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The Emergence of Populism in Classical Athens

1 Some preliminary distinctions

In the James Bond movie *Die Another Day* (2002) agent 007 is chasing an international terrorist in Cuba; when he asks a Cuban counterpart about him, the Cuban agent remarks that "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter". I believe we face the same problem when we investigate the issue of populism: it is difficult to arrive at an agreed-upon definition because it depends on the perspective from which one looks at the phenomenon. Someone's populism is someone else's revolt against the elite, and thus true democracy.

The aim of this essay is to investigate the possible existence of populism in ancient Greece and especially in Classical Athens. I will explore some political figures – such as Solon, Cleisthenes, Pericles, Cimon and Cleon – to see whether they can be characterized as populist leaders, bearing in mind that the terms 'populist' and 'populism' are very recent and therefore one must look for the concept, the phenomenon, and not for the word in classical Greece.[1] In addition, I would like to analyse what it meant to be "favourable to the people" or "on the side of the people": is being *dēmotikos*, and more so *dēmotikōtatos*, a sign that we are dealing with a populist leader? Finally, I will try to explain why our sources point to the demagogue Cleon as the first example of a 'populist' leader: what distinguished him from previous or contemporary statesmen? Was it his background, the style or the substance of his policies that made him stand apart from other popular leaders?

Having acknowledged the difficulties in adopting a notion of 'populism' which can be accepted by most political theorists and social scientists,[2] I will start with a working definition, which tries to separate and distinguish populism from demagogy.[3] Demagogy is an ancient word, having its root in the political experience of classical Greece, whereas populism is a recent coin, having appeared al-

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1 Conversely, a note of caution about applying classical Greek notions to scatter light on contemporary populism is issued by Christian Mann in his essay in this volume.

2 J.-W. Müller states at the beginning of his excellent book (2017, 2): "We simply do not have anything like a *theory* of populism, and we seem to lack coherent criteria for deciding when political actors turn populist in some meaningful sense". On the definition of 'populism' see Matthew Simonton in this volume.

3 On this distinction see Carlo Scardino in this volume.

most simultaneously in the United States and in Russia at the end of the 19th century. In fact, the term 'populism' originated as a form of self-designation, being used by members of the People's Party active in the United States during the years 1877–1896. In the Russian Empire, during the period 1848–1890, there appeared an agrarian socialist movement called *Narodnichestvo*: the members of this political group referred to themselves as the *narodniki*, which has often been translated as 'populists'. What these two different movements shared was a democratic spirit, the idea that some parts of the nation had been left behind and the consequent determination to give voice to the unrepresented. Populism thus started as a democratic and democratizing political phenomenon: it was plebeian, and it aimed at widening the boundaries of political representation by inserting "second-class citizens, the plebeian people"[4] at its centre.

Demagogy, which literally means "leading the people", implies the existence of some political agent claiming to represent the interests, values, and aspirations of the people against a real or perceived elite. Accordingly, the demagogue styles himself as the mouthpiece of the people; it is typical of such an agent to curry the favour of the people to gain political power, which will not necessarily be used to further the people's interest. It is to be noted that the word 'demagogue' is not used as a self-description; rather, it is used by others to describe the leader of the demos, most often, although not necessarily, with a pejorative overtone. The demagogue is usually one person whereas populism can be a plural phenomenon: a movement, a party can be populist, namely, maintain to voice the aspirations and protect the interests of the people against the dominating elite. In their current usage, demagogy and demagogue are derogatory words: they imply using the people to further one's interests by someone endowed with power. In demagogy, therefore, the people inevitably have a counterpart: the leader; namely, someone in a position of power who maintains (or purports, according to the perspective) to speak in the name of the people and in the interest of the people. We are accustomed to think that demagogy typically leads to a one-man rule whereas populism aims at establishing or restoring the power of the people, at creating a democracy of some kind. Demagogy is, thus, often a betrayal of the people. As Moses Finley observed, demagogy inevitably implies misleading the people in the literal sense. However, he went on to argue, this happened very rarely in Athenian history.[5] And, we may ask, did the word had negative overtones right from the start?

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4 The expression is by Camila Vergara in her original work Systemic Corruption: Constitutional Ideas for an Anti-Oligarchic Republic (2020a).
5 Finley 1962.

Edith Hall has persuasively shown that it is dubious that the first time the word 'demagogue' appeared in Greek, to describe the politician Cleon (in Aristophanes' *Knights*, produced in 424 BCE), it carried negative overtones.[6] However, in his plays Aristophanes consistently depicts the *dēmos* as a slave to the triobol for jury service and for attendance at the assembly: for him, *misthophoria*, remuneration for participation in public services, is the real bond of *philia* between *dēmos* and demagogue, and the notion that the demagogues' interests and those of the *dēmos* coincide is only an illusion.[7]

In addition, Melissa Lane has convincingly argued that ancient Greeks did not make a distinction between 'good politician' and 'bad demagogue': they could obviously discriminate between a good and a bad statesman, but they did not use the word 'demagogue' to necessarily identify and describe a bad politician. In her opinion, such distinction was developed only subsequently, by Plutarch, and it was based on the theoretical distinctions between good and bad rulers elaborated by Plato and Aristotle: more specifically, Plutarch built his negative image of the demagogue upon Plato's definition of the statesman as the possessor of political science, with the demagogue as his negative counterpart: while the true statesman aims at the common good of the city, the demagogue knows only how to flatter the people and does not care about making his fellow-citizens virtuous and happy. Plutarch also drew upon Aristotle's negative view of the role of demagogues in a democracy.[8]

This is a very important insight, and a point worth examining more in detail. Born in 428/7 BCE, Plato saw his democratic city engaged in a 27-year war against Sparta and saw her total defeat in 404; he witnessed the oligarchic *coup* of 411 and the ruthless rule of the Thirty Tyrants. He was well aware of the power of

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6 Hall 2018. In his very interesting book *What is Wrong with Democracy?* Samons 2004 argues that some 4th century critics of democracy used the word *dēmagōgos* in the pejorative modern sense of 'demagogue', citing for instance X. *HG* 2.3.27, Isoc. *Pax* 129 and Arist. *Pol.* II 12, 1274a and IV 4, 1292a. However, these passages also support a neutral reading of the word: for instance, Isocrates says "I marvel that you cannot see at once that no class is so inimical to the people as our depraved orators and demagogues"; here orators and demagogues are put together and the negative sense comes from the addition of "depraved"; there could exist good orators and demagogues. Again, in Xenophon we find Critias attacking Theramenes for being unreliable, since he opposed "putting some demagogue out of the way". The word is here descriptive and used by an oligarch.

7 See Ar. *Ach.* 657; *Eq.* 51, 255, 800, 797–809, 904–905, 1017–1020, 1050–1053, 1350–1353; *V.* 300–302; *Av.* 1541. The contemporary author of *The Constitution of the Athenians* remarks that the shrewd Athenian people abstain from magistracies implying some danger (like generalship) and are keen to hold those that carry a salary and are domestically profitable: X. *Ath. pol.* 1.3.

8 Lane 2012.

effective speakers on the Athenian *dēmos* and probably listened to some of the discourses that prepared certain ill-fated decisions. In his works, democracy has no redeeming quality and, in fact, ushers in the worst kind of regime -tyranny.[9] The importance of Plato for our topic can hardly be overestimated. Plato success-fully tried to establish a clear-cut difference between the statesman and the dem-agogue, a distinction which mirrors the difference between the philosopher and the sophist. They may look similar, like the dog and the wolf, but in reality they are completely different.[10] What characterizes, and sets apart, the philosopher and the statesman from pretenders and impostors is the possession of true knowl-edge, which includes political science: through a long and elaborate education they have grasped the truth about the most important matters for a human being; the possession of such knowledge entitles them to rule, even above the laws.[11] In addition, Plato is responsible for the still current view that the dema-gogue is a man of the *dēmos* but he will inevitably evolve into a tyrant: this is the lesson of the *Republic*, where the demagogue/tyrant is depicted as the son of a democratic father.[12]

Aristotle too passes a very negative judgement on demagogues, but his opinion is the result of the observation of actual historical events, and it is not based on a theoretical distinction. Aristotle has a much more positive view of democracy than Plato's, and he is even willing to concede that a well-balanced form of democracy can be the best regime in certain circumstances.[13] He sees the demagogues as the source of problem for democracies, which will then turn into tyrannies of one of two sorts: either the people themselves, emboldened by the demagogues, will act as a tyrant neglecting the rule of law; or some demagogue will actually make himself tyrant of the city: the result is inevitably singular, or plural, tyranny, and destruc-tion of the rule of law. In the case of Athens, moreover, magistrates had a complex system of accountability whereas judges and assembly-goers were unaccountable.[14] Accordingly, in *Pol.* IV 4, 1292a Aristotle blames the absence of good laws for the appearance of demagogues: "where the laws are not supreme, there demagogues spring up". He adds that the "demagogues are those who make the decrees of the

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9 See Plat. *Resp.* VIII, 564a–569c.

10 See Plat. *Plt.* 291c for the "chorus of people meddling with political matters", sophists of all sorts.

11 See Plat. *Resp* III and IV; *Plt.* 292c–293d; for the superiority of political art over the laws see 300c–d.

12 See the intriguing analysis of Arruzza 2019, who maintains that Plato's criticism of tyranny is in fact directed towards democracy.

