

# Aristotle, the Agricultural Democracy, and the Aphytaians (*Pol.* 6, 1319a 14-19)

## Aristóteles, la democracia agrícola y los Aphytaioi (*Pol.* 6, 1319a 14-19)

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### Abstract

Aristotle normally used historical notations to support his arguments. This is somewhat true for all the works of the *corpus*, but above all for *Politics*: the nature, objectives, and methodology of the investigations in this treatise present the strongest links with actual and concrete data, and therefore with *historia*. Obviously even the Aristotle of *Politics* is not a historian who wants to report known historiographical traditions; however, regardless of his intentions, there is no doubt that the work in question (more than all the others attributed to the philosopher) contains precious ‘fragments’ of history which, in general, confirm or supplement our knowledge. There are, however, cases in which the Aristotelian *exempla* end up filling in the omissions and gaps of the available sources, such as the cursory reference to the *nomos* of the Aphytaians, which appears in the section of Book 6 dedicated to the so-called agricultural democracy.

**Keywords:** Aristotle, *Politics*, history, agricultural democracy, Aphytaians.

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## Resumen

Aristóteles usó normalmente notaciones históricas para apoyar sus argumentos filosóficos. Esto es cierto para todas las obras del *corpus*, pero sobre todo para la *Política*: la naturaleza, los objetivos y la metodología de las investigaciones en este tratado presentan los vínculos más fuertes con datos reales y concretos, y por lo tanto con la *historia*. Evidentemente, el Aristóteles de la *Política* no es un historiador que quiera informar sobre tradiciones historiográficas conocidas; sin embargo, independientemente de sus intenciones, no hay duda de que la obra en cuestión (más que todas las demás ascritas al filósofo) contiene preciosos ‘fragmentos’ de historia que, en general, confirman o complementan nuestro conocimiento. Hay, sin embargo, casos en los que los *exempla* aristotélicos acaban llenando las omisiones y lagunas de las fuentes disponibles, como la rápida y concisa referencia al *nomos* de los *Aphytaioi*, que aparece en la sección del libro 6 dedicada a la llamada democracia agrícola.

**Palabras-clave:** Aristóteles, *Política*, historia, democracia agrícola, *Aphytaioi*.

## 1. The *poleis* and the *ethne* mentioned as *exempla historica* in the *Politics* of Aristotle

*Politics* (hereafter *Pol.*) is the work that stands out the most in the *corpus Aristotelicum* for the large number of references to facts and historical figures in the form of short notations (almost always devoid of context and temporal references) throughout the treatise, mostly related to Greek cities and other Greek ethno-regional organizations<sup>2</sup>. The largest groups in this regard are the *poleis* and the *ethne*, which Aristotle mentions only once in the entire work<sup>3</sup>, or at most on two or three occasions<sup>4</sup>. However, it is also true that, due to

<sup>2</sup> There is no lack of references to persons, historical facts, and political-institutional systems regarding the multi-faceted world of the barbarians, but – considering the purpose, nature, and setting of the work – it is evident that notations of this type are decidedly less exploited by Aristotle. In general, however, on the non-Greek peoples in the *Pol.*, see Zizza 2014 and 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Cf., for example, *Antissaioi* (5, 1303a 34), *Apollonia* [on the Ionian Gulf] (4, 1290b 11), *Aphytaioi* (6, 1319a 14: see *infra*, § 2, 4ff.), *Erythrai* (5, 1305b 18), *Hestiaia/Oreos* (5, 1303a 18; 1303b 33), *Zanklaioi* (5, 1303a 35), *Heraia* (5, 1303a 15), *Thera* (4, 1290b 11), *Klazomenai* (5, 1303b 9), *Kos* (5, 1304b 25), *Lesbioi* (3, 1284a 40), *Leukas* (2, 1266b 22), *Magnetes* [on the Maeander] (4, 1289b 39), *Massalia* (5, 1305b 4; 6, 1321a 30), *Opous* (3, 1287a 8), *Rhegion* (5, 1316a 38; and *Rheginon* a 2, 1274b 23, but only to facilitate the identification of Androdamas, *nomothetes*).

<sup>4</sup> Cf., for example, *Abydos* (5, 1305b 33; 1306a 31), *Aigina* (4, 1291b 24; 5, 1306a 4), *Ambrakia* (5, 1303a 23; 1304a 31; 1311a 40), *Amphipolis-Amphipolitai* (5, 1303b 2; 1306a 2), *Apollonia-Apolloniatai* [on the Black/Euxine Sea] (5, 1303a 36-37; 1306a 9), *Thourioi* (5, 1303a 31; 1307a 27; 1307b 6), *Istros* (5, 1305b 5; 1305b 11), *Knidos* (5, 1305b 12; 1306b 5), *Kolophonioi* (4, 1290b 15;

the number of occurrences and the usually cursory nature of the references, the differences among the cases just reported and most of the remaining ones are minimal and substantially negligible. In fact, apart from the references to Athens, Syracuse, and Thebes, which appear respectively 21, 14, and 9 times<sup>5</sup>, none of the other cities and peoples mentioned by Aristotle exceed the 6 citations of the *Chalkideis-Chalkis* pairing<sup>6</sup>: *Argeioi*, *Korinthioi*, *Megareis*, and *Chioi* are mentioned 5 times<sup>7</sup>; *Epidamno*, *Rhodos*, and *Taras*, 4 times<sup>8</sup>.

On the other hand, the references to Sparta, Crete, and Carthage are not comparable to those mentioned so far in terms of the space reserved for their respective constitutions (2, 1269a 29-1273b 26) and of the twin objectives Aristotle reveals in noting, above all, the critical issues presented by each of the three *politeiai*: debunking the opinion of those who considered the political systems in question to be excellent and demonstrating that none of the known government apparatuses could be taken as a model for those who wished to reform the *polis* or to found a better one (2, 1260b 27-36). Therefore, it is from here that the investigation begins in the *Pol.* on the *ariste politeia*. In fact, in this work the *pars destruens* (from the more appropriately-termed historical-doxographic argumentation in Book 2 to that on the real constitutions in Books 5 and 6) lays the foundations for the *pars costruens*. In the latter (which occupies Books 7 and 8), Aristotle presents his political-institutional project as the best alternative to the imperfect *poleis/politeiai* of history and to those existing only “in words (*en logois*)”<sup>9</sup>. However, apart from the final ‘montage’ in the ordering

5, 1303b 10), *Kyrene* (6, 1319b 18; 1319b 22), *Leontinoi* (5, 1310b 29; 1316a 36; and 3, 1275b 27, but here only to facilitate the identification of *Gorgias*, a Sicilian philosopher, orator, and rhetorician), *Mantineia* (5, 1304a 26; 6, 1318b 25; 1318b 26), *Samioi-Samos* (3, 1284a 39; 5, 1303a 36; 1313b 24), *Sikyon* (5, 1315b 13; 1316a 30), *Sybaris-Sybaritai* (5, 1303a 29; 1303a 31), *Troizenioi* (5, 1303a 29; 1303a 30; 7, 1335a 20), *Pharsalos* (2, 1262a 24; 5, 1306a 10-11).

