

Δῆμοκρατία

People, Power, and Dissent in Classical Athens

Prof. Andy Overman
Department of Classics X: 6375
Overman@Macalester.Edu
T & TR 1:20-2:50

This course examines various notions pertaining to *demokratia* in ancient Athens. A lively discourse and debate about governmental forms, the roles of the citizenry – both elite and the masses – characterized much of the ancient Hellenistic world and Athens in particular. These debates have informed most if not all subsequent discussions about democracy up to and including our own day. What range of meanings is carried in this Greek term? What did writers mean when they talked about *people power*? What were the arguments for and against this broadly defined form of government? In this period we see birthed a radical notion of human self-determination, hotly debated, which proved at the same time to be a glory for Greece and many, would say, also her undoing. But these were courageous thinkers, some martyrs, who dared to try to find a new way for people to govern their *poleis* and break very old bonds of monarchic or oligarchic rule. Their beliefs did not prevail. These were ancient losers. Their's was a brief experiment gone terribly wrong. Yet thanks to only a few scribes, these ideas survived. Their thoughts were hardly echoed for yet another 2200 years. But when they emerged from the mostly lost pages of history *demokratia* possessed a resilience and relevance that has endured to our day.

We are also interested in how the institutions and practices born in Athens are enacted today. We will make use of our urban setting to visit institutions and spaces which owe their origins to the ancient Greeks; the Minnesota Supreme Court, the new Minneapolis Public Library, the urban honorific way, the *Agora*. How do these modern forms and spaces devoted to democracy reflect, if they do, ancient Athenian notions of the same?

Δῆμοκρατία had a context. The setting and backdrop of the conversations we visit was one largely of War and the memory of War. But corruption, abuse of power, courts that seemed to favor the well-positioned, tension about Greek colonization, and new and powerful global pressures informed our debates directly. We have to pay attention to these tensions and currents in our study. As with today's discussions about democracy, our conversations also must consider their original setting and σκῆνε.

Like most courses at Macalester there is an emphasis on student participation and the contribution of the student's own ideas to the course. There is a fair amount of reading of primary sources here along with two secondary sources from two accomplished scholars. Students will write three papers – two of five pages in length and a third major research paper. There are two in-classes quizzes and a brief oral presentation. The grades for these pieces of work and research are roughly equal in weight except for the major research paper which carries a slightly higher percentage of one's grade. But your participation, reading of all assigned reading as well as further reading on your own is expected and impacts the grade you receive.

OUTLINE:

- 9/3 Introduction; Greek alphabet and terms; a setting of the stage.
- 9/7 Greek Drama – The Greek Theatre; Theatre and social and political life; *The Trojan Women*
- 9/9 Discussion of the TW – Read Christ over the weekend 1-87
- 9/14 On Becoming a Bad Citizen; Christ 88-210.
- 9/16 Social Order and resistance; do bad citizens provoke democratic ideas?
- 9/21 First Paper is Due – five pages on either TW or The Bad Citizen in Classical Athens.
- 9/23 The First Citizen: Periclean Athens – Pericles' War Speech and Funeral Oration;
Thucydides on Pericles; Finding Modern parallels to Periclean democratia.
- 9/28 Discuss and Presentation of contemporary parallels to Periclean democracy.
- 9/30 The Archaeology of Ancient Athens; the State and the gods; civic space; architecture and
Demokratia; handouts
- 10/5 Socrates and Plato: *The Apology*; Minnesota Governor Candidate Forum on Campus in
the evening.
- 10/7 Discussion of The Apology; *The Clouds*, Aristophanes
- 10/12 Law, courts, rule of law; parts of *The Republic*; *The Crito*
- 10/14 Discussion of The R. and Crito; Justice/*dike* in Plato
- 10/19 Paper on Plato/Socrates/Law or Justice in Plato due 10/21
- 10/21 Second paper due.
- 10/26 In class quiz: Greek terms and ideas; alphabet; theatre; Christ; Plato
- FALL BREAK – read Jones; ATHENIAN DEMOCRACY
- 11/2 Democracy and it's Critics I
- 11/4: Democracy and it's Critics II - the speeches of Demosthenes
- 11/9 The Court and the lawyer – Demokratia at work in Demosthenes
- 11/11 The Minnesota Supreme Court
- 11/16 Theater and Democracy – Prof. B. Lush – an evening at the Theater (TBA)
- 11/18 Modern institutions which foster *demokratia*; creating democracy?
Begin research for larger paper – topics, genre, research; handout
- 11/23 Problems with democracy in the world of Plato and Pericles
Paper topics, initial sources, beginning outline due; handout
- 11/30 Democratic Civic institutions today; is a hierarchy anti-demokratia?
Paper thesis due
- 12/2 IN-CLASS QUIZ – terms and I.D.'s; Essay questions on how to Criticize Democracy.
- 12/7 Final chance for me to look at your rough draft.
- 12/9 Concluding conversation about Democracy; what did you see that “worked?”
Why did this experiment fail? What has succeeded with respect to *Demokratia*?
- RESEARCH PAPER DUE AT CLASS TIME