13 I wish to refer here to Giorgini 2019.

14 On the judges' and assembly-goers' unaccountability see Th. 3.43.4; cf. 7.14.4; 8.1.1. See also Lys. 18.2; X. *Ath. pol.* 2.17.

people override the laws, by referring all things to the popular assembly"; he remarks that "the decrees of the *dēmos* correspond to the edicts of the tyrant". Briefly, the demagogues in a democracy play the same role that flatterers play in a tyranny.[15] Further on, in *Pol.* V 5, 1304b Aristotle blames "the insolence of the demagogues" as the main cause of revolutions in democracies. He notices that in ancient times, when the demagogue was also a general, democracies changed into tyrannies. He argues that:

> ὁ δὲ τύραννος ἐκ τοῦ δήμου καὶ τοῦ πλήθους ἐπὶ τοὺς γνωρίμους, ὅπως ὁ δῆμος ἀδικῆται μηδὲν ὑπ' αὐτῶν. φανερὸν δ' ἐκ τῶν συμβεβηκότων. σχεδὸν γὰρ οἱ πλεῖστοι τῶν τυράννων γεγόνασιν ἐκ δημαγωγῶν ὡς εἰπεῖν, πιστευθέντες ἐκ τοῦ διαβάλλειν τοὺς γνωρίμους.

> a tyrant is set up from among the people and the multitude to oppose the notables, in order that the people may suffer no injustice from them. And this is manifest from the facts of history. For almost the greatest number of tyrants have risen, it may be said, from being demagogues, having won the people's confidence by slandering the notables. (Arist. *Pol.* V 10, 1310b12–16, transl. H. Rackham)

Aristotle provides some historical instances of how tyrannies originated from demagogues and mentions Panaetius in Leontini, Cypselus in Corinth, Pisistratus in Athens, and Dionysius in Syracuse.[16]

It is thus with Plato and Aristotle that demagogy came to be seen as a negative political activity which ushered in tyranny, and demagogue became a derogatory word.

In the English language, the word 'demagogue' acquired a pejorative meaning in the 17th century, during the civil and religious wars. More specifically, this happened in association with the publication of Charles I's spiritual autobiography, called the *Eikon Basilike*, which appeared in 1649, ten days after his execution. In this work we read:

> Who were the chief Demagogues and Patrones of Tumultus, to send for them, to flatter and embolden them, to direct and tune their clamorous importunities, some men yet living are too conscious to pretend ignorance.[17]

It is after the publication of the *Eikon Basilike* that the word assumed and retained its negative meaning in English, notwithstanding Milton's protestations in

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15 On the negative image of the demagogues in Aristotle see also *Pol.* VI 4, 1319b12–16. On Aristotle's characterization of demagogues see Georgia Tsouni in this volume.

16 Arist. *Pol.* V 10, 1310b29–30.

17 See Charles I/Gauden 1904, 20. The role of John Gauden in the writing of the work is still controversial.

his aptly titled *Eikonoklastes*.[18] The neutral meaning of 'leader of the people', however, remained in use, as it is testified by Milton's contemporary Thomas Hobbes.[19]

In the 19th century, Athenian democracy became a battlefield for historians, philosophers, and statesmen. This fact was evidently due to the appearance of popular masses on the political stage. Consequently, conservative historians elicited examples of the irrational and dangerous behaviour of the people especially from ancient Athenian democracy and the French Revolution.[20] In this context the role of demagogues was depicted as particularly obnoxious and only the monumental work of the liberal historian George Grote provided a more balanced assessment.[21] The same happened in the 20th century with the appearance of the "mass-man" and of totalitarian political experiments. This is well captured by the conservative philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset:

> We must realize that it is very hard to save a civilization when its hour has come to fall beneath the power of demagogues. For the demagogue has been the great strangler of civilization. Both Greek and Roman civilizations fell at the hands of this loathsome creature who brought from Macaulay the remark that "in every century the vilest examples of human nature have been among the demagogues."[22]

Finally, from what we have ascertained so far, it clearly follows that populism is different from the political phenomena we call Caesarism and Bonapartism. These two historical occurrences share with populism the revolt against the establishment and the existing institutions, but they were based on the charismatic leadership of these two extremely victorious generals on their troops, Caesar and Napoleon Bonaparte. In these cases, the counterpart of the leader is the army, not the people.

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18 See Milton 1893, 36: "Setting aside the affrightment of this Goblin word; for the King by his leave cannot coine English as he could Mony, to be current [. . .] those Demagogues [. . .] saving his Greek, were good Patriots".
19 Hobbes 1845, §6.153: "In a Democraty, look how many Demagoges (that is) how many powerfull Oratours there are with the people".
20 I wish to refer to Giorgini 2009.
21 Grote 1846–1856.
22 Ortega y Gasset 1961, 76.

2 What are the characteristics of populism? And did it exist in ancient Greece?

In one of the earliest works on the subject, political scientist Cas Mudde has argued that populism is "an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite", and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people".[23]

Jan-Werner Müller, the author of one of the most penetrating works on the topic, has maintained that populism is characterized by a revolt against the elites: however, he adds, this is a necessary but not sufficient condition. Populism is a form, an exclusionary form, of identity politics in which the populist leader claims to represent the entire people and does not recognize the legitimacy of other leaders and of the opposition in general: populism is, therefore, antipluralist and as such a threat to real democracy. Müller goes on to argue that populism presents a particular moralistic imagination of politics, in which a morally pure and fully unified 'people' is set against the corrupt 'elite'.[24]

In addition, political scientist Nadia Urbinati has argued that

> populist democracy is the name of a new form of representative government that is based on two phenomena: a direct relation between the leader and those in society whom the leader defines as the "right" or "good" people; and the superlative authority of the audience. Its immediate targets are the "obstacles" to the development of those phenomena: intermediary opinion-making bodies, such as parties; established media; and institutionalized systems for monitoring and controlling political power. The result of these positive and negative actions delineates the physiognomy of populism as an interpretation of "the people" and "the majority" that is tainted by an undisguised – indeed, an enthusiastic – politics of partiality.[25]

Mudde and Urbinati pass a negative judgment on populism, being strong supporters of representative democracy. We have noticed, however, that other authors like Camila Vergara have a completely different view of populism.[26] For instance, in the past two decades the American political scientist John McCormick has put

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23 Mudde 2004. Mudde's application of the notion of 'ideology' to populism has been criticized from the perspective of frame theory by Aslanidis 2016.
24 Müller 2017, 19–20.
25 Urbinati 2019, 4.
26 Vergara interprets as populism all plebeian movements which aim at correcting the excesses of oligarchy in liberal States. In addition to Vergara 2020a, see also 2020b. One may find a similar view of populism, characterized by a democratic and integrating logic which distinguishes it from authoritarian and totalitarian movements, in Tarragoni 2019.

forth a populist interpretation of Machiavelli and has argued for what he has la-
belled a 'Machiavellian democracy'. McCormick has emphasized the fundamental,
often unacknowledged elements of a vibrant 'Machiavellian' politics: the utility of
vigorous class conflict between elites and common citizens for virtuous demo-
cratic republics, the necessity of political and economic equality for genuine civic
liberty. According to McCormick, populism should not be entirely dismissed,
since only the pressure of a populist movement can force elites to behave more
responsively and bring about truly democratic institutions, including magistrates
designed to protect the people. In his view, populism is not an end in itself but it
could serve democratic ends when it sets as an eventual goal the establishment of
procedures and practices through which the people rule themselves better and
more directly.[27]

After examining these diverse opinions, I think we may conclude that one im-
portant feature of populism is its direct appeal to the people and its declaration
to serve the interests of the people. The populists always divide the citizens be-
tween two abstract entities – the pure people and the corrupt elite. Populist lead-
ers, therefore, claim to further the interests of the people, namely of a part, albeit
presumably the bigger, of the population; on the contrary, real democratic dis-
course centres on the common good, on what is good for the entire population,
not just a part. In addition, Aristotle's insight suggests that populism conceives of
the people as superior to the laws since it is the people that enact the laws: it is
thus a safe generalization to say that populism is against the rule of law.

One sure point I would like to emphasize is that populism implies that the
people are a political agent, either active or passive; therefore, it cannot exist be-
fore this condition is present in a society or in a political arrangement. This is
why I shall maintain that populism could not exist before the 5th century BCE,
because the people as a political entity did not exist before. I will maintain that
the Athenian statesman Cleisthenes for the first time in history made the *dēmos*
an active political agent, by giving to every Athenian (free, adult, male) citizen the
right to participate in the works of the Assembly, to sit as a judge in court and to
hold certain offices: this way the people became an active actor in Athenian
politics.

