984) 186 ("C'est le roi qui décide, mais il décide en public").

⁷Formalization (role for heralds): *Il.* 2.99, 9.11; *Od.* 2.6–7; formalization (proper seating): *Il.* 2.96–97, 99, 9.13; *Od.* 2.14, 8.5–7; public matters: *Il.* 1.54–305, 2.84–398, 2.788–808, 7.345–379, 7.381–411, 7.414–420, 9.9–79, 11.806–807, 18.243–313, 19.34–237; *Od.* 3.126–150, 8.5–45, 16.361, 20.146; distribution of goods: *Il.* 1.125–126, 2.227–228, 11.704; *Od.* 13.14–15; adjudication: *Il.* 18.497–508, and Gagarin (*supra* n.6); foreign relations: *Il.* 3.205–224, 3.245–345, 7.66–205, 11.122–142; *Od.* 21.15–21; and Raaflaub 1997b; other mentions of assemblies: *Od.* 10.114–115, 15.468.

the people, both historically and in the epic. Donlan gives some sense of the resultant complexity of authority relations when he identifies three different forms of authority, all operating at various degrees. Drawing from Weber, he argues that there are elements of "traditional authority" by which the *basileus* maintained authority through an appeal to tradition (such as heredity), elements of "charismatic authority" in which authority depended on the personal qualities of the individual to maintain a following, and even elements of "legal-rational authority" with which the *basileus* is imbued to protect the *themistes* of Zeus.⁸ But we need to explain not only that different aspects of authority inhere in leadership, but how these different elements cohere. My suggestion is that like a chemical reaction, the interaction of these different elements of authority actually creates a different, and quite volatile, form of authority relations, one that Max Weber describes as *plebiscitary*.

A "plebiscite" has many connotations, not the least of which is the practice of a direct form of voting in affirmation or rejection of a leader or a policy.⁹ But that is not the only form of a plebiscite. Plebiscitary politics, as described by Weber, can be conceived of more generally as one in which the decisions of leaders derive at least part of their legitimacy from the acclaim, or perceived acclaim, of the people. Plebiscitary leadership is not exclusive from the chiefdom form of organization discussed by Donlan. Nor is plebiscitary leadership incompatible with claims by individuals to extraordinary, even divine, associa-

⁸Donlan 1997 42–43. Others, too, have identified overlapping authority relations, both in the epics and contemporaneous with their composition. J. V. Luce, "The Polis in Homer and Hesiod," *PRIA* 78 (1978) 1–15, comments that the "polis" appears "under its autocratic ruler, but not without some rudiments of a wider political structure" (11). See also Raaflaub 1993, 1997b, 1997d, and Bjørn Qviller, "The Dynamics of the Homeric Society," *SymbOslo* 56 (1981) 109–155.

⁹J. L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (New York 1960), for example, draws on the connection of a plebiscite to voting in his discussion of modern forms of totalitarianism.

tions. Rather, plebiscitary politics arises when charismatic forms of authority become subject to "an anti-authoritarian interpretation."¹⁰

The validity of charismatic rule, to recall Weber, rests on recognition by the ruled of a leader's claim to some extraordinary personal, heroic, or divine traits that justify his leadership. Recognition of the authority of the charismatic leader is treated as a "duty." But charismatic rule, he suggests, may be affected by broader political, economic, and social changes, which place pressure on the political organization to make issues of leadership increasingly public.¹¹ In the eighth century, these pressures included increasing population density that heightened demands on resource usage;¹² the rise of other communities that created security concerns;¹³ the intrusion of a market that placed pressure on resource allocation and control;¹⁴ the consolidation of an aristocratic identity that increased claims on

¹⁰Weber 266.

¹¹Weber 266. Among the elite, authority relations appear as "collegial." In a collegial system, according to Weber, an important aspect of maintaining one's position as a preeminent head is "consultation with formally equal members" (272). Aspects of collegiality have been noted by Lenz (*supra* n.4); Carlier (*supra* n.6) 182–187; Y. Andreyev "Greece of the Eleventh to Ninth Centuries B.C. in the Homeric Epics," in *Early Antiquity*, ed. I. M. Diakanoff, transl. A. Kirjanov (Chicago 1991) 328–348, at 344; Donlan 1989 25 (as a culmination of the unstable chieftom system); Robert Drews, *Basileus: The Evidence for Kingship in Geometric Greece* (New Haven 1983); and Raaflaub 1996 151. See also Barbara Patzek, *Homer und Mykene: Mündliche Dichtung und Geschichtsschreibung* (Munich 1992) 131–132, and Egon Flaig, "Das Konsensprinzip in homerischen Olymp. Überlegungen zum göttlichen Entscheidungsprozess Ilias 4.1–72," *Hermes* 122 (1994) 13–31, on the importance of consensus in Homeric society. Suggestions of such collegiality appear at *Il.* 2.53–86, 2.402–440, 3.146–160, 4.322–323, 4.344, 7.323–344, 9.70–178, 9.422, 12.210–250, 13.726–747, 14.27–134, 15.283–284, 18.243–313, 18.497–508, 18.510–511, 22.99–110; *Od.* 3.127, 6.54, 11.509–511, 16.242, 16.419–420, 22.230.

¹²See A. M. Snodgrass, *The Dark Ages of Greece* (Edinburgh 1971) and *Archaic Greece* (Berkeley 1980); J. N. Coldstream, *Geometric Greece* (New York 1977); Robin Osborne, *Greece in the Making, 1200–479 BC* (London 1996); Rose (*supra* n.5).

¹³See François de Polignac, *Cults, Territory, and the Origins of the Greek City-State* (Chicago 1995); Chester G. Starr, *Individual and Community: The Rise of the Polis, 800–500 B.C.* (New York 1986); Raaflaub 1997d.

¹⁴See Tandy (*supra* n.5).

the resources;¹⁵ and the emergence of self-conscious *demos* that further heightened demands on the political system, leading to either integration or suppression.¹⁶ These pressures create a seemingly subtle transformation in which "recognition" of charismatic authority is not "treated as a consequence of legitimacy" but "is treated as the basis of legitimacy."¹⁷ The leader, though he may retain charismatic elements, comes to premise his personal authority on recognition by the ruled.

The people, through the assembly, do not vote nor do they make binding decisions.¹⁸ But neither are they compliant, inert, absent, or silenced. We see decisions "enacted" in a public space. These enactments may take a variety of forms: consultation with the people before a decision is made, the appeal by a leader for approval of a decision, and even debates between leaders before the people. The term "enacted" is useful because it draws attention to the public aspects of the activity without, in turn, claiming that a formalized or democratic process is in place. Within the public space, leaders play to the crowd, seeking to persuade, cajole, or elicit support. But this alters the nature of the political dynamic, and the nature of political legitimacy, as leaders draft their appeals in anticipation of a response. Within the broader political field comprised of the *demos*, *laos*, or *plethos*, the decisions, and the authority of leaders in proposing these decisions, derive at least part of their legitimacy from the acclaim, or perceived acclaim, of the people.¹⁹

¹⁵See Qviller (*supra* n.8).

