

## NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

### DEMOKRATIA

The purpose of this note is to try to make it clear that there is nothing strange or surprising in the fact that the word *demokratia* after the fifth century changed its meaning so that it could be applied ultimately to any republican government, no matter how oligarchic. From the point of view of the times, there were two forms of government: *basileia*, or kingship, and *demokratia*, government by the people (*demos*). The question will be approached through a glance at the meaning of *demos*.

The word *demokratia* is simple enough. It refers to a state or government in which the power (*kratos*) is wielded by the *demos*. But what does *demos* mean? The commonest translation is "people," that is, the sovereign people, as in the expression ἔδοξε τῷ δήμῳ; but even the most elementary student should be aware that this is not always the meaning. The use of the word for the demes of Attica should be evidence enough. Probably the use of the same word for the sovereign people and for a small country district seems so inexplicable that most of us have merely accepted it without attempting to explain it.

The examples and treatment in LSJ enable a student to trace the development of the meaning. The earliest known meaning seems to be "country" or "land." If the term then is applied to small districts, the use for the demes of Attica becomes natural and it is not surprising to find it later applied also to wards within the city. The first crucial step in the change of meaning came when *demos* was applied to the people of the countryside, and, since the people of the countryside were largely poor, the word came to mean the people of the lower classes. This was undoubtedly the meaning at the time of Solon, but this meaning survived much longer, at least in certain circles. Thus it is found in the Pseudo-Xenophontic *Politeia*. It is clear that the author considers *demokratia* as the form of government functioning at the time, that he is hostile

to it, and that he considers the *demos* which controls the state to be the lower classes. The *demos*, he states, does not wish to be subject—actually he says enslaved—in a well-governed *polis*, but wishes to be free and to rule, and does not worry about misgovernment (1. 8). However, he forgives the *demos* for *demokratia*, for everyone is to be forgiven for favoring himself (2. 20). Quite different is his judgment of anyone not a member of the *demos* who chooses to live in a democratically governed city rather than in an oligarchic one. By a democratically governed city he obviously means a city governed in the interest of the most numerous but most objectionable elements in the state. Thus, even after *demokratia* had been introduced, *demos* continued to be used in certain circles as a derogatory term. This use survived long in aristocratic circles. At any rate, it is clearly present in the second century after Christ when Dio Cassius (52. 30. 2) represents Maecenas as advocating that the *demos* of Rome should have access neither to law courts nor to elections nor to any other assembly which transacted business.

The greatest victory for the common people in the development of democracy at Athens was that the name for their group became the word used to designate the sovereign people in the records of votes in the assembly. Examples in the Meiggs-Lewis edition of *Greek Historical Inscriptions* show the usage as early as the middle of the fifth century. If their Number 14 is sufficient evidence, it was already in use in the late sixth century. When it was adopted, Athens undoubtedly had manhood suffrage giving the vote to all adult male citizens, but can we be sure that all states in which the government was a *demokratia* and in which the sovereign people was called the *demos* possessed manhood suffrage? Undoubtedly the "reforming" of democracy by limiting the rights of the lower classes directly or indirectly was common and began at Athens

very soon after the restoration of democracy in 403 B.C.<sup>1</sup> A result was that *demokratia* ultimately was applied to any republican government. An interesting example is found in Dio Cassius (52. 5. 4) in the speech in which he represents Agrippa as advising Augustus against establishing a monarchy. It would be difficult, he states, to enslave once more the allies and subjects (*ὑπήκοοι*), some of whom had been democratically governed from ancient times, and some of whom had been set free by "us ourselves" (the Romans). Note the implication that all subjects of the Romans are free. Here democracy and freedom are equated and both are opposed to kingship. The allies and subjects freed by the Romans obviously are the ones whose kings had been deposed by the Romans. To make this still more clear, it is implied that if Augustus establishes a monarchy, it will be the end of freedom. He is warned (52. 5. 3-4) that monarchy, besides being difficult to apply in the provinces,<sup>2</sup> would be even worse for himself. It would be difficult to subject the populace which had been free so many years. Then

comes the statement about the allies and subjects already noticed.

The change in the meaning of *demokratia* should not be difficult to understand if it is borne in mind that the word means rule by the *demos* and that such rule need not necessarily involve manhood suffrage. There may have been communities of that kind surviving here and there, but in Hellenistic and Roman times they certainly were rare if they existed at all. The important point remains that the word implied rule by the people instead of by a king and so could be applied to any state with a republican form of government no matter how narrow or liberal. Though this is not a discussion of the Roman idea of freedom when applied to non-Romans, it may not be out of place to note that any community with a modicum of local self-government, no matter how closely it was supervised by Roman officials, and no matter how heavy the taxes it paid to Rome, could be called free.<sup>3</sup>

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1. "The Judgment of Antiquity on Democracy," *CP*, XLIX (1954), 1-14.

2. The word translated "provinces" is *δήμοις*. It seems that the word again is used with its old meaning of country or a district. The Loeb translation (Cary-Foster) renders it "democracies." This clearly is wrong. As used here, the *demoi*

are contrasted with the *polis* of Rome and so must refer to the rest of the empire.

3. For an early example of freedom of this kind, cf. Larsen, *Greek Federal States* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 295-300 on the organization of Macedonia in 167 B.C.

### TRIMALCHIO'S CORINTHIAN PLATE

"Nec non cocus potione honoratus est et argentea corona, poculumque in lance accepit Corinthia. Quam cum Agamemnon propius consideraret, ait Trimalchio: 'Solus sum qui vera Corinthea habeam'" (*Sat.* 50). The boast is typical of Trimalchio, and the subsequent lecture is based on two of the host's recurrent foibles: a pun and a snatch of garbled mythology. He buys his plate from Corinthus the *aerarius*, and so has the only genuine plate. But he is aware that Corinthian bronze dates back to Hannibal at the fall of Troy!

The presence of Corinthian ware on Tri-

malchio's table is unsurprising; indeed, an *asellus Corinthius* had already been noticed as an olive dish (*Sat.* 31). The fashion is frequently attested by Cicero in the late Republic,<sup>1</sup> and Augustus was notorious from his youth for being "pretiosae suppellectilis Corinthiorumque praecipidus."<sup>2</sup>

Some, however, thought the fad had become a mania and a menace. Velleius Paterculus deplored the popularity of *Corinthia* in A.D. 30, and blamed it on the *rudis* Mummius for his sack of Corinth in 146.<sup>3</sup> This connection was stressed by the elder Pliny, who thought that

1. *Rosc. Am.* 133; *Verr.* 2. 2. 46, 83; *Tusc.* 2. 32; *Fin.* 2. 23; *Att.* 2. 1. 11.

2. Suet. *Aug.* 70; Octavian was allegedly dubbed *Corintharius* for proscribing owners of *vasa Corinthia* which he coveted. Pliny *NH* 34. 6 claims that Antony proscribed Verres for much the same reason.

3. Vell. Pat. 1. 13. 4: "non tamen puto dubites, Vinici, quin magis pro re publica fuerit manere adhuc rudem Corinthiorum intellectum quam in tantum ea intellegi, et quin hac prudentia illa imprudentia decori publico fuerit convenientior."