Herodotus, our main source on the events, writes that Cleisthenes, "finding
himself in a condition of inferiority, enlisted the people into his comradeship".[28] I
prefer to translate literally Herodotus' statement, who uses the puzzling expres-

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27 McCormick 2011.
28 ἑσσούμενος δὲ ὁ Κλεισθένης τὸν δῆμον προσεταιρίζεται. Hdt. 5.66.

sion *ton dēmon prosetairizetai*;[29] a unique verb, which was already incomprehensible to Aristotle one century later. In fact, in the *Constitution of the Athenians* Aristotle (or one of his pupils), who evidently used Herodotus as a source for Cleisthenes' reforms, made an identical statement but was forced to change the phrasing to make himself understood to his readers. He wrote that: "Cleisthenes, having got the worst of it in the comradeships, enlisted the people on his side, offering to hand over the citizenship to the multitude" (*Ath. pol.* 20.1). The phrasing of Herodotus' and Aristotle's narratives disclose a situation of struggle between opposed factions (*stasis*), which saw involved aristocratic political clubs, comradeships (*hetaireiai*). Cleisthenes' decision to enrol the common people into his political club should be interpreted as a move to gain the support of the people, which then turned into the decision to extend to all Athenian citizens the same privileges and access to political power that solely the aristocrats previously held. This act extends to the common people the equality among peers of the aristocracy and marks the 'ennobling' of the Athenian *dēmos*, which will become a commonplace in 5th century BCE Athenian democratic propaganda. By enlisting the people in his comradeship Cleisthenes means to transform the *dēmos* into a politically active agent.

Cleisthenes rejected the policies of the previous tyrants, which benefited the *dēmos* in order to make it an instrument of their plans; he identified in the *dēmos* one of the components of the political community and redesigned accordingly the administrative and political offices. Cleisthenes' attitude is very different from Pisistratus', whom Aristotle describes as "an extreme lover of the people" (*dēmotikōtatos*: *Ath. pol.* 13.4) and whose programme is summarized in the invitation he gave to his fellow countrymen after disarming them with a stratagem:

> ὁ δὲ ἐπεὶ τὸν ἄλλον λόγον ἐπετέλεσεν, εἶπε καὶ περὶ τῶν ὅπλων τὸ γεγονός, ὡς οὐ χρὴ θαυμάζειν οὐδ᾽ ἀθυμεῖν, ἀλλ᾽ ἀπελθόντας ἐπὶ τῶν ἰδίων εἶναι, τῶν δὲ κοινῶν αὐ[τὸς] ἐπ[ι]μελήσεσθαι πάντων.

> He, when he had finished the rest of his speech, told his audience not to be surprised at what had happened about their arms, and not to be dismayed, but to go away and occupy

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29 The concept is repeated in Hdt. 5.69: "When he had drawn into his own party the Athenian people, which was then debarred from all rights, he gave the tribes new names and increased their number, making ten tribe-wardens in place of four, and assigning ten districts to each tribe. When he had won over the people, he was stronger by far than the rival faction (ὡς γὰρ δὴ τὸν Ἀθηναίων δῆμον πρότερον ἀπωσμένον τότε πάντως πρὸς τὴν ἑωυτοῦ μοῖραν προσέθηκατο, τὰς φυλὰς μετωνόμασε καὶ ἐποίησε πλεῦνας ἐξ ἐλασσόνων. δέκα τε δὴ φυλάρχους ἀντὶ τεσσέρων ἐποίησε, δέκαχα δὲ καὶ τοὺς δήμους κατένειμε ἐς τὰς φυλάς. ἤν τε τὸν δῆμον προσθέμενος πολλῷ κατύπερθε τῶν ἀντιστασιωτέων; transl. A.D. Godley)."

themselves with their private affairs, while he would attend to all public business. (*Ath. pol.* 15.5, transl. H. Rackham)

A little further on Aristotle reiterates that Pisistratus wanted his citizens to "be engaged in their private affairs, so as not to desire nor to have time to attend to public business" (*Ath. pol.* 16.3).[30] Pisistratus' "love for the people" is a personal matter, the result of his mild and liberal nature, to which he added political calculation since the *dēmos* was his innovative basis of support. Pisistratus did not want the people to meddle with public affairs, he wanted to keep them in a private dimension. Cleisthenes, on the contrary, wanted the *dēmos* to enter the public dimension and to have an active decisional role in public matters (*ta koina*). This is confirmed by Isocrates' judgment, which reflects the subsequent interpretation of Cleisthenes' reforms current in the 4th century BCE: "Cleisthenes expelled the tyrants and brought the people back to power".[31]

After Cleisthenes' reforms, the Athenian political regime slowly became what Josh Ober aptly characterized as "an active self-government of masterless citizens".[32] The importance of the single assembly-goer or judge was emphasized by the adoption of the method of counting the votes, as opposed to estimating them or deciding by acclamation.[33] This procedure would equate to taking seriously the political judgment of each member of a gathering, recognising his epistemic dignity. In the self-interpretation of supporters of democracy, this regime identified the rule of the whole of the citizenry and not of only a part – the many who are destitute.[34] Perhaps the best exemplification is to be found in the discourse of the democratic leader Athenagoras in Thucydides (6.39): "First I say that the *dēmos* is the whole while oligarchy is only a part".[35]

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30 πρὸς τοῖς ἰδίοις ὄντες, μήτ' ἐπιθυμῶσι μήτε σχολάζω[σι]ν ἐπιμελεῖσθαι τῶν κοινῶν.

31 Isoc. *Areopag.* 16: Κλεισθένης δ' ὁ τοὺς τυράννους ἐκβαλὼν καὶ τὸν δῆμον καταγαγὼν πάλιν ἐξ ἀρχῆς κατέστησεν. This statement is repeated in *Antidosis* 232 and 306; *De bigis* 26f. Isocrates believed – anachronistically but with a very interesting interpretation of the events – that Solon had already admitted the people to power: see *Antidosis* 231f.; *Areopag.* 16.

32 See Ober 2015, 54; cf. 166; 233.

33 On the political significance of counting the votes as opposed to acclamation see Schwartzberg 2010. Canevaro 2018 has persuasively argued that Athenian voting procedures did not entail majority rule, as in contemporary democracies, but rather aimed at consensus.

34 On this and on the notion of *plēthos*, with special reference to Herodotus' constitutional debate in 3.80–82 see Carillo 2004.

35 ἐγὼ δέ φημι πρῶτα μὲν δῆμον ξύμπαν ὠνομάσθαι, ὀλιγαρχίαν δὲ μέρος. The same identification of the *dēmos* with the entire city (*pantes*: "all") is evident in Cleon: see for instance Th. 4.22.2; 3.39.6. On the contrary, Diodotus, an opposer of Cleon, sees the *dēmos* as the faction opposite to the *oligoi*: Th. 3.47.2, For other interesting examples see Th. 2.37.1; 6; 3.82.1; 4.86.4; 6.38.4; 8.66.5; 8.97.2.

This view of the *dēmos* as a homogeneous whole is perfectly reflected in the identification of city and *dēmos* which appears in Athenian official documents, where *dēmos* stands for *dēmokratia*, the government of Athens: treaties, decrees, laws begin with the formula "The People decided" (*edoxe tōi dēmōi*) or "The Council and the People decided". For instance, in a very interesting inscription reporting Athenian relations with Chalkis dated 446/5 BCE (or possibly 424/3 BCE), the Council and the people (*dēmos*) swear an oath to refrain from doing certain deeds without "approval from the Athenian *dēmos*":[36] the *dēmos* in this last sentence is evidently the Athenian regime, the *dēmokratia*.

On the other hand, it is very interesting that authors who adopt an oligarchic perspective refer to the *dēmos* as a part – the poor, the rabble, the uncultured – and not the whole of the citizenry. This is patent in the pamphlet about *The Constitution of the Athenians*, dated around 420s BCE and found in Xenophon's works, whose author is usually referred to as 'The Old Oligarch'. The author begins his attack on the Athenian regime by saying that in Athens "the poor and the people (*dēmos*) are right to have more than the high-born and wealthy for the reason that it is the people who mans the ships and imparts strength to the city".[37] This fact is also evident in Aristotle's treatment of democracy, which he sees, in general, as the government of the poor to their sole advantage. When Aristotle examines the different kinds of democracy, he argues that the goodness of the regime depends on the quality of the people and goes on to describe different kinds of *dēmos* – conceived as the poor stratum of the population.[38]

This reading of the origin of democracy, which considers the *dēmos* an active political agent only starting with Cleisthenes' reforms, is not incompatible with the interesting and innovative view proposed by Daniela Cammack. She has argued that "the original meaning of *dēmos* and that implied by *dēmokratia* were 'assembly', defined as the collective political agent constituted by the common people". The *dēmos* was conceived as a singular collective agent which comprised a part, not the entirety, of the city – the ordinary people as opposed to the elite and to those who spoke publicly. Cammack adds two considerations: first, *dēmos* did not refer to all assembly-goers, but specifically to the audience, to those who listened as opposed to those who spoke publicly. Second, "by extension, *dēmos* denoted all those who participated in politics through collective action, as opposed to those

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36 See *IG* I³ 40. On the meaning of *dēmos* see Hansen 2010; Blanshard 2004.

37 X. *Ath. pol.* 1.2: οἱ πένητες καὶ ὁ δῆμος πλέον ἔχειν τῶν γενναίων καὶ τῶν πλουσίων διὰ τόδε, ὅτι ὁ δῆμός ἐστιν ὁ ἐλαύνων τὰς ναῦς καὶ ὁ τὴν δύναμιν περιτιθεὶς τῇ πόλει. See Simonton 2017; Bearzot et al. 2018.

38 Arist. *Pol.* VI 4, 1319a5–1319b12. On the aristocratic prejudice of these authors see Ober 1994; Osborne 2010.

who had personal political significance".[39] I agree with Cammack's conclusions and I do not think they collide with my reading; in fact, if *dēmos* meant the assembly of ordinary people, Cammack's exemplifications of an active role of the *dēmos* begin with Aeschylus and Herodotus.[40] Cammack concludes that "the same two groups, *dēmos* and leading men, dominated the political scene all the way from Homer to Aristotle and beyond. What changed was the balance of power between them".[41] I agree, and I would point out that the tipping moment happened when Cleisthenes gave an active role to the *dēmos* because it marked – in Cammack's words – "the conversion of the political elite from rulers to leaders".