¹⁶See Morris (*supra* n.5); Raaflaub 1997a, 1997b; Donlan 1989.

¹⁷Weber 266–267.

¹⁸In particular, we do not see a principle of majority rule. Carlier (*supra* n.6) 186 n.231: "Les moyens de déterminer quelle est l'opinion majoritaire ne manquent pas." See also François Ruzé, "Plethos, Aux origines de la majorité politique," in *Aux origines de l'Hellénisme* (Paris 1984) 247–263, at 248–249; Raaflaub 1997b 15.

¹⁹Though *laos* and *demos* are not synonymous, their meanings overlap, e.g. Il. 18.301, "let him give them to the people (λαοῖσι), to use them in common

The notion of plebiscitary politics is helpful in making sense of what otherwise appear in the epics as inconsistent or incoherent relationships between the leaders and the people. Moreover, plebiscitary politics allows us to situate the Homeric epics in the political developments of Greece. In particular, it provides the political context for addressing the complex relationship between the rise of tyranny and the emergence of democracy. Rather than viewing tyranny as a remnant of an older, monarchical time that must then be overthrown by the people, or as the anticipation of a newer, democratic time led by the people, we can view tyranny and democracy as emerging similarly from this plebiscitary context. Plebiscitary politics provided a public space, often volatile, in which a vocabulary of democracy could develop.

Plebiscitary Politics

The peculiar combination of a charismatic and public basis of legitimacy is suggested in the openings of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The *Odyssey* begins with Telemachos calling an assembly, a critical first step toward restoring order in the community.²⁰ The assembly is associated, in general, with some

(καταδημοβορῆσαι)"; *Od.* 16.95–96, 114, "do the people (λαοί) hate you throughout this place (δῆμον) ... It is not that all the people (δῆμος) hate me." Both terms refer to the people of a community. *Laos* and *laoi* often refer to the followers of a leader whereas *demos* refers to both a named territory and the people of the territory: see *L.fgr.E.* 275–278, 1633–1644; Benveniste (*supra* n.4) 371–376; Donlan 1989; Michel Casevitz, "Sur le concept de 'peuple,'" in *La langue et les textes en grec ancien*, ed. F. Létoublon (Amsterdam 1992) 193–199; Johannes Haubold, *Homer's People: Epic Poetry and Social Formation* (Cambridge 2000). *Plethos* seems to refer frequently to an undifferentiated multitude (*Il.* 2.488, 11.305, 11.360, 11.405, 15.295, 17.31, 17.221, 20.197, 22.458; *Od.* 11.514, 16.105). *Plethos* is not used as a pejorative term for *demos* or *laos*, however. *Plethos*, *demos*, and *laos* are all used to refer to the mass of disorderly people (*Il.* 2.143, 2.198, 2.191). And the *plethos* are not portrayed only unsympathetically. They express approval when Odysseus silences Thersites (*Il.* 2.278); Ajax appeals to Achilles on behalf of the *plethos* (*Il.* 9.641); and the *plethos* march in an orderly way back to the ships (*Il.* 15.305).

²⁰The twenty years that pass without an assembly in Ithaca have been used as evidence for the unimportance of public meetings in Homeric society (Finley 1979 80). We should not take the length of time literally, but as suggestive of

“public matter” (δήμιον) that a member of the community may want to put forward (πιφάσκειται) and argue (ἀγορεύει) (2.32). In this case, though, the matter relates to Telemachus’ “own need,” namely, the intrusion of the suitors into Odysseus’ household (2.45). The assembly becomes a space for Telemachos to “declare” his claim against the suitors in front of the people and the gods, so that he may later seek compensation from the suitors (1.272–273, 2.76–78).

Telemachos, however, still helpless in his “childhood” (νηπιᾶς 1.297), cannot simply summon the people and expect them to listen. Athene, thus, instills in him the courage (μένος) to call the assembly (1.88–91). Moreover, Telemachos lacks the personal authority of his father because he has never proven himself in either battle or counsel. So Athene bestows upon Telemachos the aura of the divine so that he may command the attention of the assembled people in his father’s absence (2.12–14):

θεσπεσίην δ’ ἄρα τῷ γε χάριν κατέχευεν Ἀθήνη.
τὸν δ’ ἄρα πάντες λαοὶ ἐπερχόμενον θεῶντο·
ἔξετο δ’ ἐν πατρὸς θώκῳ, εἴξαν δὲ γέροντες.

Athene drifted a divine grace upon him,
and all the people marveled at him as he came forward.
He sat in his father’s seat, and the elders made way before him.

Telemachos possesses, at least momentarily, the charismatic authority of his father. But acclaim is not treated, in turn, as a duty of the people. Rather, Telemachos must seek public affirmation for his appeal.

In the meeting with the Phaiakians, Athene similarly conveys a magical grace upon Odysseus as he appears in the assembly (8.18–22):

Odysseus’ long absence. Furthermore, this hiatus appears abnormal and, in fact, reveals the near breakdown of the community. The infrequency of meetings in Ithaca is juxtaposed to their frequency elsewhere. See *Od.* 2.32 (association of assemblies with public matters), 10.114–115, 15.468, 8.10–45.

τῷ δ' ἄρ' Ἀθήνη
 θεσπεσίην κατέχευε χάριν κεφαλῇ τε καὶ ὤμοις
 καὶ μιν μακρότερον καὶ πάσσονα θῆκεν ἰδέσθαι,
 ὥς κεν Φαίηκεσσι φίλος πάντεσσι γένοιτο
 δεινός τ' αἰδοῖός τε ...

and upon him Athene
 drifted a divine grace upon his head and his shoulders,
 and made him taller for the eye to behold, and thicker,
 so that he might be loved by all the Phaiakians, and to them
 might be wonderful and respected ...

These two instances do not point to divine kingship, but to a more complex intertwining of charismatic and public elements of leadership. No one element seems to exist by itself. Telemachos and Odysseus show attributes of the divine, and the people in turn admire them. But in each case, the claims of the leaders are subject to public acclamation.

The combination of a charismatic and public basis of legitimacy is suggested in the opening of the *Iliad* as well. The charismatic basis of Achilles' authority is indicated not just by his heroic stature within the community, but by the role of Hera in prompting Achilles to call the people to assembly (1.54–55).²¹ Achilles' personal authority operates, in turn, in a public setting in which the people seem to play some role in expressing their opinion. When the priest Chryses seeks to ransom his daughter, urging that this will honor Apollo, the people "cried out in favor" (ἐπευφήμησαν) that Chryseis be returned to her father (1.22). The people are not successful, but what is striking is that even Achilles, in recounting the events to his mother, should mention their outcry as support for his position (1.376).