<sup>5</sup> *Athenai-Athenaioi*: 2, 1267b 18; 1268a 10; 3, 1275b 35; 1284a 39; 4, 1291b 24; 1300b 28; 5, 1302b 19; 1303a 8; 1303b 10; 1304a 6; 1304a 9; 1304a 28; 1305a 23; 1305b 25; 1307b 22; 1307b 23; 1310b 30; 1315b 30; 6, 1319b 21; 1322a 20; 8, 1341a 34. *Syrakousai-Syrakousioi*: 1, 1255b 24; 1259a 30; 3, 1286b 40; 5, 1302b 32; 1303a 38; 1303b 20; 1304a 27; 1306a 1-2; 1310b 30; 1312b 8; 1313b 13; 1313b 26; 1315b 35; 1316a 33. *Thebai-Thebaioi*: 2, 1269b 37; 1274a 32; 1274a 35; 1274b 2; 3, 1278a 25; 5, 1302b 29; 1306a 38; 1306b 1; 6, 1321a 28.

<sup>6</sup> 2, 1274b 24; 4, 1289b 39; 5, 1303b 2; 1304a 29; 1306a 3; 1316a 31. The generic reference the philosopher makes to the Chalcidic cities on the coasts of Italy and Sicily was excluded from the count (2, 1274a 24).

<sup>7</sup> *Argeioi-Argos*: 2, 1269b 4; 1270a 2; 5, 1302b 18; 1303a 6; 1304a 25; the case in which the name of the *Argos polis* appears only to facilitate the identification of the figure mentioned in 5, 1310b 26-27 (*Pheidon*) was not considered here. *Korinthia-Korinthioi-Korinths*: 2, 1274a 41; 3, 1280b 15; 5, 1306a 23; 1310b 29; 1315b 22; for the same reasons set out above, three references were not included in the count: 2, 1265b 12-13 (*Pheidon*); 1274a 31 (*Philolaos*); 5, 1313a 37 (*Periandros*). *Megareis*: 3, 1280b 14; 4, 1300a 17; 5, 1302b 31; 1304b 35; 1305a 24-25. *Chioi-Chios*: 1, 1259a 13; 3, 1284a 40; 4, 1291b 24; 5, 1303a 34; 1306b 5.

<sup>8</sup> *Epidamno*: 2, 1267b 18; 3, 1287a 7; 5, 1301b 21; 1304a 13-14. *Rhodos*: 2, 1271b 37; 5, 1302b 23; 1302b 32; 1304b 27. *Tarantinoi-Taras*: 4, 1291b 23; 5, 1303a 3; 1306b 31; 6, 1320b 9.

<sup>9</sup> The expression is borrowed from Plat. *Resp.* 9, 592a 10-592b 1 and is used here to refer, in general, to the *politeiai* referred to by philosophers and thinkers. Aristotle dedicated to these ‘ideal’ *poleis/politeiai* a lengthy section of the Book 2 (1261a 9-1269a 28), reserving more space for the

of the (macro) sections of the work, it seems entirely reasonable to hypothesize that the political model outlined in Books 7 and 8 represented a fundamental evaluation criterion in the analysis of the constitutions, in particular, in identifying the causes of the fall and transformation of the *politeiai*<sup>10</sup>. It seems, indeed, very likely that Aristotle had already developed a clear idea of the characteristics his *ariste politeia* should present during the extensive historical investigation he undertook in the drafting of the work and in compliance with the same prescriptions he addressed to politicians and *nomothetai* in *Rhetoric* (hereafter *Rhet.*). In fact, Aristotle believed that anyone who wanted to deal with politics and to give advice on how to best govern a community could not be satisfied with what he knew from personal experience, but instead must become *historikos*: that is, draw from the history of the Greeks and non-Greeks the necessary (and indispensable) knowledge to acquire an overall vision of things to carry out his ‘mission’ with competence, precision, and awareness<sup>11</sup>.

In the *Pol.*, therefore, *historia* is present and constitutes one of the fundamental premises. On the other hand, there is little than can be seen from the results of historical investigations; and this ‘little’ is generally more easily appreciated not only in the analysis of the constitutions of Sparta, Crete, and Carthage but also through the aforementioned historical references, to which Aristotle attributes an instrumental value.

Clearly, the fact that the Aristotle of the *Pol.* foreshadows the *historikos* Aristotle of the *Rhet.* does not mean that it was the philosopher’s intention to make history and report more or less well-known traditions in all their detail. The Stagirite wanted only to reflect on politics and carry out in the best way possible its ‘mission’: to use the history of the Greeks and non-Greeks as a sort of reservoir of ‘special cases’: a pool of information to draw on to create functional *exempla* to clarify, expand, and strengthen theoretical concepts<sup>12</sup>.

## 2. Historical notations in Books 5 and 6 of the *Politics*: a quick overview

Most of the historical notations in the *Pol.* are concentrated in Book 5 and, in part, also in Book 6, which is consistent with the content, setting, and

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arguments Plato treats above all in the *Republic* and *Laws*.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Pezzoli-Curnis 2012: 12ff., 171-172, 303-304.

<sup>11</sup> *Rhet.* I, 1359b 19-1360a 38.