3 Different styles in demagoguery, different kinds of love for the people

I will now explore the profile of three Athenian politicians – Pericles, Cimon and Cleon – to answer the question of why our sources point to Cleon as the first populist leader in Athenian history, although Cimon had a special relation with the people and Pericles was the first leader of the *dēmos* to be called a 'demagogue'. What is so innovative or peculiar to Cleon? Why was he different from previous leaders of the people's faction? Answering these questions entails examining the ideological premises of our main sources – namely Thucydides, Aristophanes, Plato, Aristotle and Plutarch. For the difficulties in arriving at an answer about Cleon's alleged populism mirror the difficulties in providing a clear and undisputed definition of 'populism': the historical agents, and the historians who inform us about their deeds, are never neutral in their definition of 'the people'; some are favourable while some are unfavourable to the people as an active political agent, and this fact influences the actions of the politicians as well as the narrative of our sources.

In examining these three statesmen I will adopt a specific perspective, being guided by one question: what is the nature of the relationship between a populist leader and the people? Can it be characterized as a 'love-relationship'? I wish to argue that Pericles, Cimon and Cleon styled themselves as lovers of the people and they were all depicted as characterized by love for the people in our sources; but their different kind of love for the people discloses their political motivations

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39 Cammack 2019.

40 Cammack 2019, 50. See her reading of Cleisthenes' actions on p. 55.

41 Cammack 2019, 60.

and purposes. But what does it mean to love the people? Should we take this as simply a metaphor, an evocative formula, or is it possible to construe love as an actual kind of erotic or affective political relation?

The question has been examined, adopting a psychoanalytic perspective strongly influenced by Lacan, by Victoria Wohl in her very interesting and thought-provoking *Love among the Ruins* (2002). Wohl reconstructs the deep and intricate web of love-relations in democratic Athens as they appear in public discourse. She pinpoints some prototypical examples, such as the pederastic love between Harmodius and Aristogeiton, who were glorified as the tyrant-slayers who put an end to the Pisistratid tyranny; the uncontrollable sexual drive of the tyrant; the relationship between active citizenship and active masculinity, whose importance is revealed, for instance, in the episode of the mutilation of the Hermai in 415 BCE. Wohl's reconstruction of the complexity of these love bonds makes the notion of citizens' love for the city deeper and more meaningful. It makes us understand why an Athenian citizen could "fall in love" with Athens. And why 'erotic' language could be used to describe political relationships.

Before using some of Wohl's insights in our investigation of the love-relation between the three Athenian statesmen and their city, I wish to make two general considerations. First, our contemporary political discourse has little room for love. The birth of modernity, with its hard and fast distinction between the public and the private, has relegated love into the private realm: we love our spouses, our children, our friends, but we do not love the State or the government nor do we expect that they reciprocate. We hardly love our country, as many political theorists and sociologists lament.[42] Second, when it comes to the existence and purpose of the State, our political discourse, both in its liberal and in its socialist versions, emphasizes the notions of rationality, interest and law: we obey the laws for a mixture of rational and selfish considerations, because we expect protection and, sometimes, welfare from the government. Accordingly, we do not have room for the idea of "political friendship" (*philia politikē*), which plays such a fundamental role in Plato's and Aristotle's theories. For them, friendship among citizens translates into concord, *homonoia*, thinking alike about the most important matters concerning the political community. Concord keeps the city together even more than the laws; Plato and Aristotle argued, therefore, that the lawgiver must devise ways to create such a sentiment. Among other educational devices. Plato relied on *sōphrosynē*, the common virtue, to keep citizens in their station

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42 See, for instance, Alasdair MacIntyre's (1999) famous complaint that, since the modern liberal State has become like a giant utility company, dying for one's country equals dying for one's telephone company.

but also to create bonds of friendship. The entire *Republic* can be read as a gigantic effort to educate the citizens' eros and to direct it towards philosophy and noble goals: this is "the art of conversion" of the soul (*technē tēs periagōgēs*) which keeps the parts of the soul in good order and keeps *stasis* at bay.[43] Eros too has his place in Plato's thought. In the *Symposium* Phaedrus argues that if there were a way to create a city of lovers and beloved, they would be the best citizens, since they would refrain from what is base and instead compete for honour (*philotimoumenoi*).[44] Aristotle devoted two books in the *Nicomachean Ethics* to the notion of friendship, including political friendship, and its beneficial effects on the citizens. Recent revivals of Aristotle's ethical and political thought have all but neglected this important aspect.[45]

On the contrary, in Athenian politics, and especially in democratic discourse, the city itself, but also the regime (*dēmokratia*) and the *dēmos* could become objects of love. Political love can assume many forms. The two most common verbs to express this feeling are *phileō* and *eraō*, which carry different overtones. *Phileō* means loving without sexual connotations, cherishing and regarding with affection, as in the case of friendship (*philia*). *Eraō* and *erōs* denote sexual passion, intense desire, even lust. It is very interesting that both these verbs were used in 5th century BCE Athenian politics.

I will start with a curious document. There is an extant inscription on marble reporting a treaty between Athens and the city of Colophon, probably dated 447/6.[46] It contains an oath sworn by the Colophonians "to love" (*philein*) the Athenian *dēmos*, among other provisions: "I shall love the people of the Athenians" – we read; the Colophonians also swear that they will do what good they can to the Athenians, will not defect, will not bear a grudge about the past (*mnēsikakein)*,[47] will not over-

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43 See the penetrating observations in Voegelin 1957; Roochnik 2003; Newell 2000.

44 Plat. *Smp.* 178e.

45 Just to confine ourselves to recent times, the 1960s and 1970s saw the revival of Aristotle's notion of practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) by the movement of *Rehabilitierung der praktischen Philosophie*. Alasdair MacIntyre and others revived Aristotle's virtue ethics and his communitarian approach to politics and the good life in the 1980s. In the 1990s Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen proposed a "moderate Aristotelian essentialism" in their capabilities approach, centred on a notion of human nature identified by certain shared functions and capacities. No room for political friendship. An interesting exception is the recent Ludwig 2020; see also 2002.

46 *IG* I³ 37. For translation see Fornara 1977, 99. Mattingly 1961 and 1963 dates it to 427/6.

47 So Matthaiou 2010, 21–24: *automolein* in *IG*, but that would reduplicate the expression *ouk apostesomai* above. For *philein* he compares Ar. *Ach.* 142–144 on Sitalces, and on his restoration of *mnēsikakein* remarks: "It was mainly by the insertion of this clause in the Kolophonan oath that the Athenians tried to make sure that the Kolophonians who sympathized with the medizers would not react."

throw the democracy at Colophon. This suggests that here *philein* the Athenian *dēmos* is equivalent to *philein* the Athenian democracy – though the Athenian democracy was not in danger at whatever date one prefers for this decree. This is the only occurrence of the verb *philein* in *IG* I³, apart from 1401, where one man declares his approval of another. In addition, there are four texts in the *IG* I³ collection in which *philia* is combined with *xymmachia* (12, 76, 89, 123). Since the root of *phileō* is the same as *philos* (friend and, by extension, ally), we may surmise that in this context *philein* means "having the same friends and enemies": that was the typical formula to sign a *xymmachia* (alliance) between two cities. In this respect, in the texts cited above, *IG* I³ 89 seems the most interesting, with both *philous kai echthrous* in line 28 and *philia kai xymmachia* in lines 57–58. It is safe to conclude that *philein* here means 'holding to be a friend', the opposite of 'holding to be an enemy'.[48] It is very significative, however, that in the world of international diplomacy this kind of love-language was used.[49] Even more so if we adopt the later date of 427/6 BCE, namely at the height of Cleon's influence on the Athenian *dēmos* – Cleon, "the lover of the people".

4 Pericles, the lover of the city

Arguably the best place to start our examination of Pericles' love for Athens is the Funeral Oration he delivers for the citizens who died in the first year of the war against Sparta, as reported by Thucydides. This famous speech abides by the rules of the epideictic genre and, in it, Pericles praises the fallen by praising the constitution and the mores which made them such good citizens and brave soldiers.[50] Praise for the dead citizens becomes praise for the existing laws and institutions, and Pericles depicts an idealized Athens before his fellow citizens. In this portrait, love, in its different guises, has a fundamental part.

There is, first, love as cherishing: "We love beauty (*philokaloumen*) with moderation and we love wisdom (*philosophoumen*) without softness" – Pericles maintains – depicting the picture of a uniquely well-balanced Athenian citizen, refined in his private life as well as courageous and public-spirited. Love for

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48 For the interpretation of this inscription I wish to acknowledge the invaluable help of my friend Paul Cartledge and, through him, of Peter Rhodes and Robin Osborne, to whom go my most sincere thanks. I am solely responsible for the inferences based upon the text.