In a later assembly, Diomedes advises that the people should refuse the offer of gifts, rather than the return of Helen, by the Trojans. In responding to him, all the Achaians "shouted

²¹Suggestive of these charismatic elements, as well, is how the people of Protesilaos longed (πόθειον) for their leader (2.703–710) and how Nireus cannot attract a following because he was "a man of poor strength" (ἀλαπαδνός 2.675).

... admiring the words of Diomedes" (ἐπίαχον . . . μῦθον ἀγασσάμενοι Διομήδεος, 7.403–704). Two aspects are worth noting. First, the public acclamation has elements of personal admiration, as *agamai* is used frequently to express a wonderment toward an exceptional individual.²² Second, Homer uses the language of the heroic war-cry to depict the voice of the people in assembly. Elsewhere, *ιάχω* is compared in noise to the roaring sea, blazing forest fire, wind in the oaks, and the tempering of an ax blade, and is associated with great feats of personal prowess, communal strength, and divine terror.²³ In the competitive world of the warrior, the cry corresponds to strength, courage, and individual distinction.²⁴ By depicting the people as shouting their approval, Homer not only reveals the force of the people, but also lends their voice some legitimacy by associating it with the agonistic, heroic world. Mentor, in fact, expresses anger with the people precisely because they sit "in silence" (ἄνεφ) and do not try to stop the suitors through words, "though they are so few, and you so many" (*Od.* 2.239–241).

Plebiscitary Politics and the Volatility of the Political Field

In a purely charismatic form of association, the acclaim of the people is treated as a duty that is directed toward one recognizably charismatic leader. In plebiscitary politics, however, acclaim is up for grabs. This makes the Homeric political field volatile.²⁵ The leaders, in seeking acclaim, can go in two directions. They can use whatever personal authority

²²See also *Il.* 3.181, 3.224, 7.41, 9.51.

²³Comparison to noise: *Il.* 14.393–401; *Od.* 9.392; personal prowess: *Il.* 5.297–302, 8.321, 16.784–785, 18.160, 18.228–229, 20.285; *Od.* 4.454; communal strength: *Il.* 13.834–835, 15.312–313, 16.78–79, 17.262–266; divine terror: *Il.* 5.784–792, 5.859–863, 11.10–14, 14.147–152, 15.321–327, 20.48–53.

²⁴See J. E. Lendon, "Voting by Shouting in Sparta" (forthcoming).

²⁵For a discussion of politics as a field, see Dean Hammer, "The Politics of the *Iliad*," *CJ* 94 (1998) 1–30, and *The Iliad as Politics: The Performance of Political Thought* (Norman, forthcoming).

they have to seek public acclaim for a community good, as does Achilles in Book 1. Or they can play upon the more autocratic elements of charisma by “hid[ing] behind” a legitimacy that appears to be derived from “the will of the governed.”²⁶ Unlike democratic forms of politics in which the office, and not the individual, has authority, under a plebiscitarian form of politics the choices of the people can be used as “unconditional acclamations of the leader’s authority.”²⁷

We get our first hint of this volatility in Book 2 of the *Iliad* when Agamemnon summons the people to assembly to test their desire to continue fighting. Achilles had not only assailed Agamemnon’s courage and leadership the day before, but had suggested that no one would readily (πρόφρων) obey him (1.150). Agamemnon, in calling the assembly, attempts to shore up his personal legitimacy by seeking public affirmation of the war effort. In stirring up the “passion” (θυμόν) of the multitude (2.142), however, Agamemnon misjudges badly the reaction of the people. The assembly resounds with a “thundering shout” (2.149 ἀλαλητῶ), a term used also to describe the cries of war. Powerful in their numbers, the people almost create “a homecoming beyond fate” (2.155). Ironically enough, the political field fragments through the acclaim of the people, and is restored only through the personal authority of Odysseus, as he is instructed by Athene (2.166–210).

The danger that the people, powerful in their voice, will seize upon ill-advised words is also expressed later by Odysseus who rebukes Agamemnon for his potentially “ruinous” advice to leave battle (14.84). Odysseus’ concern is that the people will follow words that are not spoken soundly (ἄρτια 14.92) and rise, in a unison born of passion, to obey the leader unthinkingly. And Nestor points to the general volatility of plebiscitary

²⁶Weber 268.

²⁷Peter Breiner, *Max Weber & Democratic Politics* (Ithaca 1996) 21.

politics when he speaks of how the Achaians act “like children” when they hold assembly (2.337) because they too easily forget the work of war as they swing quickly from fear to enthusiasm.

In the *Odyssey* Nestor traces the emergence of this volatility in describing how the Achaians came to be divided against each other after they had sacked Troy. Nestor describes (3.127–129) how Odysseus and he:

οὔτε ποτ' εἰν ἀγορῇ δίχ' ἐβάζομεν οὔτ' ἐνὶ βουλῇ,
ἀλλ' ἕνα θυμὸν ἔχοντε νόῳ καὶ ἐπίφρονι βουλῇ
φραζόμεθ' Ἀργείοισιν ὅπως ὄχ' ἄριστα γένοιτο.

never spoke against one another, neither in council nor assembly,
but forever one in mind and in thoughtful planning,
we worked out how things would go best for the Argives.

Nestor is not saying that he never debated. Rather, he is describing a division that arises when people argue for their own interests rather than the good of the community. This is suggested by his use of the word *δίχα*, which generally in the epics indicates a division of purpose or separation.²⁸

In contrast to thoughtful planning, Nestor continues, Menelaos and Agamemnon called the Achaians into assembly “wildly” (*μάψ*), “in no kind of order” (*οὐ κατὰ κόσμον*), late in the day, and after heavy drinking (3.137–140). In the drunken assembly, as Nestor recalls (148–150):

ὡς τὼ μὲν χαλεποῖσιν ἀμειβομένῳ ἐπέεσσιν
ἔστασαν· οἱ δ' ἀνόρουσαν εὐκνήμιδες Ἀχαιοὶ
ἠχῆ θεσπεσίη, δίχα δέ σφισιν ἦνδανε βουλή.

So these two, after making exchange with hard words, stood up to go, and the rest of the strong-greaved Achaians rushed out with inhuman clamor, and two opposed counsels pleased them.

Each leader played to the drunken passions of the people, stirring them to a noisy acclaim that divided the community.

²⁸See *Il.* 18.510, 20.32, 21.386; *Od.* 16.73, 19.524, 22.333.

Not only may a leader endanger the stability of the public space by speaking unwittingly to the people, but the instability of the crowd may also undermine the recognition of good counsel. When speaking at the assembly upon Achilles' return, Agamemnon says (*Il.* 19.79–82):

ἔσταότος μὲν καλὸν ἀκούειν, οὐδὲ ἔοικεν
 ὑββάλλειν· χαλεπὸν γὰρ ἐπισταμένῳ περ ἑόντι.
 ἀνδρῶν δ' ἐν πολλῷ ὁμάδῳ πῶς κέν τις ἀκούσαι
 ἢ εἴποι; βλάβεται δὲ λιγύς περ ἔων ἀγορητής.

it is well to listen to the speaker, it is not becoming
 to break in on him. This will be hard for him, though he be able.
 How among the great murmur of people shall anyone listen
 or speak either? A man, though he speak very clearly, is baffled.