<sup>12</sup> What has been said so far on Aristotle’s use of history is the result of several reflections in recent years based on a careful reading of the topic (cf., for example, Weil 1960; Moggi 2013; Bertelli 2014; Magnoli Bocchi 2019: 39ff., 57ff. and 217-219; Poddighe 2019: 291-293 and 2020), as well as studies by the author on the *Pol.* (cf., for example, Zizza 2012; 2014). For another bibliography and an in-depth look at this question (which, for reasons of space, only allows for a rapid and ‘apodictic’ treatment), see the aforementioned works and the recent edition of the *Pol.* published by «L’Erma» di Bretschneider and edited by L. Bertelli and M. Moggi (Books 1-6: 2011-2016).

objectives of this lengthy (and unitary) section of the work. Book 5, in fact, is especially devoted to the causes that have led to the ruin or to the transformations of *monarchiai*, *oligarchiai*, and *demokratiai*; Book 6, on the other hand, deals more at length with the theme of saving the constitutions and, in particular, the strategies to make democracies and oligarchies, the most widespread regimes in Greece at the time of Aristotle, as stable as possible.

This type of investigation could not but lead the author to deal more closely (or, at least, more openly) with the concreteness of the historical ‘*realia*’ (events, facts, figures, constitutions, etc.), and therefore to present a whole series of cases that were exemplificatory, explanatory, and at times demonstrative.

Of the two Books, however, the one with the fewest number of historical notations is undoubtedly Book 6; however, what is noteworthy is that the few *exempla* that Aristotle gives in presenting his arguments, in addition to generally concerning Greek cities and peoples, are all mentioned – once in the case of *Aphytaioi*, *Thebaioi*, *Massalia*, and *Taras*, or twice in the case of *Kyrene* and *Mantineia*<sup>13</sup> – when the discourse tends to focus on the most effective remedies for establishing the best possible democracy<sup>14</sup>.

Obviously, we cannot analyze all the notations in Book 6, even if, contrary to normal occurrence, they are mostly positive *exempla* which generally represent a small body of good political-institutional practices. For reasons of space, therefore, attention here will focus on the *Aphytaioi* since, to a certain extent, the information Aristotle reports fills the gaps in our very scarce and incomplete knowledge of the *polis* in question and because the *exemplum*, although referenced only once in the *Pol.*, reveals a paradigmatic strength and importance equivalent to (and in some ways even greater than) that possessed by the *poleis* and *ethne* to which the philosopher refers several times in the treatise.

In any case, so as not to lose sight of the main characteristics of the *Pol.* and the role brief historical references play in it, it is useful to begin by analyzing the argumentative context for Aristotle’s reference to the *Aphytaioi*; otherwise, we would risk giving undue emphasis and ‘exclusive’ importance to data and material the philosopher felt played a ‘service’ and support role to *politika*.

### 3. Agricultural democracy: the oldest and best *demokratia*

Having dealt with the rigid and rigorous theoretical classification of governments (Books 3-4), from Book 5 onwards Aristotle deals with the

<sup>13</sup> For specific references, cf. *supra*, n. 3ff.

<sup>14</sup> The only exception is Athens, which is mentioned first in a section on democracy (1319b 21) and subsequently in the Chapter dedicated to the systematic description of the various Greek political offices (1322a 20).

real *politeiai*, beginning Book 6 with an investigation of democracy. After critically analyzing the interpretations the *demotikoi* gave to the concepts of freedom, justice, and equality (Chapters 2-3), Aristotle goes on to formulate alternative and more functional proposals to found a democracy based on *medietas* (Chapters 3-4), and thus on a ‘just’ justice and a ‘true’ equality among all citizens. In this case, the reference model is the so-called agricultural democracy, considered to be the first and best type of democracy. In fact, in Chapter 4 the discourse reexamines the different features a democracy could assume based on the activity carried out by the most numerous segments of the *demos*, and therefore on the basis of the socio-economic characteristics of the most representative group.

Given the number of *demokratiai* mentioned (1318b 6: “four kinds of democracy”) and the order in which they are presented (from best to worst), the review coincides with the classifications proposed in Book 4<sup>15</sup>. Now, however, in 6, 1318b 6-1319b 32 (Chapter 4), the space dedicated to each of the different democratic regimes is strongly skewed in favor of the oldest democracy of all and the best one under the given conditions<sup>16</sup>. Here is where the list begins and to where Aristotle’s reflections return when, in the course of his reasoning, he presents – *per differentiam* – the progressively worse forms, ending the chapter with the most radical democracy, characterized by excess and disorderly governing<sup>17</sup>.

If it is true that in Book 6 the main purpose of the philosopher is to provide the *nomothetai* and politicians with the necessary tools not only to establish ‘*ex novo*’ stable democratic and oligarchic *politeiai*, but also to improve the existing ones (cf. Chapter 1, but also *infra* in the text), in this case the objective could undoubtedly have been achieved more easily by emphasizing not so much the ‘intermediate’ forms but the model of democracy to strive for (*i.e.* the first and best type of democracy), as well as the anti-model par excellence: the ultimate (and radical) democracy. If the ‘right measure’ is represented by the democracies at a time when the populace was composed mainly of farmers (*georgoi*), then it is necessary to return to this type of regime, identifying useful strategies in this regard (Chapters 4-5) and, above all, intervening in the contemporary democracies to correct deviations, put a stop to excess, and ensure as much as possible that the city would not end up in the hands of individuals engaged in vile activities (1319a 19-30).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. 4, 1292b 22-1293a 12 and 1298a 9-34. At 1291b 30ff., on the other hand, the types of democracies mentioned are five in all, but the first – in the axiological sense – does not appear in the subsequent lists as it refers to an ideal form of democracy that is too close to the so-called *politeia* to be considered a deviation. On this specific question, cf. in particular Pezzoli 2014: 206-207 and 220-221, with a vast bibliography; see also Canevaro 2014: 293-295.

<sup>16</sup> Obviously, ‘best’ here is not meant in an absolute sense, since for Aristotle this could only apply to the *ariste politeia* he describes in Books 7 and 8. Cf. Accattino-Curmis 2013: 20 and Bertelli 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Ober 1998: 332-339 and Bertelli 2018.

If the best populaces have the best constitutions, it goes without saying that a democracy will be more stable and long-lived the more relevant and dominant are the *plethos* that live on agriculture or pastoralism; in fact, the populace made up of farmers or shepherds have many elements in common, and they are both defined as being better than other categories of peoples. The former group (*to georgikon*), however, precedes the latter, and therefore represents absolute excellence.