49 On the language of Athenian empire see Low 2005.

50 On the funeral oration genre see Loraux 2006; Yunis 1996.

beauty and love for wisdom are quintessentially aristocratic pursuits and Pericles is here ennobling the entire Athenian citizenry.[51]

The tone of the discourse rises, and then peaks with Pericles' famous statement: "In short, I say that the entire city is the school of Greece" (Th. 2.41.1). But the most significant part is the argument Pericles produces to support his assertion: "that this is no mere boast produced for the occasion, but plain matter of fact (*alētheia*), is proved by the power (*dynamis*) of the city" (2.41.2). Both the words 'power' and 'truth' recur twice in this passage and disclose Pericles' (and more generally Thucydides') assumption that power is the standard by which one should evaluate the quality of a political community. Behind the beautiful buildings there is the Athenian *archē* over the Hellenic world and beyond; that power and empire that Pericles will evoke also in his last speech, maintaining that the memory of Athenian greatness "will descend to the latest posterity" even if Athens yields to the universal law of decay.[52] It is here, at the acme of his funeral speech, that Pericles urges the Athenians

τὴν τῆς πόλεως δύναμιν καθ' ἡμέραν ἔργῳ θεωμένους καὶ ἐραστὰς γιγνομένους αὐτῆς

to gaze, day after day, upon the power (*dynamin*) of the city and become her lovers (*erastai*). (Th. 2.43.1, transl. M. Hammond).[53]

The use of the word *erastēs* and its erotic connotations have not gone unnoticed. This is no simple exhortation to love one's country.[54] And what I find most interesting is the fact that the beauty of Athens is summarized by, nay identified in her power. Power, and the glory that accompanies it, make a city beautiful and 'lovable'. Pericles exhorts his fellow citizens to bring love into the public arena and points to the city herself as a beautiful object of love. Every citizen should be like Pericles himself and have a passionate love for the city "for what she is in actuality (*ergōi*)".

The point I wish to stress is that Pericles' funeral oration depicts Athens as one single agent, who acts sometimes for the good and sometimes for the bad and

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51 See e. g. Arist. *EN* I 9, 1099a11–13 on *philokalia* and its opposition to "the many"; and X 9, 1179b8–9 where *philokalia* is connected to nobility and opposed again to "the many". On this see Wohl 2002, 41–42, who correctly notices the transformation of the Athenian people into a (democratic) elite and makes many interesting observations, pressing perhaps too much the aristocratic/erotic side.

52 Th. 2.64.3.

53 On this expression see Monoson 1994; Scholtz 2007.

54 The kind of exhortation we find in the orator Lycurgus in a passage probably reminiscent of this. Lycurg. *Contra Leo.* 100 praises Euripides for his beautiful words about Athens, which "will implant in their hearts a love for their country (*to tēn patrida philein*)" in all Athenian citizens.

can therefore be subject to moral judgment.[55] Pericles' exhortation to his fellow countrymen is to love the entire city, not a section of it, the *dēmos*. It is thus very significant that in rejecting the criticism levelled at him by the Athenians distraught by the plague, Pericles describes himself as "one who loves his city (*philopolis*) and one who is above being influenced by money" (2.60.5). Pericles is *philopolis* and not merely *philodēmos*: his 'love' encompasses the entire city, not merely one part. It is worth noting that his entire discourse is punctuated by the difference between the utility of the private individual (*idiotēs*) and the interest of the entire city, the opposition between private misfortunes and common safety. Pericles also stigmatizes *apragmosynē* and being *apragmōn*: those who are politically apathetic, who do not engage in politics and do not contribute to increasing and preserving the power of Athens, show their lack of love for the city.[56]

Pericles' rhetoric was justly famous, and his words flesh out the image of Athens as a beautiful common creation, and possession, of all her citizens. His are seductive words, which act as an enchantment in the minds of his listeners, according to Gorgias' famous statement: "*Logos* is a powerful lord which, by means of the finest and most invisible body effects the divinest works".[57] It is thus interesting to read in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* of a discussion about how to gain friends in which Socrates evokes the power of Pericles' speech in these terms: "I have heard that Pericles knew spells and put them on the city and so made her love (*philein*) him".[58]

Plutarch gives us a more nuanced view of Pericles. He knows and considers the attacks on Pericles by the Comedy and describes two stages in Pericles' political career. In the first phase he was prone to please the *dēmos* as a counterpart to his opponents' reliance on the *kaloikagathoi*; he dismissed this policy after the ostracism of Thucydides the son of Melesias. Here are Plutarch's words:

Ἐπεὶ δὲ Θουκυδίδης μὲν ἀριστοκρατικήν τινα τὴν τοῦ Περικλέους ὑπογράφει πολιτείαν, „λόγῳ μὲν οὖσαν δημοκρατίαν, ἔργῳ δ᾽ ὑπὸ τοῦ πρώτου ἀνδρὸς ἀρχήν", ἄλλοι δὲ πολλοὶ πρῶτον ὑπ᾽ ἐκείνου φασὶ τὸν δῆμον ἐπὶ κληρουχίας καὶ θεωρικὰ καὶ μισθῶν διανομὰς προαχθῆναι, κακῶς ἐθισθέντα καὶ γενόμενον πολυτελῆ καὶ ἀκόλαστον ὑπὸ τῶν τότε πολιτευμάτων ἀντὶ σώφρονος καὶ αὐτουργοῦ, θεωρείσθω διὰ τῶν πραγμάτων αὐτῶν ἡ αἰτία τῆς μεταβολῆς. ἐν ἀρχῇ μὲν γὰρ ὥσπερ εἴρηται πρὸς τὴν Κίμωνος δόξαν ἀντιταττόμενος ὑπεποιεῖτο τὸν δῆμον,

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55 E. g. leaving behind "everlasting memorials of enterprises good and bad (μνημεῖα κακῶν τε κἀγαθῶν ἀίδια ξυγκατοικίσαντες)": Th. 2.41.4.

56 Th. 2.63.2f.; 2.64.4.

57 DK 82 B 11.8: λόγος δυνάστης μέγας ἐστίν, ὃς σμικροτάτωι σώματι καὶ ἀφανεστάτωι θειότατα ἔργα ἀποτελεῖ.

58 X. *Mem.* 2.6.12f.: ἤκουσα μὲν ὅτι Περικλῆς πολλὰς ἐπίστατο, ἃς ἐπᾴδων τῇ πόλει ἐποίει αὐτὴν φιλεῖν αὑτόν.

ἐλαττούμενος δὲ πλούτῳ καὶ χρήμασιν, ἀφ' ὧν ἐκεῖνος ἀνελάμβανε τοὺς πένητας, δεῖπνόν τε καθ' ἡμέραν τῷ δεομένῳ παρέχων Ἀθηναίων καὶ τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους ἀμφιεννύων, τῶν τε χωρίων τοὺς φραγμοὺς ἀφαιρῶν ὅπως ὀπωρίζωσιν οἱ βουλόμενοι, τούτοις ὁ Περικλῆς καταδημαγωγούμενος τρέπεται πρὸς τὴν τῶν δημοσίων διανομήν.

διὸ καὶ μᾶλλον ἰσχύσας ὁ Περικλῆς ἐν τῷ δήμῳ κατεστασίασε τὴν βουλήν, ὥστε τὴν μὲν ἀφαιρεθῆναι τὰς πλείστας κρίσεις δι' Ἐφιάλτου, Κίμωνα δ' ὡς φιλολάκωνα καὶ μισόδημον ἐξοστρακισθῆναι, πλούτῳ μὲν καὶ γένει μηδενὸς ἀπολειπόμενον, νίκας δὲ καλλίστας νενικηκότα τοὺς βαρβάρους καὶ χρημάτων πολλῶν καὶ λαφύρων ἐμπεπληκότα τὴν πόλιν, ὡς ἐν τοῖς περὶ ἐκείνου γέγραπται. τοσοῦτον ἦν τὸ κράτος ἐν τῷ δήμῳ τοῦ Περικλέους.

Thucydides describes the administration of Pericles as rather aristocratic, – 'in name a democracy, but in fact a government by the greatest citizen.' But many others say that the people was first led on by him into allotments of public lands, festival-grants, and distributions of fees for public services, thereby falling into bad habits, and becoming luxurious and wanton under the influence of his public measures, instead of frugal and self-sufficing. Let us therefore examine in detail the reason for this change in him. In the beginning, as has been said, pitted as he was against the reputation of Cimon, he tried to ingratiate himself with the people. And since he was the inferior in wealth and property, by means of which Cimon would win over the poor, – furnishing a dinner every day to any Athenian who wanted it, bestowing raiment on the elderly men, and removing the fences from his estates that whosoever wished might pluck the fruit, – Pericles, outdone in popular arts of this sort, had recourse to the distribution of the people's own wealth.For this reason all the more did Pericles, strong in the affections of the people, lead a successful party against the Council of the Areopagus. Not only was the Council robbed of most of its jurisdiction by Ephialtes, but Cimon also, on the charge of being a lover of Sparta and a hater of the people, was ostracized, – a man who yielded to none in wealth and lineage, who had won most glorious victories over the Barbarians, and had filled the city full of money and spoils, as is written in his Life. Such was the power of Pericles among the people. (Plu. *Per.* 9.1–5, transl. B. Perrin)

Plutarch reiterates this last point in his *Comparison of the Lives of Pericles and Fabius Maximus* 3, where he speaks of "the factious (*stasiasmon*) opposition of Pericles to Cimon and Thucydides, who were both true and good men and of the highest birth [. . .]".[59] According to Plutarch, then, Pericles' first phase was factional and he had recourse to ingenious means to win the people over; his second phase, with no opposition, showed his love for the city and his ability to pursue policies that benefited all. Thucydides, on the other hand, emphasizes two characteristics of Pericles that show his love for the common good and distinguish him from subsequent leaders. First, his foresight (*pronoia*), for Pericles "did nothing to

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59 τὸν πρὸς Κίμωνα καὶ Θουκυδίδην στασιασμόν, ἄνδρας ἀγαθοὺς καὶ ἀριστοκρατικούς. Plutarch subscribes to the ideology of elite leadership. Quoting Aristotle at the beginning of his *Life of Nicias*, he states that Nicias, Thucydides son of Melesias, and Theramenes were the best citizens of Athens: all "had a father's good will and love (*eunoian kai philian*) toward the *dēmos*" (*Nic.* 2.1; cf. Arist. *Ath. pol.* 28.5).

risk the safety of the city itself. But his successors did the exact opposite", driven by private ambition and private profit. Also, famously, "it was he who lead the people, rather than they who led him" (2.65), whereas his successors "adopted methods of demagogy which resulted in their losing control over the actual conduct of affairs" (2.65). Thucydides blames internal strives for the final defeat and surrender of Athens: in the love-language we have chosen to adopt, Pericles' love for the city translated into policies that aggrandized the entire city; whereas his successors loved only one part(-y) or merely loved themselves.