Even the best counsel risks being lost in the noise of a disorderedly crowd.

In two encounters between Hektor and Poulydamas, the volatility—and warnings—about plebiscitary leadership are most clear. At a critical juncture in battle, when deciding whether to continue to attack the Achaians or to retreat for the moment, Poulydamas says to Hektor (*Il.* 12.211–214):

Ἔκτορ αἰεὶ μὲν πῶς μοι ἐπιπλήσσεις ἀγορήσιν
 ἐσθλὰ φραζομένῳ, ἐπεὶ οὐδὲ μὲν οὐδὲ ἔοικε
 δῆμον ἑόντα παρὲξ ἀγορευέμεν, οὔτ' ἐνὶ βουλῇ
 οὔτε ποτ' ἐν πολέμῳ, σὸν δὲ κράτος αἰὲν ἀέξειν·

Hektor, somehow in assembly you move ever against me
 though I speak excellently, since indeed there is no good reason
 for you, in your skill, to argue wrong, neither in councils
 nor in fighting, and ever to be upholding your own power.

According to Poulydamas, Hektor continually uses the acclaim of the people to confirm his personal authority. To counter Hektor's sway over the people, Poulydamas calls for an "interpreter of the gods" who will be able to explain "the truth of portents, and whom the people believed in" (12.229). Hektor, though, rejects Poulydamas' argument. The problem, as

Poulydamas suggests later, is that Hektor is “too intractable to listen to reason” (13.726) because he believes that he possesses, by himself, both prowess in battle and wisdom in counsel.

Hektor’s willingness to play to the people has disastrous consequences for the strategic decision of how to respond to the re-entrance of Achilles in battle. The decision is so important, and the fear so great, that the people cannot even sit (18.245–314). Poulydamas argues in assembly that the army should take a defensive posture behind the walls rather than risk the onslaught of Achilles. Rather than listening to counsel and being open to possible arguments against attack, Hektor wins the debate by appealing to the unthinking impulses of the crowd (18.310–313):

ὡς Ἴκτωρ ἀγόρευ', ἐπὶ δὲ Τρῶες κελάδησαν,
 νήπιοι· ἐκ γὰρ σφεων φρένας εἴλετο Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη.
 Ἴκτορι μὲν γὰρ ἐπήνησαν κακὰ μητιόωντι,
 Πουλυδάμαντι δ' ἄρ' οὐ τις ὃς ἐσθλὴν φράζετο βουλήν.

So spoke Hektor, and the Trojans thundered to hear him;
 fools, since Pallas Athene had taken away the wits from them.
 They gave their approval to Hektor in his counsel of evil,
 but none to Poulydamas, who had spoken good council before them.

Like Agamemnon in the *Iliad* and Menelaos and Agamemnon in the *Odyssey*, Hektor attempts to use the public space to affirm his personal authority. The results are as unpredictable as they are severe. In their unwitting endorsement of Agamemnon’s suggestion that they return home and in Menelaos and Agamemnon’s divided counsel on returning home after the war, the thundering acclaim of the people fragments the political field. So also, by playing upon the impulses of the assembly, Hektor imperils the survival of the community.

Plebiscitary Politics and Political Excellence

In the volatile plebiscitary space, we can see the operation of a political ethic, however rudimentary, that attempts to balance

the charismatic and public aspects of authority. Charismatic elements remain, as elites can gain glory through a “political heroism” by speaking great words in assembly. When Achilles withdraws from battle, he is portrayed as never again going either to battle or “to assemblies (ἀγορήν) where men win glory” (κυδιάνειραν *Il.* 1.490). Similarly, Phoenix reminds Achilles that it is in “debate” (ἀγορέων) that “men are made pre-eminent” (ἀριπρεπέες 9.441). As Schofield comments, in discussing the advice that Diomedes offers in Book 9, “the crucial point for the present is that Diomedes’ speech is in its own way as much a feat of prowess as one of his exploits on the battlefield.”²⁹ One sees a notion of distinction and acclaim that corresponds to the words of the elite in the assembly of the people.

Political excellence rests, in part, upon the favor of the divine, which is why Hera is associated with Achilles’ calling of the assembly in the *Iliad*, and Athene is associated with both Odysseus and Telemachos. But such excellence also requires an ability to articulate a position in a public space. This political language, as Martin’s helpful analysis indicates, consists of public speech acts (or *muthoi*) which involve a “performance” and a claim to authority “before an audience.”³⁰ Such political excellence seems to rest on a number of factors. In part, there are rhetorical abilities, including an ability to order words properly (the opposite of Thersites’ disorderly, or *akosmos*, speech, *Il.* 2.213; also *Od.* 8.179),³¹ and the ability to speak concisely (*pauros*) and lucidly (*ligus*) (*Il.* 3.213–215, 4.293). Physical gestures add authority to the message as well. Antenor describes Odysseus on the embassy with Menelaos: when it was his time to speak, Odysseus “would just stand and stare down,

²⁹ Malcolm Schofield, “*Euboulia* in the *Iliad*,” *CQ* 36 (1986) 6–31, at 14.

³⁰R. P. Martin, *The Language of Heroes: Speech and Performance in the Iliad* (Ithaca 1989) 37.

³¹See Martin (*supra* n.30) 17.

eyes fixed on the ground beneath him, nor would he gesture with the staff backward and forward, but hold it clutched hard in front of him, like any man who knows nothing" (*Il.* 3.217–219). Yet his "great voice" and "words" were second to no other mortal (221). And political excellence requires virtues of the mind, such as soundness (*artia*, *Il.* 14.92) and thoughtfulness (*epiphron*, *Od.* 3.128) on the part of the leaders, and orderliness by the people.³²

An important part of the political language is, as Nestor explains to Agamemnon, an ability to speak for the good (*Il.* 9.100–102):

τὼ σε χρὴ περὶ μὲν φάσθαι ἔπος ἡδ' ἐπακοῦσαι,
κρηῆναι δὲ καὶ ἄλλω, ὅτ' ἄν τινα θυμὸς ἀνώγη
εἰπεῖν εἰς ἀγαθόν.

It is yours therefore to speak a word, yours also to listen
and grant the right to another also, when his spirit stirs him
to speak for the good.

Nestor's statement is important because it both restricts the use of public acclaim for one's personal power and identifies a responsibility by the leader to maintain this public, participatory space. As he advises Agamemnon (74–77):

πολλῶν δ' ἀγρομένων τῷ πείσειαι ὅς κεν ἀρίστην
βουλήν βουλευύση· μάλα δὲ χρεὼ πάντας Ἀχαιοὺς
ἐσθλήης καὶ πυκινῆς, ὅτι δῆϊοι ἐγγύθι νηῶν
καίουσιν πυρὰ πολλά.