With reference to what Aristotle refers to 4, 1292b 25ff. – where the best democracy is said to be the government in which sovereignty belongs to farmers and to those who possess a modest patrimony – in the chapter presently being analyzed (Book 6, Chapter 4), attention is focused on an aspect that is only mentioned in the previous classifications of democracies (Book 4): the *diaphoroi demoi* (“the fact that the populations are different”: 1317a 24) and their respective lifestyles. Therefore, what is different in the treatment in Book 4 compared to Book 6 is only the detail focused on, not the type of regime, which remains the same. Therefore, it is obvious that the unique characteristics of the best populace noted in Chapter 4 of Book 6 even include the census classifications; it is evident that the annual income required for citizenship for the *georgikos demos* had to be limited and, in some way, kept low.

In fact, since this category represented citizens who had to work to live and could not afford to waste time in politics to the neglect of their business, it was easy under these circumstances to find a mediation between the demands of the rich (*euporoi*) and the needs of the poor (*aporoí*): farmers as well as herdsmen were willing (and, in part, forced by their economic-property situation) to let the magistracy be covered by citizens who did not need to work to live; the upper classes and notables (*epieikeis/gnorimoi*), feeling neither envied by the *demos* nor hindered in their political ambition, were content to live under a democracy of this type, and they governed without fear of repercussions because the populace was content to participate only occasionally in the assemblies (perhaps only in the most important ones), limiting themselves to exercising control over the elections of the magistrates and their activities. Of course, the essential condition for this arrangement was that participation in the government did not entail significant monetary gains and that, therefore, no compensation be provided either for the magistrates or the citizens taking part in the assemblies. In this way, the wealthy minority (*oligoi-euporoi*) in the agricultural democracies would feel constantly under judgment and be more motivated to govern in a just way, without wronging anyone; the *demos*, on the other hand, could continue to take care of the land, which was its only source of income and required constant and prolonged care

over time, without, however, feeling deprived of their political rights and being completely excluded from participating in the government (1319a 1-4)<sup>18</sup>.

Having reiterated for the umpteenth time that the *georgikos demos* represented the best populace, Aristotle, from here on (and before returning to review the worst forms of democracy: 1319a 19ff.), gives his discourse a more clearly and explicitly ‘reformist’ tone, which is what principally makes the classification he proposed in the Book in question different and unique compared with the previous Books<sup>19</sup>.

To achieve a stable democracy – which an agricultural democracy can, with good reason, be considered to represent – it is necessary that citizens return to the land (or do not move away from it) and that their livelihood depends predominantly on the cultivation of the land. Consequently, the *sine qua non* for ‘straightening out’ (and saving) a wayward democracy is by preventing the creation of groups of wealthy landowners and ensuring everyone has the possibility of having a plot of land that will satisfy their food needs and allow them to achieve the census *status* necessary to acquire (or maintain) full-citizen rights.

Obviously, to ensure that these preconditions were met and to instill the hope that, if not a perfect *isomoiria*, at least an acceptable middle ground could be achieved<sup>20</sup>, the legislator had to intervene, but only after becoming a *historikos* and identifying from past and contemporary Greek history suitable instruments to draw inspiration from to achieve the objectives. This was what Aristotle prescribed in *Rhet.* and what he is prescribing even in the specific case, citing, among the first *exempla historica* of the chapter in question, the case of the Aphytaians.

<sup>18</sup> In other words, according to the most widespread institutional model in the best democracies of the past (cf. 6, 1318b 21-22 and 27-31), the system adopted in agricultural democracies provided that all citizens would elect the magistrates and control their activities; however, only a few – chosen based on the census – would hold governmental offices, so that the most important of these would be entrusted to those who belonged to groups that had a high annual income. The same ‘custom’ is also referred to elsewhere by Aristotle: cf., for example, 2, 1274a 15-18 and 3, 1281b 31-34 in reference to the political-institutional order ascribed to Solon and partly coinciding with the form of rural democracy in question, especially as regards both the election of magistrates from among citizens belonging to the upper class and the powers granted to the people (cf. Pezzoli 2014: 222 and, among others, Aubonnet 1973: 254-255; Schütrumpf-Gehrke 1996: 632; Simpson 1998: 436). On the variants to the more common system just described cf. 6, 1318b 23-32.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Bertelli 2018: 99ff.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Pol.* 2, 1266b 16-28 with Pezzoli-Curnis 2012: 262-264; see also Fantasia 1975: 1271-1274.

#### 4. The Aphytaians in the *Politics* (part I)

The reason Aristotle calls the Aphytaians to the mind of his public is quite clear: the case is presented as a methodologically paradigmatic example for politicians and *nomothetai* who wished to establish an agricultural democracy by operating on constitutions that required rectification and at risk of *metabolai*, especially in a markedly oligarchic sense<sup>21</sup>. In fact, in Aristotle's opinion, the citizens of Aphytis lived under a law that proved to be easily applicable to contemporary democracies, without necessarily having to provide for a redistribution of land ownership or equally radical interventions that could have triggered dangerous civil wars<sup>22</sup>.

What is decidedly less clear in the passage in question is the description Aristotle provides of the system whereby the estates of the citizens of Aphytis were assessed (1319a 15-19):

the citizens of Aphytis although numerous and possessing a small territory nevertheless are all engaged in agriculture (καίπερ ὄντες πολλοὶ κεκτημένοι δὲ γῆν ὀλίγην, ὅμως πάντες γεωργοῦσιν), for they are assessed not on the whole of their estates, but on divisions of them so small that even the poor can exceed the required minimum in their assessments (τιμῶνται γὰρ οὐχ ὅλας τὰς κτήσεις, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τηλικαῦτα μέρη διαιροῦντες ὥστ' ἔχειν ὑπερβάλλειν ταῖς τιμήσεσι καὶ τοὺς πένητας).

In the case in question, one cannot fail to note that, among other things, the interpretative problems posed by the text are mainly due to the concise presentation of the historical-political situation of the Aphytaians. However, one can reasonably assume that the brevity and cursory nature of the reference owed to the fact that the public the author was addressing would have known about Aphytis: this is an *exemplum* Aristotle cites with the primary objective of making the concept referred to more easily and immediately understandable<sup>23</sup>. Therefore, if the passage in question creates difficulties, the 'fault' certainly is not to be attributed to the philosopher, but above all to the ignorance of the modern-day reader: that is, to the scarce amount of information we possess about Aphytis.