5 Cimon, the mild-mannered statesman

Pericles' antagonist Cimon, the son of Miltiades (the general who led the Athenian army at Marathon) was not only an excellent general himself but also a very good statesman, who advocated a policy of appeasement with Sparta and, simultaneously, an aggressive panhellenic policy against the Persian empire. He was also famous for his enormous wealth, which he used displaying great generosity towards his fellow citizens. Plutarch begins his portrait of Cimon by remarking his "unending generosity", writing that Cimon's generosity (*aphthonia*) surpassed the hospitality and philanthropy (*philanthrōpian*) of the ancient Athenians.[60] Cimon gave public banquets that everybody could attend; he took off the hedgerows delimiting his properties so that everyone could use of his fields; he and his associates routinely gave money to the poor. This generosity had also a political reward: by nourishing the poor – Plutarch observes – Cimon left them free to devote themselves to public affairs (*Cim.* 10.1). Plutarch comments that after Cimon's death Athens and Sparta were aroused one against the other by "demagogues and warmongers" (*Cim.* 19). He saw these people as partisans who looked only to their own advantage while Cimon himself was the opposite of a demagogue and acted for the common good, fighting the "natural enemies" of the Athenians, namely the barbarians. Plutarch also emphasizes Cimon's gentleness (*praotēs*), but in his *Comparison of Lucullus and Cimon* 2 observes that "aristocratic natures are little in accord with the multitude, and seldom please it".[61]

A political consequence of this benevolence towards his fellow countrymen was the creation of a loyal group of personal supporters in a sort of *clientes* status *ante litteram*. Cimon, following in the footsteps of his father Miltiades and of Aristides, had a truly panhellenic political programme, which he thought could bene-

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60 Plu. *Cim.* 10.

61 αἱ γὰρ ἀριστοκρατικαὶ φύσεις ὀλίγα τοῖς πολλοῖς <συν>ἀδουσι καὶ πρὸς ἡδονὴν ἔχουσι.

fit the entire city as well as all Greece. In this respect, we could argue that Cimon's love for the common good embraced all Greece and was not limited to Athens only. Concerning this, Loren J. Samons II makes an interesting observation: "In fact, after the vote in 462/1 to assist Sparta during the helot revolt, we rarely see the Athenians voting to support policies that could not be painted as profitable for the citizens or the city".[62]

6 Cleon, the first populist leader in history?

Cleon is notoriously one of the preferred targets of Aristophanes' comedy, where he is attacked at every level: moral (for his greediness), political (for being a war-monger) and personal (for his violence, boorishness and lack of self-control). He is also openly despised, both personally and politically, by Thucydides and the opinions of these two contemporary authors have permanently influenced the view of posterity.[63] The weight of these judgements is reflected already in Aristotle, who lists Cleon as the head of the popular party in Athens after Pericles' death, and as the antagonist of Nicias, leader of the aristocratic party.[64] Aristotle observes that, after Pericles' death,

> πρῶτον γὰρ τότε προστάτην ἔλαβεν ὁ δῆμος οὐκ εὐδοκιμοῦντα παρὰ τοῖς ἐπιεικέσιν· ἐν δὲ τοῖς πρότερον χρόνοις ἀεὶ διετέλουν οἱ ἐπιεικεῖς δημαγωγοῦντες.

> the people now for the first time adopted a head who was not in good repute with the respectable classes (*epieikeis*), whereas in former periods those always continued to lead the people. (Arist. *Ath. pol.* 28.1, transl. H. Rackham)

Concerning Cleon himself, he remarks that:

> Περικλέους δὲ τελευτήσαντος, τῶν μὲν ἐπιφανῶν προειστήκει Νικίας ὁ ἐν Σικελίᾳ τελευτήσας, τοῦ δὲ δήμου Κλέων ὁ Κλεαινέτου, ὃς δοκεῖ μάλιστα διαφθεῖραι τὸν δῆμον ταῖς ὁρμαῖς, καὶ πρῶτος ἐπὶ τοῦ βήματος ἀνέκραγε καὶ ἐλοιδορήσατο, καὶ περιζωσάμενος ἐδημηγόρησε, τῶν ἄλλων ἐν κόσμῳ λεγόντων.

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62 Samons 2004, 51.
63 One may see Finley 1962 for an ingenious attempt to depict a more even-handed portrait of Cleon. Finley notices the influence of the ancient authors' damnation of Cleon in the fact that even contemporary interpreters, more or less knowingly, are reluctant to use the word 'statesman' referred to Cleon.
64 Arist. *Ath. pol.* 28.

When Pericles died, Nicias, who died in Sicily, held the headship of the men of distinction, and the head of the People was Cleon son of Cleaenetus, who is thought to have done the most to corrupt the people by his impetuous outbursts and was the first person to use bawling and abuse on the platform, and to gird up his cloak before making a public speech, all other persons speaking in orderly fashion. (Arist. *Ath. pol.* 28.3, transl. H. Rackham)

From Plutarch we learn that Cleon started his political career by attacking and then prosecuting Pericles for his unwillingness to engage the Spartans in battle at the outset of the Peloponnesian war.[65] From this information, we may surmise that he was more radical than Pericles in his policy of hostility towards Sparta, although Plutarch adds that Cleon had selfish reasons of personal gain behind his behaviour, namely he meant to "take advantage of the wrath with which the citizens regarded him [=Pericles] to make his own way toward the leadership of the people."[66]

One remarkable fact about Cleon is that our two contemporary sources depict a quite consistent picture of him. Accordingly, Anthony Andrewes aptly commented that "Aristophanes' Kleon is recognizably a caricature of the same man we find in Thucydides".[67] When Cleon appears on the scene, he is introduced this way by Thucydides: "He was remarkable among the Athenians for the violence of his character (*biaiotatos*), and at this time he exercised far the greatest influence over the people".[68] In the debate about Pylos, Thucydides describes Cleon as "a popular leader *(dēmagōgos)* of the day who had the greatest influence over the people" (4.21.3). The most interesting point about Cleon in Thucydides' account is perhaps his attack on the elite in the name of the common sense of the ordinary man:

ἀμαθία τε μετὰ σωφροσύνης ὠφελιμώτερον ἢ δεξιότης μετὰ ἀκολασίας, οἵ τε φαυλότεροι τῶν ἀνθρώπων πρὸς τοὺς ξυνετωτέρους ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πλέον ἄμεινον οἰκοῦσι τὰς πόλεις. οἱ μὲν γὰρ τῶν τε νόμων σοφώτεροι βούλονται φαίνεσθαι [. . .].

lack of learning (*amathia*) combined with sound common sense (*sōphrosynē*) is more helpful than the kind of cleverness (*dexiotēs*) that gets out of hand and as a general rule, cities are better governed by the man in the street (*phauloteroi*) than by intellectuals (*xynetōterous*). These are the sort of people who want to appear wiser than the laws [. . .]. (Th. 3.37.3, transl. R. Warner)

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65 In 431–430 BCE. See Plu. *Per.* 33 and 35.

66 Plu. *Per.* 33.6: διὰ τῆς πρὸς ἐκεῖνον ὀργῆς τῶν πολιτῶν πορευόμενος ἐπὶ τὴν δημαγωγίαν.

67 Andrewes 1962, 80.

68 Th. 3.36: ὢν καὶ ἐς τὰ ἄλλα βιαιότατος τῶν πολιτῶν τῷ τε δήμῳ παρὰ πολὺ ἐν τῷ τότε πιθανώτατος. Compare Aristophanes' reference to Cleon as "the beast with the sharp teeth": *V.* 1031; *Pax* 754.