When many assemble together follow him who advises
the best counsel, for in truth there is need for all the Achaians
of good counsel, since now close to our ships the enemy
burn their numerous fires.

Nestor's point is that personal authority rests in a larger public

³²See Schofield (*supra* n.29) for discussion of *euboulia*, or good counsel, as an important attribute of good leadership in the *Iliad*. This public ethic that I am suggesting here, and that Schofield also suggests, stands in contrast to Finley's view that soundness and good sense are not heroic virtues (1979 115–117).

space, in which one must be able to distinguish good advice from bad and make sound decisions for the community good amidst the clamor of the crowd.

On a number of occasions, the community good assumes prominence in arguments or concerns of the leaders.³³ Agamemnon says in the assembly, for example, that he will agree to give up his war prize because "I desire that my people be safe, not perish" (*Il.* 1.117). Later, he will lament that he will be dishonored because he has lost so many of his people (2.115). Outside of the assembly, the leaders appeal to Paris to return Helen because the Trojan people are dying (6.327). Antenor confronts Paris in assembly because he fears that more harm will come to the Trojans (7.345–353). Ajax entreats Achilles to return on behalf of the "multitude of the Danaans" (9.641). Hektor fears that he will be shamed because he brought ruin to his people by not listening to good counsel (22.104–107). And Odysseus says that Agamemnon's words are not worthy of distinction, even though the leader speaks them, precisely because they threaten the survival of the community (14.83–102). We do not need to consider these moments as selfless gestures. Rather, the considerations suggest a connection, often fragile, between individual excellence in words and deeds, and the well-being of the community.

When scholars dismiss the public role of the assembly, they often do so by noting that, ultimately, the leaders decide, often in disregard of public opinion. As Finley puts it (80), the "assembly was normally summoned by the king at his pleasure" and the people "neither voted nor decided" but simply expressed their "acclamation" which the "king was free to ignore." Andreyev, too, argues that the "people's assembly" is either a "docile tool in the hands of a small group of kings" or ineffective on occasions when it does express an opinion

³³On the theme of the role of the leader in protecting the people see Haubold (*supra* n.19) 37–40, 47–100.

because it lacks any "legal force."³⁴ But this misunderstands the nature of plebiscitary politics. As Weber says (267), the assent or dissent of the public in a plebiscitary form of government may at times be "only formal or fictitious." Indeed, as we see with the intimidation of Kalchas and Thersites, as well as the disregard that Paris has for the request of the Trojan assembly (*Il.* 7.362), this is not a democracy. But that does not render a plebiscitary politics unimportant. A plebiscitary form of politics is significant because it rests upon a system of values in which decisions are enacted in a public space and subject to community acclaim and sanction. It is a space constituted by both the elite and the people.

Plebiscitary Politics, Tyranny, and Democracy

a. Tyranny

A plebiscitary form of politics is useful not only for making sense of authority relations portrayed in the Homeric world, but also for situating Homeric politics in later political developments, particularly the appearance of tyranny and the rise of more participatory forms of politics. Understanding the relationship between the eighth century world of Homer,³⁵ the rise

³⁴*Supra* n.11, 342.

³⁵Though the epic refers to a heroic past, it is "near-contemporary" in meaning: K. Raaflaub, "A Historian's Headache: How to Read 'Homeric Society?'" in *Archaic Greece: New Evidence and New Approaches*, edd. N. Fisher and H. van Wees (Cardiff/London 1998) 181. For discussions of how the epic portrays the world of the second half of the eighth century, see further Raaflaub, "Homer, the Trojan War, and History," *CW* 91 (1998) 387–403; 1997a 628; W. Donlan, "Duelling with Gifts in the *Iliad*: As the Audience Saw It," *Colby Quarterly* 24 (1993) 144; Morris (*supra* n.5); Ulf (*supra* n.6); van Wees (*supra* n.6); J. V. Luce, *Homer and the Heroic Age* (New York 1975); Tandy (*supra* n.5); and James Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the Iliad* (Durham 1994). For views of the epic as portraying an earlier time, see Finley 1979; W. Donlan, "The Homeric Economy," in *New Companion* (*supra* n.1) 649–667; "Homeric τέμενος and the Land Economy of the Dark Age," *MusHelv* 46 (1989) 129–145; "The Unequal Exchange between Glaucus and Diomedes in Light of the Homeric Gift-Economy," *Phoenix* 43 (1989) 1–15; Donlan 1989; Donlan (*supra* n.3); Donlan and Carol G. Thomas, "The Village Community of Ancient Greece: Neolithic, Bronze, and Dark Ages," *Studi Micenei ed Egeo-Anatolici* 31 (1993) 61–71; A. Andrewes, *The Greeks* (New York 1967) 41–48; A. W. H. Adkins,

of tyrannies starting in the seventh century, and the emergence of more participatory forms of government in the succeeding centuries has often been complicated by attempts to place these developments in an evolutionary trajectory from the coercive rule of monarchy or oligarchy to the popular rule of democracies. We have already seen that Homeric authority relations are more complex than this. Neither does the appearance of tyranny fit easily into this scheme. Tyrannies are often established at a point in which the public space and public protections are expanding, as with the rise of Peisistratus after the Solonian reforms. To account for this, some scholars have viewed tyrannies as either a monarchical "counter-revolution"³⁶ or the outcome of elite rivalry that is imposed upon a quiescent public.³⁷ But viewing tyranny as a reassertion of monarchy makes it difficult to understand ancient testimony about the participation of the people in this form of rule. We are no better served, however, by reading tyranny as an "expedient"³⁸ to break down a closed system of "hereditary aristocratic dominance" and create "a much more 'open' society."³⁹ Tyrannies certainly altered the political landscape,

Merit and Responsibility (Oxford 1960), and "Homeric Ethics," in *New Companion* 694–713. Some have argued that the *Iliad* contains so many inconsistencies or inaccuracies, resulting from its composition over several centuries, that the epic cannot be interpreted as portraying any functioning society: notably Snodgrass, "An Historical Homeric Society?" *JHS* 94 (1974) 114–125, and *supra* n.12 (1971); G. S. Kirk, *Homer and the Oral Tradition* (Cambridge 1976) 40–68; Coldstream (*supra* n.12) 18; Wolfgang Kullmann, "Homers Zeit und das Bild des Dichters von den Menschen der mykenischen Kultur," in *Homer's World: Fiction, Tradition, Reality*, edd. Ø. Andersen and M. Dickie (Bergen 1995) 57–75; James Whitley, *Style and Society in Dark Age Greece* (Cambridge 1991); C. J. Ruijgh, "D'Homère aux origines proto-mycéniennes de la tradition épique," in *Homeric Questions*, ed. J. P. Crielaard (Amsterdam 1995) 1–96, at 21–24; A. G. Geddes, "Who's Who in 'Homeric Society?" *CQ* 34 (1984) 17–36.