<sup>21</sup> In this regard, see, for example, Newman 1902, IV: 516; Nagle 2006: 48.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. De Luna-Zizza-Curnis 2016: 587ff. and *infra* in the text. See also Newman 1902, IV: 512-515; Asheri 1966: 16-21; Fantasia 1975: 1270ff.; Schütrumpf-Gehrke 1996: 635; Simpson 1998: 437-438.

<sup>23</sup> Notoriety is the main criterion adopted in the selection of *exempla historica* (or in the choice of facts to be transformed into *exempla*): otherwise, history would be less effective and useful, since a little-known *exemplum* would end up complicating things and certainly would not represent a valid explanatory and illustrative support to *philosophia*.

## 5. Aphitys and the Aphytaians: for a brief history of a Chalkidic *polis*

The Chalkidic *polis* – located in Pallene, between Poteidaia and Neapolis<sup>24</sup>, and founded in the 8th century BCE, probably by Eretrians from Euboea<sup>25</sup> – is sufficiently well-known from an archaeological point of view<sup>26</sup>, though much less from a historical and political-institutional one.

The toponym appears for the first time in Herodotus and Thucydides, but in both cases the reference is accompanied by scarce, though essential, information. In fact, from the former we know only that Aphitys, like other nearby cities, offered ships and armed forces to Xerxes during the second Persian invasion of Greece (7.123.1).

Thucydides, on the other hand, merely states that the city was used by the Athenians as a base during their siege of Poteidaia (1.64.2). In 432 BCE, Poteidaia had rebelled against Athens and the so-called Delian League, which the *polis* had become part of perhaps since the League's establishment.

The alliance of Greek city-states led by Athens also included Aphitys, which, unlike other cities belonging to the same geographical area<sup>27</sup>, turned out to be a loyal ally. The participation of Aphitys in the alliance is suggested by the words of Thucydides (otherwise, one could not explain why the Athenians, led by Phormio, were able to stop in Aphitys and, from there, leave for Poteidaia) and confirmed epigraphically. It is in this sense that we are to understand, for example, both the fact that the city appears in the Athenian Tribute Lists some fifteen times, from 452/451 to 440/439 and from 435/434 to 429/428 BCE (but perhaps also in 425/424)<sup>28</sup>, and the privilege Athens granted by decree to the Aphytaians around 420 BCE, which allowed the latter to import a certain amount of grain<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Fig. 1: Map of the Chalkidike, at the end of the present work (Papadopoulos-Paspalas 1999: 162). In this regard, see, in addition to the sources given below in the text, Ps.-Scylax 66; Strabo 7a, 1, 27; Paus. 3, 18, 3. According to Plutarch (*Lys.* 20, 7), the city of Aphitys was in Thrace; however, it is known that, for the Greeks, the westernmost peninsula of Chalkidike belonged geographically to Thrace.

<sup>25</sup> Regarding this question specifically, cf. Zahrnt 1971: 167ff.; Tiverios 2008: 38-39; Misailidou-Despotidou 2009: 221ff.

<sup>26</sup> Among the most significant archaeological finds, worth mentioning, in addition to the temples of Ammon (?) and Dionysos (cf. *infra*, n. 30), are the remains of the defensive wall that encircled the city in the Classical period and a series of some twenty tombs that can be placed chronologically between the middle of the sixth and the end of the fifth century BCE. For details, a vast bibliography, and the results of other archaeological investigations conducted *in situ* (i.e., at modern-day Athytos), cf. Misailidou-Despotidou 1999 (and 2009); Flensted-Jensen 2004: 825; Misailidou-Despotidou 2012; Arvanitaki 2019; Misailidou-Despotidou 2019; Smith-Volioti 2019: 175ff., 180-181, 183-184.

<sup>27</sup> This is the case, for example, with Mende and Skione, which, like Poteidaia, rebelled against Athens in an attempt to leave the Delian League. Cf., among others, Nagle 2006: 49.

<sup>28</sup> Cf., for example, *IG* I<sup>3</sup> 71.III.168, 261-262, 264-272, 277, 280-282, 290. Except for a limited period (from 446/445 to 440/439 BCE), in which the sum paid into the League coffers was 1 talent, the contribution paid by the Aphytaians seems to have always been 3 talents, compared, for example, to the 8 talents paid by Mende, the 6 by Skione, or the 3,000 drachmas by Neapolis and Aige.

<sup>29</sup> *IG* I<sup>3</sup> 62 (ca. 428/427 BCE).

We also know from Plutarch and Pausanias that, in 405/404 BCE, Aphytis was besieged by Lisander, who, however, failed for some obscure reason: tradition speaks of an order the Spartan general received in a dream from the god Ammon (who, interestingly, was also venerated by the Aphytaians)<sup>30</sup> that caused him to put an end to the war and return to his homeland.

From this moment on, we have no other relevant information about Aphytis, which was probably synoecised into Kassandreia (about 316/315 BCE)<sup>31</sup>. However, it is likely that the city – “a potential stopping place for anyone traveling by sea around the Chalcidice”<sup>32</sup> – still had a certain importance in the middle of the fourth century BCE and remained independent until the radical urbanization process undertaken in the area by Cassander, and perhaps even after the actions of the latter and the founding of Kassandreia<sup>33</sup>. It is significant, moreover, that in 360/359 BCE Aphytis was mentioned in the Epidaurian list of *theorodokoi*<sup>34</sup> and that the most recent archaeological investigations have shown that the site was spared by the Macedonian King Philip II<sup>35</sup>, though suffering extensive and severe damage due to an earthquake toward the end of the 4th century BCE<sup>36</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> The Aphytaians' ties to Ammon are also echoed in other sources: cf., for example, Favorinus (fr. 96, 8 l. 25) and Stephanus Byzantinus (*Ethnica* I 561: s.v. Αφύτη). Archaeological excavations have unearthed the remains of a temple from the mid-4th century BCE which has been attributed – albeit doubtfully – to Ammon. The same doubts concern the effigy reproduced on a series of coins struck by the Aphytaians between the 5th and 4th centuries BCE (perhaps, more precisely, between the end of the 5th and the first half of the 4th century). According to some scholars, the head that appears on the obverse of some specimens was that of Zeus Ammon; others, however, believe it could be the image of a helmeted Ares or Apollo Karneios. More certain appears to be the identification of the sanctuary of Dionysos, to which Xenophon refers (*Hell.* 5.3.19). The sanctuary was found in Aphytis, in an area a little further south of the so-called temple of Ammon, and was believed to be dedicated to the god and the Nymphs. Regarding the specific issues just mentioned (in particular, the coins and sacred areas identified in the territory of Aphytis), cf. Head 1911: 209-210; Gaebler 1935: 44-46; Robinson-Clement 1938: 273; Zahrt 1971: 164ff.; Papazoglou 1988: 427-428; Flensted-Jensen 1997: 123 and 2004: 825; more recently, Tsigarida 2011. For another bibliography and archaeological finds, cf. *supra*, n. 25ff.