A seasoned speaker, Cleon knows how to pitch his speech to please the *dēmos*, which does not appreciate someone who appears too clever.[69] Recall Thucydides' remark about the orator Antiphon, who was regarded with suspicion by the multitude for his reputation for cleverness (*deinotates*).[70] Thucydides final judgement on Cleon after his death at Pylos is both harsh and scathing:

> καὶ ἐχρήσατο τῷ τρόπῳ ᾧπερ καὶ ἐς τὴν Πύλον εὐτυχήσας ἐπίστευσέ τι φρονεῖν·

> He was in the same confident frame of mind that he had been in at Pylos, where his good luck (*eutychēsas*) had convinced him that he had some brains (*ti phronein*). (Th. 5.7.3, transl. R. Warner)

Cleon, or rather his stage alter-ego Paphlagon, is the first politician to be described with the traits of a populist demagogue; the same traits are present and caricatured in the deforming mirror of the comedy. In fact, the first occurrence of the word *dēmagōgia* is in Aristophanes' *Knights* (424 BCE): it is worth noting that it is this word, not *dēmagōgos,* that occurs in Aristophanes. In the play Demosthenes, one of Demos' slaves, comments:

> ἡ δημαγωγία γὰρ οὐ πρὸς μουσικοῦ
> ἔτ' ἐστὶν ἀνδρὸς οὐδὲ χρηστοῦ τοὺς τρόπους,
> ἀλλ' εἰς ἀμαθῆ καὶ βδελυρόν.

> Leading the people (*dēmagōgia*) is no longer a job for the educated or well-mannered man, but for the ignorant rascal. (Ar. *Eq.* 191, transl. mine)

It is evident from this statement that 'leading the people' (*dēmagōgia*) is not necessarily a bad activity and that the word has a neutral sense: to maintain that leading the people is no longer a job for the well-educated implies that it was so beforehand, and this may refer to previous leaders of the popular faction such as Ephialtes and Pericles. We may recall that Pericles himself was described as the *rhētor par excellence*,[71] was called *prostatēs tou dēmou*[72] and *dēmagōgos*.[73] Aristotle, in his *Constitution of the Athenians*, presents us with an interesting list of leaders of the *dēmos*:

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69 The danger of being deceived by clever speakers becomes a *topos* in 4th-century oratory. See Rosalind Thomas in this volume.
70 Th. 8.68. See also the allusions to the anti-intellectualism of the *dēmos* in Adeimantus' discourse in Plat. *Resp.* II, 365d.
71 Eup. fr. 102 K.-A.; Plu. *Dem.* 6.
72 Th. 2.65; X. *Mem.* 1.2.40.
73 Isoc. 8.126; 15.234.

ἐξ ἀρχῆς μὲν γὰρ καὶ πρῶτος ἐγένετο προστάτης τοῦ δήμου Σόλων, δεύτερος δὲ Πεισίστρα-
τος, τῶν εὐγενῶν καὶ γνωρίμων· καταλυθείσης δὲ τῆς τυραννίδος Κλεισθένης, τοῦ γένους
ὢν τῶν Ἀλκμεωνιδῶν, καὶ τούτῳ μὲν οὐδεὶς ἦν ἀντιστασιώτης, ὡς ἐξέπεσον οἱ περὶ τὸν Ἰσα-
γόραν. μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα τοῦ μὲν δήμου προειστήκει Ξάνθιππος, τῶν δὲ γνωρίμων Μιλτιάδης,
ἔπειτα Θεμιστοκλῆς καὶ Ἀριστείδης· μετὰ δὲ τούτους Ἐφιάλτης μὲν τοῦ δήμου, Κίμων δ’ ὁ
Μιλτιάδου τῶν εὐπόρων· εἶτα Περικλῆς μὲν τοῦ δήμου, Θουκυδίδης δὲ τῶν ἑτέρων, κη-
δεστὴς ὢν Κίμωνος. Περικλέους δὲ τελευτήσαντος, τῶν μὲν ἐπιφανῶν προειστήκει Νικίας ὁ
ἐν Σικελίᾳ τελευτήσας, τοῦ δὲ δήμου Κλέων ὁ Κλεαινέτου, [. . .].

For Solon was the first and original head of the People, and the second was Peisistratus,
who was one of the men of nobility and note. After the tyranny had been put down, Cleis-
thenes, a member of the family of the Alcmaeonidae, was head of the People, and he had no
opponent, since the party of Isagoras was banished; but after this Xanthippus held the head-
ship of the People, and Miltiades of the notables; and then Themistocles and Aristides; and
after them Ephialtes held the headship of the People, and Cimon son of Miltiades of the
wealthy; and then Pericles of the People and Thucydides of the others, he being a relation of
Cimon. When Pericles died, Nicias, who died in Sicily held the headship of the men of dis-
tinction, and the head of the People was Cleon son of Cleaenetus [. . .]. (Arist. *Ath. pol.*
28,2–3; transl. H. Rackham)

Cleon's unscrupulous selfishness always comes to the fore in our sources, fol-
lowed by a number of base vices: his greediness and low morality are mocked in
the opening lines of Aristophanes' *Acharnians* (425 BCE), where he has to spit the
five talents' bribe received from Athenian allies for making them pay a lower
tribute. This trait is confirmed in the *Knights*, where the Chorus states that Cleon
has the culture of a swine and can tune the lyre only to the Dorian style, namely
to the bribery mode.[74]

   We are now in the best position to focus on the two most conspicuous traits
of Cleon's political rhetoric. It emerges that one feature of his tactic in politics
was the constant denunciation of tyranny and conspiracy, accompanied by his
promise to be ready to give his own life to defend the *dēmos*. It is evident that
Aristophanes' quips and taunt would not be effective if they were not connected
to the real Cleon: caricature always has a foundation in reality. For instance, in
the *Knights*, Aristophanes has Cleon shout "Conspirators, conspirators!" every
time the chorus of knights appears on the scene.[75] In the same play, Cleon treats
the plot against himself as a conspiracy against the *dēmos* and thus against the
entire city.[76] Cleon's incendiary rhetoric both kindled and exploited the fear of
the overturning of democracy at Athens. In the *Wasps* (422 BCE), a character who

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74 Ar. *Eq.* 985–996.
75 Ar. *Eq.* 236, 257, 452, 476, 478, 628, 862; see also *V.* 345, 383, 417, 464, 487.
76 Ar. *Eq.* 235–239, 255–257, 626–631; cf. 730f. On Cleon's populist traits as portrayed in Aristo-
phanes' *Knights* see Christoph Riedweg in this volume.

is evidently "a hater of the city" (*misopolin*) makes the proposal to stop the trials – "a manifest tyranny"![77] Here too suspects, conspirators and philo-laconism are everywhere. When faced with the accusation of hating the people and loving monarchy (*misodēme kai monarchias erastas*), Bdelycleon launches into a tirade:

ὡς ἅπανθ᾽ ὑμῖν τυραννίς ἐστι καὶ ξυνωμόται,
ἤν τε μεῖζον ἤν τ᾽ ἔλαττον πρᾶγμά τις κατηγορῇ.
ἧς ἐγὼ οὐκ ἤκουσα τοὔνομ᾽ οὐδὲ πεντήκοντ᾽ ἐτῶν
νῦν δὲ πολλῷ τοῦ ταρίχους ἐστὶν ἀξιωτέρα,
ὥστε καὶ δὴ τοὔνομ᾽ αὐτῆς ἐν ἀγορᾷ κυλίνδεται.
ἢν μὲν ὠνῆταί τις ὀρφῶς, μεμβράδας δὲ μὴ ᾽θέλη,
εὐθέως εἴρηχ᾽ ὁ πωλῶν πλησίον τὰς μεμβράδας·
"οὗτος ὀψωνεῖν ἔοιχ᾽ ἄνθρωπος ἐπὶ τυραννίδι."
ἢν δὲ γήτειον προσαιτῇ ταῖς ἀφύαις ἥδυσμά τι,
ἡ λαχανόπωλις παραβλέψασά φησι θατέρῳ·
"εἰπέ μοι· γήτειον αἰτεῖς· πότερον ἐπὶ τυραννίδι;
ἢ νομίζεις τὰς Ἀθήνας σοὶ φέρειν ἡδύσματα;"

Everything is now tyranny and conspirators for you, no matter what is concerned, whether it be large or small. Tyranny! I have not heard the word mentioned once in fifty years, and now it is more common than salt-fish, the word is even current on the market. If you are buying gurnards and do not want anchovies, the huckster next door, who is selling the latter, at once exclaims, "That is a man whose kitchen savours of tyranny!" If you ask for onions to season your fish, the green-stuff woman winks one eye and asks, "Ha, you ask for onions! are you seeking to tyrannize, or do you think that Athens must pay you your seasonings as a tribute?" (Ar. *V.* 489–499: transl. E. O' Neill, jr)

Every act that looks *asymmetron* is suspicious, even in the comic deforming mirror. Xanthias reinforces Bdelycleon's point thus:

κἀμέ γ᾽ ἡ πόρνη χθὲς εἰσελθόντα τῆς μεσημβρίας,
ὅτι κελητίσαι ᾽κέλευον, ὀξυθυμηθεῖσά μοι
ἤρετ᾽ εἰ τὴν Ἱππίου καθίσταμαι τυραννίδα.

Yesterday I went to see a whore about noon and told her to get on top; she flew into a rage, pretending I wanted to restore the tyranny of Hippias.

To which Bdelycleon can add:

ταῦτα γὰρ τούτοις ἀκούειν ἡδέ᾽, εἰ καὶ νῦν ἐγώ,
τὸν πατέρ᾽ ὅτι βούλομαι τούτων ἀπαλλαχθέντα τῶν
ὀρθροφοιτοσυκοφαντοδικοταλαιπώρων τρόπων

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77 Ar. *V.* 417. On Aristophanes' deep understanding of the Athenian demagogic power system see Gunther Martin in this volume.