³⁶ Stewart Oost, "Cypselus the Bacchiad," *CP* 67 (1972) 10–30, at 24. See also Robert Drews, "The First Tyrants in Greece," *Historia* 21 (1972) 129–144.

³⁷ Josiah Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens* (Princeton 1989) 65.

³⁸ Glotz (*supra* n.4) 136 and de Ste. Croix (*supra* n.5) 281 (quoting Glotz).

³⁹ de Ste. Croix (*supra* n.5) 280–281. Wood and Wood (*supra* n.5) 29, who characterize the *polis* as emerging from a class struggle for the "liberation of a

breaking the political hold of traditional aristocratic families, reorganizing the citizenry, and increasing both the material and symbolic importance of the *polis* through public works projects, monumental architecture, civic and religious festivals, and the cultivation of art.⁴⁰ This argument becomes murky, though, when used to explain the political context from which tyrannies arose in the first place. Seeing tyranny as an expedient, and thus assigning democratic purposefulness to the public in looking to tyrants, poses several problems. First, we cannot explain why the very group that was interested purportedly in economic and political reform would rest content with tyranny for over 30 years in Athens, over 70 in Corinth, and 100 in Sicyon (Arist. *Pol.* 1315b12–34). Second, we cannot explain why the populace, as in Samos, sometimes resisted the end of tyranny.⁴¹ Finally, we cannot explain why popular rule sometimes precedes tyrannies, as in Heraclea Pontica⁴² and Mesopotamia,⁴³ and why, in these cases, a form of popular rule is sometimes restored (Heraclea Pontica) and sometimes not (Mesopotamia).

Plebiscitary politics provides us a way to understand both ancient testimony about the public's role in the establishment of

producing class," simply skip over any discussion of the appearance of tyranny in the seventh and sixth centuries.

⁴⁰See James McGlew, *Tyranny and Political Culture in Ancient Greece* (Ithaca 1993); Raaflaub 1997c 39; Philip Brook Manville, *The Origins of Citizenship in Ancient Athens* (Princeton 1990) 162–173; Frank Kolb, "Die Bau-, Religions- und Kulturpolitik der Peisistratiden," *JdI* 92 (1977) 99–138; H. A. Shapiro, *Art and Cult Under the Tyrants in Athens* (Mainz 1989); Michael Stahl, *Aristokraten und Tyrannen im archaischen Athen* (Stuttgart 1987); Walter Eder, "Polis und Politai: Die Auflösung des Adelsstaates und die Entwicklung des Polisbürgers," in *Euphronios und seine Zeit*, edd. W.-D. Heilmeyer and I. Wehgartner (Berlin 1992) 24–38.

⁴¹Hdt. 3.142–143; Eric Robinson, *The First Democracies: Early Popular Government Outside Athens* (Stuttgart 1997) 118–120.

⁴²Arist. *Pol.* 1304b31–34; Robinson (*supra* n.41) 111–113.

⁴³Thorkild Jacobsen, "Early Political Development in Mesopotamia," and "Primitive Democracy in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Toward the Image of Tammuz and Other Essays on Mesopotamian History and Culture*, ed. W. Moran (Cambridge 1970) 132–156, 157–170. See Robinson (*supra* n.41) 17–25 for a summary of the literature on early non-Greek democracy.

tyrannies, and how democracies (or more participatory forms of rule) would emerge from tyranny. I am suggesting a relationship in which both tyranny and democracy emerged from the volatile plebiscitary political space that developed in the previous two centuries. In fact, I would suggest that the plebiscitary realm served as a laboratory for democracy, giving to the elite and the people the practice, and, in turn, an evolving vocabulary, of public enactment. Plebiscitary politics was not a sufficient condition for democracy. But the existence of a plebiscitary space before tyranny, and the maintenance (and sometimes elaboration) of this space by the tyrants, provided the context for the discussion, expansion, and institutionalization of more democratic forms after the fall of tyranny.⁴⁴

Aristotle offers important insight into the role of the people when he distinguishes between an older form of tyranny, in which kings went beyond their hereditary power to establish a "more despotic rule" (δεσποτικωτέρας ἀρχῆς), and a newer form, in which tyrants rose to power by gaining the trust (πιστευθέντες) of the people (δήμου) and the multitude

⁴⁴Jacobsen (*supra* n.43) provides some corroboration to this argument in his discussion of early political development in Mesopotamia. He identifies what he describes as "primitive democracy" in early Mesopotamia that corresponds, in significant ways, to our discussion of the operation of plebiscitary politics. In particular, "the ruler must lay his proposals before the people, first the elders, then the assembly of the townsmen, and obtain their consent, before he can act" (163). Over time, however, Mesopotamia veers in a more autocratic direction from a natural tendency of leaders to desire to maintain their position, the accumulation of powers in one leader through claims of perpetual emergency (particularly war), and the appearance of a new model of autocratic rule with the kingship of Kish, which successfully established control by force over large territories. Jacobsen describes a process in which the assembly, which is not institutionalized, is particularly vulnerable to the assertions of the more autocratic claims to charismatic authority by the king (146–147). This move to autocracy is, in turn, supported by the development of claims of divine election and the institutionalization of the "dynastic principle," in which the king would designate his successor (142–151). Critiques of Jacobsen can be addressed largely, I think, by substituting "plebiscitary politics" for "primitive democracy." This provides a way to understand the political role of the people without positing a sovereignty of the people. Mesopotamia serves as a case in which the autocratic elements of plebiscitary leadership assert themselves and then get institutionalized.

(πλήθους). This trust may be created by the tyrant portraying himself as one of the people, by speaking against the nobles, or by claiming to defend the people against injustice (*Pol.* 1310b12–17). Aristotle calls the new type of tyrant a demagogue (δημαγωγός). In this context, the term does not refer to a politically conscious movement on the part of the people, but a different form of tyranny that acquires legitimacy from a public space of the people.

Oost, downplaying the role of the people in the establishment of tyranny, suggests that *plethos* and *demos* are used anachronistically by Aristotle. The mass of people “are not politically conscious yet”; these terms more likely refer to support from a smaller group of the “hoplite middle class.”⁴⁵ Though Oost is certainly correct that “demagogue” is a term developed later, and that the hoplites may have played a critical role in the formation of tyranny, he is incorrect in his characterization of the eighth and seventh century meaning of the *plethos* and *demos*. We have seen that in the Homeric epics these refer to the common people who are capable of acting in concert. Such action has consequences for the leadership and the community even though the people may not act according to a coherent set of political principles. The *plethos* of the seventh and sixth century, like the multitudes portrayed in the Homeric epics, did not initiate a political program, but they were not passive. And the leaders of the seventh and sixth centuries, like the Homeric elite, did not simply command, but enacted their decisions publicly to gain the acclaim of the people.