<sup>31</sup> Cf., for example, Hatzopoulos 1996: 121, 199-200, 231, 255.

<sup>32</sup> Nagle 2006: 48, n. 38.

<sup>33</sup> The numismatic evidence would also seem to indicate this: cf. Touratsoglou 1993: 33 and n. 5.

<sup>34</sup> *IG IV<sup>2</sup>* 1, 94, I b, l. 24. Cf. Tataki 1998: 66; Perlman 2000: 257; Mari 2001: 238, nr. 102.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Demosth. 9.26. Among other things, it seems that Aphytis managed to retain its *status* as an independent *polis* even after Philip II disbanded the Chalcidian League, of which the Aphytaians, at certain stages of their history, also had to belong to. In this regard, however, we do not have sufficient information to establish the type of relationship Aphytis had with Olynthus and the other cities of the League (cf., for example, Zahrt 1971: 7, 34-43, 50-51, 102-103, 132; Hatzopoulos 1996: 121, 199-200, 231, 255). It is likely, however, that the entry of the Aphytaians in the Chalcidian League took place after the Delian League was dissolved, and therefore at a time when the link with Athens had proven disadvantageous, perhaps even sterile and dangerous (in this regard, cf. Nagle 2006: 52).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Tsigarida 2011: 171 and n. 15.

## 6. Aphytis: a *polis* also known to Aristotle's disciples

The 'fragments' of the history of Aphytis that have come down from surviving tradition allow us not so much to produce a detailed reconstruction but to arrange the events in a vaguely chronological order.

None of the information in our possession can be considered parallel or coincident with the passage from the *Pol.*, which was our starting point. However, the Aristotelian *exemplum* is at least consistent, above all with what the philosopher's disciples apparently knew about Aphytis<sup>37</sup>. It is significant, in fact, that in *De causis plantarum* (3.15.5) Theophrastus recalls the fame the *polis* acquired for the production of wine<sup>38</sup>. It is possible, therefore, that an important (if not exclusive) source of livelihood for many of the citizens who lived on agriculture was viticulture, and thus the sale and export of wine. Moreover, it is no coincidence that many other cities in the area produced wine, which garnered them fame in the Greek world<sup>39</sup>, nor that, according to the testimony of Heraclides Lembus, *Aphytis* had to function as a kind of emporium of wine produced in the territory, stored on site, and sold to individuals, who perhaps resold it at retail (*Exc.* 72 Dilts)<sup>40</sup>.

Despite the obscurity of some details, the historical information Aristotle knows about the Aphytaians (perhaps because of autoptic knowledge of the *polis* and the lifestyle of its inhabitants) must be considered reliable and trustworthy. In this case it must be noted that the distance between Stagira and Aphytis was barely 100 km<sup>41</sup> and that we cannot exclude the possibility the political system ascribed to these *politai* was still in force at the time of Aristotle<sup>42</sup>.

<sup>37</sup> This view can also apply to an account revealed by Theopompus (fr. 141 Jacoby; *ap.* Steph. Byz. XXII 62: *s.v.* Χυτρόπολις). In fact, according to Stephanus Byzantinus, the historian mentioned the site of Chytropolis, presenting it as having been founded by the Aphytaians. Establishing the exact location of Chytropolis is somewhat difficult, although it is reasonable to think that it was in an area bordering on Aphytis (in this regard, see also Zahrnt 1971: 254). Moreover, the Aphytaians may have felt the need to extend their territory to cope with the problem noted by Aristotle: that the population was numerous and did not have much available land.

<sup>38</sup> This is indicated, for example, by the vine motif that appears on a series of coins from Aphytis (cf. Price 1987: 46, pl. 9, nr. 9; Papadopoulos-Paspalas 1999: 170, n. 26), which was a way to promote its product of excellence and reaffirm the special and identifying relationship existing between the Aphytaians and their wine production.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. especially Papadopoulos-Paspalas 1999.

<sup>40</sup> In general, on the *excerptum* in question cf. Polito 2001: 189-190.

<sup>41</sup> Nagle 2006: 48 and n. 38.

<sup>42</sup> To corroborate the latter hypothesis, we can cite the verb tenses used by the philosopher to refer to the Aphytaians in the *Pol.* and the fact that the city, unlike Olynthus and other cities in Thrace, was spared by Philip II (cf. *supra*, n. 35).

## 7. The Aphytaians in the *Politics* (part II)

The reference in the *Politics* to the so-called law of the Aphytaians was preceded by a list of three other prohibitive laws designed to ensure that the *demos* of a *polis* were tied to the land and made up for the most part of farmers:

I. prohibition for each citizen to possess more than a certain amount of land belonging to the *polis*, in particular, the land in the best areas of the city and the territory (1319a 7-10);

II. prohibition for each citizen to sell the so-called *protoi kleroi*: that is, the land distributed at the time of the foundation of the *polis* the citizen belonged to (1319a 10-11);

III. prohibition for each citizen to commit his land entirely as loan collateral (1319a 12-14)<sup>43</sup>.

The fourth law was the one in force in Aphytis. Unlike the previous ones, it was mentioned by Aristotle because it was considered a useful corrective measure when problems arose in a community due either to non-compliance or to the absence of laws like the three prohibitions mentioned above. In fact, in the opinion of the philosopher, if the Aphytaians had managed by law to always concentrate the farmers in a limited territory (*ca.* 60 km<sup>2</sup>)<sup>44</sup>, even though they represented a large group, then the same law, which in Aphytis had proven to be valuable and functional, could be considered equally valuable and functional in other situations: both in cities with a territory equal to (or more extensive than) that of the Chalkidic *polis*, and in those that were populated by *elites* made up of politically enterprising individuals eager to increase their landholdings and reserve for themselves the total management of the government<sup>45</sup>.

