

Polis as Society

In the civic community, the producer's membership—especially in the Athenian democracy—meant an unprecedented degree of freedom from the traditional forms of exploitation, both in the form of debt bondage and in the form of taxation. . . . The old dichotomous relationship between appropriating state and subject peasant producers was compromised to a certain extent throughout the Graeco-Roman world whenever there existed a civic community uniting landlords and peasants, that is, whenever peasants possessed the status of citizenship.

—E. M. WOOD, *DEMOCRACY AGAINST CAPITALISM*

A Political Form: Power, Stateness, Institutions

My history of the *polis* has three characteristics. First, it is narrative and descriptive (rather than driven by explanation, for instance within a rational-choice model).¹ Second, I assume the unity of the phenomena described in the narrative. Third, the narrative is structured by its attention to power, stateness, and institutions, on which other social phenomena are dependent, or of which they are functions. All three interlocking choices deserve some comment and critique.

To start with the immediate (though perhaps ultimately trivial) issues of form:² the long, continuous narrative aims at providing context within which individual cases might meaningfully fit, as connected parts in time and space—the island *polis* of Hērakleia ca. 250 BCE, Priēnē in 120 BCE, Panopeus in 160 CE, or indeed many places or incidents within ancient history, from the eastern Mediterranean, Sicily and Italy, the Black Sea area, or the Near East. But conversely, all of these accumulate as examples of the broad phenomena of community consolidation and structuration. The aim is to produce a revisionist narrative, or at least a recalibration. The study of the *polis* must integrate this long history: to focus on the “Archaic” and Classical periods (as the work of the Copenhagen Polis Centre almost exclusively did) produces a narrow view, skewed by the paradoxes and contradictions working themselves out over a tragic century or so (460–360 BCE). The recalibration proposed in this book takes us away from widespread images of the “death of

democracy” after the Classical period, as proposed by G. E. M. de Ste-Croix and followed by P. Cartledge in his recent essay.³

The phenomena, and all those folds and watersheds that constitute my new narrative, need explaining. Why did the clusters and hamlets of the Early Iron Age consolidate into communities? Why the generalization of egalitarianism, why the tragic century of external and internal war of all against all, and, most importantly, why the great convergence? Why did the *polis* persist under empire—until it stopped doing so and changed out of all recognition? Some of the answers were grounded in the consequences of contingencies, such as the abrupt rise of the Macedonian-ruled empires (and the concomitant, paradoxical reinforcement of *polis* life), the irruption of the Roman state into the concert of eastern Mediterranean powers, or the changes in the Late Roman state. I will try to develop further answers from a variety of theoretical angles (idealist, constructivist; neo-institutionalist, economy-centered; radical and pessimistic, even very pessimistic). For now, what matters is to justify the fact that these answers are unitary, shaped by the other characteristics of my narrative: the postulate of unity, and the focus on political agency.

The postulate of the unitary existence of *the* Greek city-state, in the singular and the absolute, rests on the widespread currency of certain phenomena: institutional processes, political discourses, social relations, and the built environment of civic life. All these features exhibit broad similarities and remarkable stability, even if they change—usually across the board, as can be seen during the Hellenistic period and under the Roman empire. The stability of *polis* life as a world culture constitutes in itself a salient fact of ancient history. We are not dealing with an ideal type (let alone Max Weber’s ideal type of the ancient city as nonproductive, status-obsessed, rentier-run).⁴ Rather, it is a detailed inductive picture, combining an emic element of how citizens of *poleis* defined and spoke of their communities, and an etic collective of observable traits that the *poleis* share. There was a clearly defined category of *polis* as a self-governing city-state made of politically equal citizens and, especially in the Hellenistic period and the Roman empire, a city-state using the institutionalized practices and language that had emerged in the Greek-speaking lands of the Mediterranean.⁵ In this context, *polis*-hood was also an official status that could be formally recognized by other *poleis*, as distinct from a mere settlement; or, once a world empire had emerged in the Mediterranean, that could be granted and guaranteed by the ruling power.

However, the end-result of formalization risks offering a mere checklist for *polis*-hood. Such a mental list underlies an oft-quoted passage of Pausanias about the Phokian *polis* of Panopeus (discussed a number of times earlier).⁶ Yet this is a much richer passage than often allowed for, which deserves full quotation in all its strangeness and multistage complexity (rather than the truncated extracts that usually appear in earlier scholarship on the *polis*):

From Chairōneia it is twenty stades to Panopeus, a *polis* of the Phokians, if one can give the name of *polis* to those who possess no government offices, no *gym-*