Aristotle’s and Herodotus’ conflicting stories of the rule of Peisistratus reveal this paradox of the public nature of tyranny. Though they differ in the conclusions they draw, both tell of Peisistratus’ return from exile in which he enters on a chariot driven by a woman dressed as Athene. For Herodotus, the

⁴⁵Oost (*supra* n.36) 20.

people worshipped (προσεύχοντο) the woman and welcomed Peisistratus, as he was seen in the presence of the divine (1.60). For Aristotle, similarly, Peisistratus gains power through the acclaim of the people. In his description of Peisistratus' first return from exile, Aristotle says that the people "fell to the ground and accepted him with awe" (θαυμάζοντες). With his second return, Peisistratus had the crowd disarmed while he spoke. After the arms were locked away, he "concluded his speech" and "told the crowd not to be surprised or alarmed by what had happened to their weapons; they should go home and look after their private affairs—he would take care of the state."⁴⁶

We can make sense of the seeming paradox of a tyrant coming to rule through an appeal to the people by placing these activities in the context of plebiscitary politics. The notion of a plebiscitary space allows us to understand the role of the people in participating in the illusion of Peisistratus' "divine presence."⁴⁷ As Connor has pointed out, "The ceremony thus served as an expression of popular consent—two-way communication, not, as so often assumed, mere manipulation."⁴⁸ Within this plebiscitary space, Peisistratus is able to gain legitimacy. But once in power, he disperses the people from any public role even though, by Aristotle's account, he rules moderately. The collapse of this political space, as this case illustrates, need not rest on force but may result from the acclaim (whether sensible or not) of the public.

What stands out, not only in the accounts of Peisistratus,

⁴⁶ *Ath. Pol.* 14.4, transl. Moore.

⁴⁷ Rebecca Sinos, "Divine Selection: Epiphany and Politics in Archaic Greece," in *Cultural Poetics in Archaic Greece*, edd. C. Dougherty and L. Kurke (Oxford 1998) 73–91, at 83–84.

⁴⁸ W. R. Connor, "Tribes, Festivals and Processions: Civic Ceremonial and Political Manipulation in Archaic Greece," *JHS* 107 (1987) 40–50, at 44.

but in those of other tyrants,⁴⁹ is the continual appeal made by the tyrant to the people, even if that appeal is duplicitous. This appeal is made not only in the rise to power, but also in the maintenance of power. Salmon suggests, for example, that a small council, *probouloi* consisting of representatives from each of the eight tribes, and an assembly may have been established under the tyranny at Corinth.⁵⁰ The assembly clearly did not decide policy. But suggestive of a plebiscitary form of politics, the *probouloi* may have served to convey the attitudes of the people to the leadership and, in turn, to guide the assembly to "take decisions which conformed with the views" of the council.⁵¹ Upon the death of Polycrates in Samos, Maeandrius called an assembly (*συναγείρας*) to set out the terms of his reign, to which the assembly refused his conditions (Hdt. 3.142). And Peisistratus is said to have kept both the political and legal institutions intact during his rule.⁵² Though it is not clear what role the people played in the rule, it is likely that a council and some form of a people's assembly was established and consulted.⁵³ McGlew observes, "If tyrants presented themselves as liberators or founders, they must have understood the polis's power to judge them, for they were determined to finesse that judgment by appearing to act in the polis's interest, to deserve its honor, and to have passed its scrutiny." In comparison to earlier despotism, "the tyrant's relationship to his subjects was

⁴⁹On the elective tyranny of Pittacus of Mytilene, see Arist. *Pol.* 1285a34–1285b4; Cypselus in Corinth, 1310b29–32 and Nic. Dam. *FGrHist* 90 F 57. On attempts by Maeandrius to surrender the tyranny in Samos, Hdt. 3.142–143. On the rise of Deioeces among the Medes, Hdt. 1.96–101. On Theagenes at Megara and Lygdamis at Naxos, Arist. *Pol.* 1305a25–26, 1305a37–1305b1).

⁵⁰J. B. Salmon, *Wealthy Corinth* (Oxford 1984) 205–209, 231–239.

⁵¹Salmon (*supra* n.50) 235. Thucydides mentions a role of the Corinthian assembly (*ξύλλογος*) in negotiations between Corinth and Argos (5.30.5). For the role of the *probouloi* and their relationship to an assembly in oligarchies, see the general remark at Arist. *Pol.* 1298b26–35.

⁵²Hdt. 1.59; Thuc. 6.54.5; *Ath.Pol.* 14.3, 16.2, 16.8–10; Plut. *Sol.* 31.

⁵³Salmon (*supra* n.50) 205–207, 234–236.

changing."⁵⁴ We can understand this changing relationship as one in which leaders—even tyrants—were expected to enact their decisions and their claims to authority in a public space.

b. Democracy

The plebiscitary realm may be helpful, as well, in thinking about the relationship between the aristocracy and people in the development of democracy. The emergence of democracy is commonly seen as either elite- or mass-led. Raaflaub, for example, points to the central role of the aristocracy in formulating notions of political equality as a response to tyranny.⁵⁵ The aristocratic notion of equality would, in turn, be expanded slowly to encompass a broader segment of the population, including the *thetes*. To make their incorporation acceptable to the elite, the "full political integration of the *thetes*" would require a "*massive and lasting* change in their economic or social status and/or communal function."⁵⁶ Raaflaub traces this change to the role of the *thetes* as "decisive contributors to their city's security and power" as rowers for the naval fleet.⁵⁷ By contrast, Ober argues against the "view of history that supposes that all advances in human affairs come through the consciously willed actions of individual members of an elite." He suggests, instead, that the democracy in Athens "was the product of collective decision, action, and self-definition on the part of the *demos* itself."⁵⁸ In fact, he argues that in 508/7, when Isagoras and Cleomenes attempted to seize control of Athens, the *demos* initiated and carried through a democratic

⁵⁴ McGlew (*supra* n.40) 215.

⁵⁵ Raaflaub 1996 144; 1997c.

⁵⁶ Raaflaub 1997c 45.

⁵⁷ Raaflaub 1997c 46.

⁵⁸ Ober, "The Athenian Revolution of 508/7 B.C.E.: Violence, Authority, and the Origins of Democracy," in Dougherty/Kurke (*supra* n.47: orig. 1993) 215–232, at 216; see also "Revolution Matters: Democracy as Demotic Action (A Response to Kurt A. Raaflaub)," in *Democracy 2500?* (*supra* n.1) 67–85.

“revolution without leadership” that created a “rupture” between one “understanding of the world and another.”⁵⁹

The notion of plebiscitary politics allows us to identify a much more paradoxical relationship between the elite and people. Not only may it have been the people who took part in the establishment of tyranny, as I suggested earlier, but also it may have been the aristocracy who would draw on these plebiscitary relationships with the people to establish democracy.⁶⁰ The model suggested here does not require either individual moments of elite volition or revolutionary moments of mass consciousness, but is more interactive in how the conditions for democracy are created.