On the other hand, it is no coincidence that, in quoting the *exemplum* in question, Aristotle emphasizes both the method by which the Aphytaians were surveyed (not on the basis of the plots owned by citizens, but taking as a reference a minimum, and likely equal, amount of land for everyone), and the fact that, in an economic and social regime of this type, even the less well-off were able to exceed the landholding requirement, certainly enabling them to hold office and perhaps also participate in the assembly.

Therefore, if we assume that in Aphytis, even with all the ‘allowances’ permitted, the statute of *politês* probably applied only and exclusively to landowners<sup>46</sup>, those citizens who for some reason were forced to sell or

<sup>43</sup> On this discussion, cf. *supra*, § 4 (n. 22).

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Flensted-Jensen 2004: 825 and Nagle 2006: 52, n. 42.

<sup>45</sup> Cf., for example, *Pol.* 1318b 33ff. and *supra*, §§ 3-4.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Newman 1902, IV: 202 and 516 in reference to the *pantes georgousin* (*Pol.* 1319a 16-17). However, in this regard, see also *infra* in the text.

mortgage part of their possessions would have been discouraged from doing the same with the rest of their property so as not to risk losing the right of citizenship along with their property. Those who, instead, had no land holdings – and were, consequently, excluded from the *politai* – could hope to recover their lost rights using the money obtained through other jobs to obtain a small plot of land, though one no smaller than the minimum amount established by law<sup>47</sup>.

Depending on what one considers the appropriate interpretation for Aristotle's treatment of the law of the Aphytaians, there is no doubt concerning the relevance of the *exemplum* to the argumentation involving the specific case of Aphytis (1319a 6: “for the purpose of making the people an agricultural community...”): the *exemplum* and the argumentation together constitute a system of mutual relations in which the former can facilitate the understanding of the latter, and vice-versa.

However, it is difficult to establish with certainty whether there was an agricultural democracy in the *polis*, and therefore whether in the *Pol.* there is a system of mutual relations between the *exemplum* of the Aphytaians and the initial statement in Chapter 4 of Book 6, dedicated, in fact, to the best democracy under the given conditions, which was achievable only if the *demos* were composed mainly of farmers and/or shepherds. Aristotle makes no explicit statement in this regard, and it is likely this was not the reason for citing the case of Aphytis<sup>48</sup>. Nevertheless, this possibility cannot be entirely excluded for the reasons mentioned above, in particular, the fact that by setting a low level of land ownership to attain citizenship, the law of the Aphytaians encouraged even the smallest landowners to hold on to their land to gain the full rights of citizenship and minimal participation in the governing of the city, without this activity taking away significant time from the care of their property.

However, if we admit the Aphytaians lived under a democratic regime, we must then also admit that even in this case – as in the case of Mantinea, cited by Aristotle before the reference to Aphytis – it was a democracy *sui generis* (σχημά τι δημοκρατίας)<sup>49</sup>, because, while true (as mentioned above) that even participation in the assembly depended on a (albeit minimal) landholding qualification, it was also true that the landless could not be considered citizens: “e questa è una conclusione difficilmente compatibile con qualsiasi regime democratico”<sup>50</sup>. This is not the case, however, if we assume the existence of a particular and atypical *scheme* of democracy: after all, the civic body was not to

<sup>47</sup> See Simpson 1998: 438.

<sup>48</sup> This is the view, for example, of Newman 1902, IV: 517 and Keyt 1999: 210, although both scholars are inclined to believe that Aristotle considered Aphytis an example of an agricultural democracy, as did Nagle as well (2006: 49, n. 39).

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *Pol.* 6, 1318b 26-27; regarding the *exemplum* of Mantinea (6, 1318b 23-27), cf. De Luna-Zizza-Curnis 2016: 584-586.

<sup>50</sup> Besso 2014: 244.

be excessively reduced, since it was enough to have a minimum amount of land to be ‘in good standing’, fully part of the *demos*, and allowed to participate in politics, albeit within the limits imposed by the demanding work in the fields.

## 8. Aristotle, the agricultural democracy, and the Aphytaians (πάντες γεωργοῦσιν): some concluding remarks

The need to refer to the good political-institutional practices adopted by the Greeks (as well as by the barbarians) leads Aristotle to cite the case of the Aphytaians and, consequently, to give us a piece of the history of a *polis* that otherwise we would not have had.

We have seen that this was a positive example and, as such, the philosopher – unlike his usual practice – does not hide his admiration either for the *nomos* in question or for the attachment of the Aphytaians to the land. However, the idea that the treatment he gave to Aphytis in the *Pol.* was because he considered the *polis* an ideal model is one I cannot share<sup>51</sup>. In fact, on the basis of the method, the objectives, and the fundamental scientific assumptions of the *Pol.*, I consider it reasonable to exclude not only that Aristotle reasoned according to the categories of model and anti-model, but above all that the *poleis* and *ethne* mentioned as special cases in the *Pol.* were selected based on these two categories.

At most, some *poleis* and *ethne* can give the impression of functioning as models or as anti-models, even if they are not actually so; sometimes, that is, they can appear as such by virtue of the ‘framework’ adopted by Aristotle to enhance (and highlight) what turned out to be functional to a particular and specific discourse regarding a certain city or people. However, that is as far as it goes: in fact, programmatic purposes are not attributed to the particular cases in the *Pol.*, and thus they are (and remain) always and in any case more or less positive or negative (historical) examples, but never in ‘absolute’ terms.

In the *Pol.*, therefore, there are no ‘facts’ but only *exempla* taken from the facts themselves to be used in an instrumental way: to clarify a concept, demonstrate the goodness of a line of reasoning, and make it easier to understand<sup>52</sup>. Consequently, there are no ‘peoples’ and ‘cities’, but only *exempla* of peoples and cities, which cannot be said to be either models or anti-models, since it is impossible to reconstruct exactly the idea that the philosopher had of the *polis* or the *ethnos* of reference. In fact, Aristotle provides us with only ‘partial’ images and privileged points of view of history, because they are considered useful – or more useful – to his reasoning. This aspect applies both in general to all the historical accounts cursorily presented in the treatise, in particular, to the *exemplum* that concern Aphytis: the exemplary use of history has led the philosopher-historikos

<sup>51</sup> Unlike in the view of Nagle 2006: 49ff. and, above all, 74–75.

