

Athenian Democracy

PS 24. Freshman Seminar
One-hour, one-unit reading course
Spring 2022

In classical Athens, ordinary citizens ruled over the political elite. That's what *demokratia*, “rule by the people,” meant. How did non-elite Athenians pull that off? In this seminar, we'll explore two fascinating, important and in some respects baffling short texts, both titled “The Constitution of the Athenians,” one attributed to Xenophon and the other to a student of Aristotle. We'll also look at some additional brief extracts from Herodotus, Thucydides, Plato, and Aristotle. Though the material concerns ancient Greek politics, we'll approach it with all our assumptions and anxieties about modern democracy in mind. How different was ancient Greek democracy from what we call democracy today—and could we manage something more like it here?

Requirements: regular attendance (maximum 2-3 absences), doing the reading, 100-200-word online forum response prior to each session, and a willingness to ask questions and float ideas in class.

All readings are posted on bCourses and will also be available in digital and hard copy course-pack form from Copy Central. If you'd like a hard copy of Pseudo Aristotle's *Constitution of the Athenians* (which we'll read all the way through), I recommend P.J. Rhodes ed., *The Athenian Constitution* (2nd ed. Penguin, 2002). It's not the same edition we'll be using in class, but it's a good one to purchase as it has lots of helpful commentary.

If you'd like to explore further background material, I recommend Michael Gagarin's and Paul Woodruff's *Early Greek Political Thought from Homer to the Sophists* (Cambridge, 1995).

- Jan 19. 1. *Introductory. What was demokratia?*
Herodotus, *Histories* 3.80-83
Written c. 430 BC. Dramatic date 522 BC.
- Jan 26. 2. *Historical narrative I. The seeds of demokratia in Athens*
Ps. Aristotle, fragments-ch.12
Written c. 330 BC. Events down to c. 590 BC.
- Feb 2. 3. *Historical narrative II. Tyranny and Cleisthenes' Revolution: the founding of demokratia in Athens*
Ps. Aristotle, chs. 13-22
Written c. 330 BC. Events c. 590-490 BC.

- Feb 9. 4. *Historical narrative III. The Persian Wars to Pericles. Radicalizing democracy*
Ps. Aristotle, chs. 23-28
Written c. 330 BC. Events c. 490-411 BC.
- Feb 16. 5. *Thucydides' Pericles I. Funeral Oration*
Thucydides, *History* 2.34-46
Written c. 400 BC. Events 431 BC.
- Feb 23. 6. *Thucydides' Pericles II. Plague, invasions, Pericles' response*
Thucydides, *History* 2.47-65
Written c. 400 BC. Events 431-429 BC.
- Mar 2. 7. *"Old Oligarch" I*
Ps. Xenophon, "Constitution of the Athenians," ch 1
Written c. 424 BC
- Mar 9. 8. *"Old Oligarch" II*
Ps. Xenophon: "Constitution of the Athenians," chs 2-3
Written c. 424 BC
- Mar 16. 9. *Historical narrative IV. The Oligarchy of the Four Hundred*
Ps. Aristotle, chs. 29-33
Written c. 330 BC. Events 411/10 BC.
- Mar 30. 10. *Historical narrative V. The Thirty, Civil War and Amnesty*
Ps. Aristotle, chs. 34-41 (written c. 328 BC)
Thucydides 8.65-68 (written c. 400 BC)
Events 410-403/2 BC.
- Apr 6. 11. *Plato on demokratia*
Plato, extracts from the *Republic*: the Ship, the Beast, and the account of *dēmokratia*
Written c. 380 BC (?). Dramatic date 431-406 BC.
- Apr 13. 12. *Historical narrative VI. Contemporary Athens I*
Ps. Aristotle, chs. 42-54
Written c. 330 BC. Describes system in place 403-322 BC.
- Apr 20. 13. *Historical narrative VII. Contemporary Athens II*
Ps. Aristotle, chs. 55-69
Written c. 330 BC. Describes system in place 403-322 BC.
- Apr 27. 14. *Aristotle on the virtues of the multitude*
Aristotle, *Politics* 1277a-1282a, 1286a-b
Written c. 340-322