An important role for the elite exists. As Raaflaub points out, “Tyranny deprived the aristocrats of such shared control of power, which now became a value that needed to be formulated, claimed, and fought for”; in this context, “*isonomia* and *isegoria* were created and became prominent.” Elite articulation of these principles may well have underlain the resistance to attempts by Isagoras and Cleomenes to abolish the *boule* in Athens.⁶¹ In formulating these concepts, though, the aristocracy had to draw on an already developing *demos*-consciousness. The *demos*, by Herodotus’ account, played an important role, by acting τὰ αὐτὰ φρονήσαντες, in the expulsion of Isagoras and Cleomenes (Hdt. 5.72). But we do not have to posit, as does Ober, that this action marks the birth of a sustained, leaderless, and revolutionary program by the *demos*.⁶² In fact, the textual evidence cannot bear the weight of Ober’s interpretation. First, the elite are not irrelevant in this story but

⁵⁹Ober, “Revolution” (*supra* n.58) 68–69.

⁶⁰This dynamic seems to be suggested in the discussion of Peisistratus’ leadership by Valerij Gouschin, “Peisistratus’ Leadership in A.P. 13.4 and the Establishment of the Tyranny of 561/60 B.C.” CQ 49 (1999) 14–23.

⁶¹Raaflaub 1996 144.

⁶²I will set aside the problem that there is no historical example of a successful, sustained, and leaderless democratic revolution.

initiate resistance that is then continued on a larger scale by “the rest of the Athenians.” Second, the *demos* do not create a program but are acting in the context of promised reforms by Cleisthenes.⁶³ And third, the description of the people as τὰ αὐτὰ φρονήσαντες certainly describes a civic consciousness, but nothing suggests that it means an exclusive, revolutionary consciousness. As we saw in Homer, the *demos* are often depicted as acting in concert, sometimes in agreement and sometimes in disagreement with the elite. When Homer uses forms of φρονέω, such as when Nestor recounts his agreement with Odysseus (*Od.* 3.128–129), the language often describes a common sense of purpose oriented to the community good.⁶⁴ Herodotus, too, seems to suggest a shared sense of purpose among the mass and elite when he links the actions. The elite resist and then “the rest of the Athenians,” who shared in this purpose, also resist (*Hdt.* 5.72).⁶⁵

Herodotus, in fact, seems to depict the operation of plebiscitary politics in which mass and elite act, react, and, importantly, interact in a public space. After the fall of the Peisistratids, Cleisthenes initially loses to Isagoras in the struggle for power among the elite. So Cleisthenes wins over the people (δῆμον) by promising them some political share (μοῖραν). Having attracted the people, Cleisthenes now emerges as stronger than Isagoras’ faction (*Hdt.* 5.69). Herodotus is describing a plebiscitary realm in which Cleisthenes vies for power through an appeal to the people. This account is supported by Aristotle, who states that Cleisthenes wins the

⁶³Raaflaub, “The Thetes and Democracy (A Response to Josiah Ober),” in *Democracy 2500?* (*supra* n.1) 87–103, at 89.

⁶⁴As examples, see *Il.* 1.73, 1.253, 2.78, 2.283, 4.361, 6.79, 13.135, 13.345 (divided in purpose), 15.50, 22.264 (divided in purpose), *Od.* 2.160, 2.228, 7.158.

⁶⁵I agree here with Raaflaub 1997c 41.

support of the people (δῆμον), offering a share (ἀποδιδούς) of government to the multitude (πλήθει).⁶⁶

Herodotus describes how Isagoras responds by enlisting the help of Cleomenes, from Sparta, who together banish Cleisthenes and other prominent Athenians, and by attempting to dissolve the Council. At this point, the Council resists (ἀντίσταθείσης), Isagoras and his followers seize the Acropolis, and then “the rest of the Athenians who were of one mind” (ἸΑθηναίων δὲ οἱ λοιποὶ τὰ αὐτὰ φρονήσαντες) join together and besiege the Acropolis. By the third day, an arrangement is made whereby the Spartans on the Acropolis are sent back and the rest are sentenced to death (5.72). In Aristotle’s account, the Athenians bring back Cleisthenes who becomes the leader of the people (*Ath. Pol.* 20.3). Herodotus even says that Cleisthenes gave the Athenians their democratic state (6.131). In assigning an important role to both Cleisthenes and the *demos*, Herodotus is not contradicting himself, as Ober holds,⁶⁷ but describing a complex and volatile interaction between the *demos* and the elite in which claims to authority must be enacted among the people. Ober in fact seems to point to this operation of plebiscitary politics in his own analysis: elsewhere he sees a growing community consciousness of the people under the tyranny of Peisistratus.⁶⁸ And in his discussion of the “Revolution” of 508/7, he notes how Cleisthenes, in his struggle against the Spartan tyranny, allies with the *demos*: “Kleisthenes’ leadership was not dependent on constitutional authority, but rather on his

⁶⁶ *Ath. Pol.* 20.1–2. We can understand *apodidomi* here as suggesting that Cleisthenes grants or offers what is due to the *demos*. Cleisthenes does not, in any absolute sense, “hand over” government (transl. Rackham), but promises to increase the share of control by the *demos*.

⁶⁷ Ober (“Revolution,” *supra* n.58) 83 “[does] not accept the historical agent Herodotus proposes here” and notes that Herodotus “elsewhere views the *demos* as the main agent of democratic change.” Certainly, we do not have to believe or disbelieve Herodotus on all things. I find it less than comfortable, though, to pick and choose when and how we are going to believe Herodotus when he is writing about the same thing.

⁶⁸ Ober (*supra* n.37) 66–67.

ability to persuade the Athenian people to adopt and to act on the proposals he advocated."⁶⁹

For Ober, the "Athenian Revolution" of 508/7 is a revolutionary act of collective self-definition by the *demos*. But, as I have suggested here, we see this development of a shared space, both among the elite and with the *demos*, established much earlier in the creation of plebiscitary politics. Rather than being a "revolution in the demos' perception of itself and of an aristocrat's perception regarding his own relationship, and that of all men of his class, to the demos,"⁷⁰ this period marked a response by both the elite and the *demos* to the volatility of the plebiscitary space. The "Revolution" did not mark the creation of new relationships, but a transformation of this plebiscitary space into a more stable, rational-legal configuration of office and law.⁷¹

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⁶⁹Ober, "Athenian Revolution" (*supra* n.58) 216. See also Ober (*supra* n.37) 68–69, 84–86, for the role of the elite in leading reforms.

⁷⁰Ober, "Athenian Revolution" (*supra* n.58) 228.

⁷¹An earlier version of this article was presented at the Center for Hellenic Studies. My thanks to Tom Banks, Walter Donlan, Kurt Raaflaub, and Fellows at the Center for their comments.