<sup>52</sup> On this topic, see also *supra*, § 1.

to allow the ‘parts of a whole’ to emerge from the text and to keep hidden the ‘whole’ (that is, the ‘system’) to which the ‘part’ belonged.

In the specific case of the Aphytaians, therefore, we know that they had an excellent law, but this information – consistent with the role that Aristotle makes history play – is not enough to support the idea that Aristotle considered the *polis* in question an ideal model of reference for the Greeks<sup>53</sup>. It is no coincidence, moreover, that in Book 2 Aristotle peremptorily states that he undertook the work and considered it appropriate to reason about politics because none of the known constitutions worked correctly: in one way or another, all the *politeiai* he had historical information about presented structural problems and important criticalities<sup>54</sup>. Since I am not aware that Aristotle made any exceptions in this respect, I really do not see why we should consider the case of Aphytis as an exception, regarding which we are essentially being told only how the citizens were assessed in terms of their landholdings.

Moreover, while it is true the Aphytaians had an agricultural democracy<sup>55</sup>, it is worth reiterating that such a regime was considered by Aristotle as the ‘best’ among those of a democratic type, and therefore not in ‘absolute’ terms but only under the given conditions. In fact, according to the philosopher, among the most widespread ‘deviant’ constitutions (that is, democracies and oligarchies), the systems in which the multitude held power, not those in which the few rich (*oligoi-euporoi*) ruled, were preferable, but only because the former constituted in some way the lesser ‘evil’, not the optimal solution<sup>56</sup>. The latter, on the other hand, is represented only by the *ariste politeia* that Aristotle outlines in Books 7 and 8, which has nothing to do with democracy (not even agricultural democracy), since in the ideal and perfect *polis/politeia* of the *Pol.* those who, like farmers, did manual work (and, therefore, work necessary and indispensable for the community) were not considered citizens and consequently not counted among the so-called “parts of a state” (πόλεως μέρη)<sup>57</sup>.

<sup>53</sup> The same holds for the limited extension of the *chora*. From this point of view, in fact, Aphytis would only reflect one of the different and competing conditions which, according to Aristotle (cf. *Pol.* 7, 1325b 38ff.), the legislator has available for realizing the city and providing it with the best constitution (*ariste politeia*). Therefore, except for the small size of the territory, this specific case does not meet a whole series of equally important and fundamental criteria, such as, for example, the fact of not having many citizens and being located at a suitable distance from the sea (cf., in particular, 7, 1326a 5ff.; 1326b 2ff.; 1326b 26ff.; 1327a 11ff.). In addition, we should consider that, regarding the Aphytaians, Aristotle emphasizes the limited extent of the city’s territory for another, precise, reason: to highlight the goodness of the law to which the *exemplum* we are analyzing refer. Despite their large numbers and the limited amount of land available to them, the Aphytaians had managed to solve a critical situation and to make sure that most of the *demos* dedicated themselves to working the fields.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *supra*, § 1.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. *supra*, § 7.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. 3, 1281a 40-1281b 10 and 1281b 31-38. On this specific question and for a comment on the passage, cf. Accattino-Curnis 2013: 195ff.; Berti 2013: 38ff.; Bertelli 2018: 90ff.

<sup>57</sup> The expression recurs several times in the *Pol.*, but cf. especially 7, 1328a 24. See, moreover, Aristotle’s considerations in 7, 1328b 37ff., 1329a 40ff. Here and elsewhere in Book 7, the *georgoi* are those individuals who worked land that was not their own and who did so as slaves, and therefore represented elements without the *status* of citizen. Considered, instead, as ‘part of the city’ were the

Therefore, with the question framed in these terms, despite the constant classification of this regime among the deviant *politeiai*, the Aristotelian views of democracy are clearly differentiated according to the different analytical perspectives adopted by the philosopher, whose reasoning, in these cases, always moves within a horizon that has nothing to do with ideal-desirable conditions, but with those proper of a given historical situation<sup>58</sup>.

From this point of view, therefore, what can quite easily be stated regarding the Aphytaians (πάντες γεωργοῦσιν) is that, in the eyes of Aristotle, the *polis* in question, like the other *exempla* mentioned in the chapter on agricultural democracies, represented a paradigmatic and perspicuous case of political moderation achieved (and perhaps achievable) under the given conditions. It was, in fact, a community that, through its laws, had managed to create ‘in a natural way’ that same balance between the *demos* and the small group of *euporoi/gnorimoi* (the upper classes and notables) that, in the corresponding positive constitution achievable under historical conditions – that is, in the so-called *politeia* (the mixed regime treated above all in Book 4 of the *Politics*) – was obtained through the proper combination of the distinctive elements of an oligarchy and those of a democracy<sup>59</sup>.

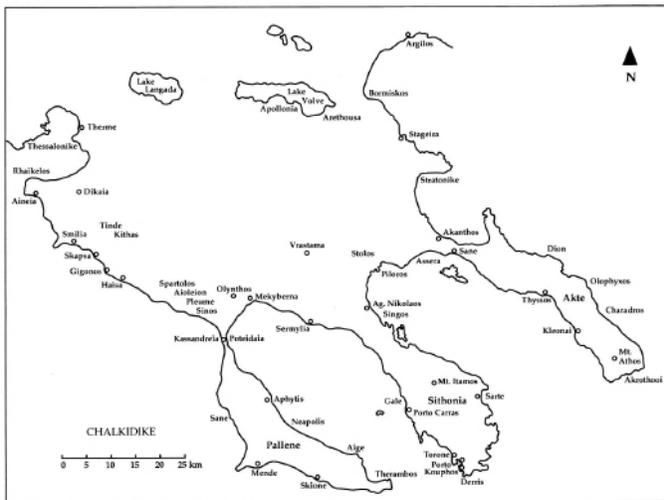


Fig. 1: Map of the Chalkidike (Papadopoulos-Paspalas 1999: 162).

soldiers (*to polemikon*) and those who deliberated (*to bouleoumenon*); the latter two groups thus constituted a higher category: the *politai* with full rights (cf. 7, 1329a 2-5, 34-39 with Schütrumpf 2005, IV: 401, 455). Farmers and all those who had to work for a living (for example, artisans, merchants, and *tetikon*) represented a lower category that were even excluded from citizenship.

<sup>58</sup> Accattino 1986: 59ff. and 74ff.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. especially Chapters 8-9 and 11-12 of Book 4 with the commentary *ad loc.* in Bertelli-Moggi 2014.

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