ζῆν βίον γενναῖον ὥσπερ Μόρυχος, αἰτίαν ἔχω
ταῦτα δρᾶν ξυνωμότης ὢν καὶ φρονῶν τυραννικά.

That's the talk that pleases the people! As for myself, I want my father to lead a joyous life like Morychus instead of going away before dawn basely to calumniate and condemn; and for this I am accused of conspiracy and tyrannical practice! (Ar. *V.* 488–507, transl. E. O' Neill, jr.)

On similar lines, in the Mytilenean debate, Thucydides reports Cleon reproaching the Athenian people, and democracy, for being unable to rule over an empire. In his explanation, Cleon gives a lesson in *Realpolitik*:

διὰ γὰρ τὸ καθ' ἡμέραν ἀδεὲς καὶ ἀνεπιβούλευτον πρὸς ἀλλήλους καὶ ἐς τοὺς ξυμμάχους τὸ αὐτὸ ἔχετε, [. . .] οὐ σκοποῦντες ὅτι τυραννίδα ἔχετε τὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ πρὸς ἐπιβουλεύοντας αὐτοὺς καὶ ἄκοντας ἀρχομένους [. . .].

Because fear and conspiracy play no part in your daily relations with each other, you imagine that the same thing is true of your allies [. . .]. What you do not realize is that your empire is a tyranny exercised over subjects who do not like it and who are always plotting against you [. . .]. (Th. 3.37.2, transl. R. Warner)

Thucydides also remarks that Cleon was opposed to peace because he thought that in quiet times people would be less likely to believe his "slander of others" (5.16.1). Evidently, the language of conspiracy played an important part in Cleon's political rhetoric and he thought it paid off. The fact that the Athenian people were prone to see tyranny and oligarchic conspiracy everywhere is again confirmed by Thucydides in the case of the disfigurement of the Hermae and Alcibiades' involvement with parodying the Orphic mysteries: the people found in them "evidence of a revolutionary conspiracy to overthrow the democracy".[78]

The other trait that characterizes Cleon's political rhetoric is his oft-repeated "love" for the people: he declares himself the "lover" (*erastēs*) of the *dēmos* and imports the vocabulary of love and affection into the public realm. This is shrewdly done for political reasons and it is in this context that we should read an episode reported by Plutarch: Cleon renounced his friendship with a group of wealthy and prominent people before entering politics in order to gain the support of the masses.[79] Cleon wanted to show that he had *philia* only for the people, taken as a whole, instead of a limited group of personal *philoi*. Translated into the language of politics, this means that Cleon adopted the strategy to pretend not to have a faction (*stasis*) backing him and appealed to the masses. It is again Plutarch who, in com-

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78 Th. 6.27. Th. 6.61 reports that the people "actually slept for one night under arms in the temple of Theseus" because they suspected a plot against democracy there.
79 Plu. *Mor*. 806e–807a. See the interesting observations by Connor 1971, 93–98.

paring Pericles' and Nicias' style in politics, remarks that Nicias "despaired of his ability to vie successfully with the versatile buffoonery (*bōmolochia*) by which Cleon catered to the pleasure of the Athenians".[80]

Aristophanes notoriously mocks and parodies Cleon, especially his statements that he is the "lover" and the "watchdog of the people".[81] Evidently Cleon had used the expression "watchdog of the people", which meant also watchdog of democracy, in his speeches. This probably became a commonplace for democratic leaders and was even used as a line of defence in court, as it is testified by Demosthenes in his *Against Aristogeiton 1*: "Now what is the defendant? 'He is the watchdog of the democracy,' cry his friends".[82] In fact, Plutarch has Demosthenes use the same expression in his self-defence before the Athenians: he depicts himself as the watchdog of the people against Alexander, "the Macedonian archwolf".[83]

However, Cleon's love for the *dēmos* is perhaps even more interesting. To prepare the ground, in Aristophanes' *Knights* old Demos asks the Sausage-seller whether he is related to Harmodius, one of the two tyrant-slayers, "a nobly done fact and a true friend of the *dēmos*" (*philodēmon*)[84] – an evident quip on the exaggerated use of this adjective in Athenian radical democracy. It is then Cleon's turn to display his *philia* for Demos by enumerating his acts of devotion:

καὶ πῶς ἂν ἐμοῦ μᾶλλόν σε φιλῶν, ὦ Δῆμε, γένοιτο πολίτης;
ὃς πρῶτα μὲν ἡνίκ' ἐβούλευόν σοι χρήματα πλεῖστ' ἀπέδειξα
ἐν τῷ κοινῷ, τοὺς μὲν στρεβλῶν, τοὺς δ' ἄγχων, τοὺς δὲ μεταιτῶν,
οὐ φροντίζων τῶν ἰδιωτῶν οὐδενός, εἰ σοὶ χαριοίμην.

How could there be a citizen who loves you more than I, Demos? When I was just a member of the Council, I showed you the greatest profit in the treasury, torturing and putting pressure on some and blackmailing others, not giving a thought to any private citizen, if I could please you. (Ar. *Eq.* 773–776, transl. mine)

Cleon can finally declare his absolute devotion to Demos, his passionate love: "I love you Demos, and I am your lover (*erastēs*: 732)". The Sausage-seller reproaches Demos for his gullibility in listening to such flatterers:

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80 Plu. *Nic.* 3.2: τῇ Κλέωνος εὐχερείᾳ καὶ βωμολοχίᾳ πρὸς ἡδονὴν μεταχειριζομένῃ τοὺς Ἀθηναίους διὰ τῶν ὁμοίων ἀντιπαρεξάγειν ἀπίθανος ὤν.
81 Cleon is the "watchdog" of the people against conspiracy (Ar. *Eq.* 861–863, 1017–1020, 1023f. ; *V.* 915f. , cf. 596f.; *Pax* 313–315) who "fights for the people" (Ar. *Eq.* 767, 1038, cf. 1341f.; *V.* 593, 667). Cf. Plato Comicus fr. 236 K.-A..
82 D. 25.40: τί οὖν οὗτός ἐστι; κύων νὴ Δία, φασί τινες, τοῦ δήμου.
83 Plu. *Dem.* 25.4.
84 Ar. *Eq.* 787.

πρῶτον μέν, ὁπότ' εἴποι τις ἐν τἠκκλησίᾳ,
"ὦ Δῆμ', ἐραστής εἰμι σὸς φιλῶ τέ σε
καὶ κήδομαί σου καὶ προβουλεύω μόνος,"
τούτοις ὁπότε χρήσαιτό τις προοιμίοις,
ἀνωρτάλιζες κἀκερουτίας.

Firstly, so soon as ever an orator declared in the Assembly, "Demos, I love you ardently; it is I alone who care for you and watch over your interests"; at such an exordium you would look like a cock flapping his wings or a bull tossing his horns. (Ar. *Eq.* 1340–1344, transl. mine)

We may infer from Cleon's statement that he did not believe that all citizens are lovers of the *dēmos* but only the leader, the demagogue. Sarah Monoson correctly remarks that this metaphor casts *dēmos* in a dangerously passive position. She goes on to comment:

Pericles' metaphor, on the other hand, does not divide the citizenry into leaders and the led. Pericles uses the metaphor to develop a conception of citizenship, whereas Cleon apparently used it to articulate a view of leadership.[85]

We may conclude by quoting two recent comments which add some interesting points to our previous considerations. E. M. Harris remarks that "unlike other politicians before him, Cleon exploited the weaknesses of the courts for political advantage. When he spoke in the Assembly, he used the same methods of intimidation he employed in the courts".[86] Peter J. Rhodes describes Cleon as "flamboyant" and infers from the silence of our sources that there were no more politicians like him after his death. Rhodes aptly speaks of a tightrope on which Athenian politicians had to walk, showing their excellence and expertise while at the same time professing to serve the interests of the *dēmos*.[87]

7 Conclusion

I wish to conclude that our literary evidence reveals the consistent use of a love-language in the characterization of these three Athenian statesmen. The different kind of 'love' that they profess for the people disclose their attitude, their view of

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85 Monoson 1994: 270. Wohl 2002, 96, on the contrary, reads Cleon's metaphor as a rejection of Pericles' image of an elite *dēmos*.
86 Harris 2013, 109. See also Edward M. Harris' essay in this volume, which presents even more evidence to support this point.
87 Rhodes 2016.

the people as a political agent, and their political projects. Cimon's love for the people was in fact the result of his gentle nature, which manifested in his private care for the ordinary people and especially the poor. Cimon's benevolent deeds gained him the support of many grateful citizens. We may describe this sentiment, more generally, as philanthropy, love for one's fellow citizens and fellow human beings: *philanthrōpia* characterized Cimon. In the case of Pericles, our sources are keen to distinguish him from his successors and therefore portray him as a lover of the people in the sense that he loved the entire city of Athens and cared for the common good, placing the *dēmos* at the centre of his policies. He spurred his fellow Athenians to love their city and to show their attachment by actively engaging in politics, by giving their advice and by fighting for Athens. The point of difference with Cleon and the other successors, emphasised by the contemporaries, is that Pericles did not exploit the people and, as Thucydides remarked, he led the people without being led. Cleon, on the contrary, had a passive view of the people, which he used as his political basis of support. He took up Pericles' image of love for the country but turned it into alleged devotion to a section of the citizenry – the *phauloi*. In the end, his professed love was only opportunistic pretence: not only factional, but also mere appearance.

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