nasion, no theater, no market-place, no water descending to a fountain, but live in bare shelters just like mountain cabins, right on a ravine. Nevertheless, they have boundaries with their neighbors, and even send delegates to the Phokian assembly. The name of the city is derived, they say, from the father of Epeios, and they maintain that they are not Phokians, but were originally Phlegyans who fled to Phōkis from the land of Orchomenos. A survey of the ancient circuit of Panopeus led us to estimate it at about seven stades. I was reminded of Homer's verses about Tityos, where he mentions the city of Panopeus with its beautiful dancing-floors, and how in the fight over the body of Patroklos he says that Schedios, son of Iphitos and king of the Phokians, who was killed by Hektōr, lived in Panopeus. It seemed to me that the reason why the king lived here was fear of the Boiotians; at this point is the easiest pass from Boiōtia into Phōkis, so the king used Panopeus as a fortified post. The former passage, in which Homer speaks of the beautiful dancing-floors of Panopeus, I could not understand until I was taught by the women whom the Athenians call Thyiads. The Thyiads are Attic women, who with the Delphian women go to Parnassus every other year and celebrate orgies in honor of Dionysos. It is the custom for these Thyiads to hold dances at places, including Panopeus, along the road from Athens. The epithet Homer applies to Panopeus is thought to refer to the dance of the Thyiads. At Panopeus there is by the roadside a small building of unburnt brick, in which is an image of Pentelic marble, said by some to be Asklēpios, by others Promētheus. The latter produce evidence of their contention. At the ravine there lie two stones, each of which is big enough to fill a cart. They have the color of clay, not earthy clay, but such as would be found in a ravine or sandy torrent, and they smell very like the skin of a man. They say that these are remains of the clay out of which the whole race of mankind was fashioned by Promētheus. Here at the ravine is the tomb of Tityos. The circumference of the mound is just about one-third of a stade, and they say that the verse in the Odyssey, "Lying on the ground, and lie lay over nine roods," refers, not to the size of Tityos, but to the place where he lay, the name of which was Nine Roods.

For sure, as many scholars have observed about this passage, Pausanias confronts the *polis* of Panopeus with the Roman-era "checklist" of monumental buildings (itself drawing from a storied tradition going back to the seventh century BCE). But he does so in a richly self-reflexive move, playing with and transcending this trope by referring to other, deeper elements of *polis*-hood, namely institutionalized recognition within frames of interaction with other *poleis*. He mentions, with deliberate offhandedness, the great circuit of walls that embodied the city's integrity and political agency (fig. 15.1). He further investigates local connections to myth; the justifications for the *polis* status of Narykos, as recognized by Hadrian, are of the same nature: institutional but also mythical (above, p. 311).⁷ That is, Pausanias is aware of the function of the checklist (to identify a *polis* by obvious signs),



FIGURE 15.1. Fortifications of Panopeus. Photograph Sylvian Fachard.

but also of its rationale and justification (i.e., the existence of a unitary object called *polis*), and the way in which these can be fulfilled by looking for other signs of *polis*-hood.

Pausanias also addresses the central problem of diversity in the landscape of *poleis*, as shown by his interest in the specific mythological connections of Panopeus: a mention in Homer, a location in a chain of song and dance connecting famous places, and local monuments and traditions. The latter connect Panopeus with the oldest times of mankind—the petrified remains of the clay whence the species was fashioned, and still smelling like human flesh. This diversity is part of the condition of the *polis* and forces us to confront the problems inherent in a major characteristic of my *polis* history, the postulate of uniformity. Even if the *polis* can be traced in highly legible forms of evidence (literary sources, the archive of monumental writing, increasingly standardized built environments), uniformity covers a considerable degree of difference (as noted by Aristotle already in the *Politics*).⁸ The economic life of a *polis* depended on resources that varied wildly within the micro-ecologies and connectivities of Mediterranean geography (so that territory size does not determine wealth).⁹ The geography and ecology of the *polis* include the Aegean but also Southern Italy, the Black Sea, Northern Africa, Anatolia, the Levant, Mesopotamia, and Egypt. We have seen cities in dry geographies such as Attica or the Aegean islands, in wet geographies such as western Greece or the Balkan settings of the modern Albanian coast, in the alluvial plains of Macedonia or of Western Asia

Minor. We have seen cities of fishermen¹⁰ and cities of farmers, even of caravan traders and camel-drivers. Does it matter that Palmyra was a *polis*?

Diversity was reflected internally in social relations, in crucial areas such as access to resources and economic power, and externally in the degree of agency a city could achieve. In addition, diversity played out in time, over centuries that saw important historical change—political, economic, and even climatic. What unites the island *polis* of Hērakleia ca. 250 BCE, which had a population in the hundreds in a territory of 18 square kilometers, and Ephesos under the Roman empire, with a spectacular monumental center, an urban population of at least 20,000, and a vast territory stretching into the Kaystros valley and along the Ionian coast?¹¹ It is not difficult to illustrate the disparity between the various elements in the same drawer labeled “*polis*.” In the course of our narrative, places wink in and out of focus. We need only to look at the evidence and context for any one “Greek city,” or region including several cities, to see diversity and change (as old Herodotos knew already).

The tableau of diversity has led W. Gawantka and E. Lévy to challenge the postulate of unity as the construct of modern political desire (see above, chapter 1).¹² In reaction, this book is premised on the existence of a common thread that connects the diverse communities in space and time. The story of the *polis* is precisely that of a construct, but of a normative one. The unitary phenomenon of *polis* forms integrates local diversity in two ways. First, it simplifies it into the “normal” institutions and parts, corresponding to generalized expectations as concerns both internal and external life. Second, it allows—indeed encourages—epichoric specificities to act as markers of distinctiveness and hence communal identity, within a network of peer-polities. The Panopeians’ claim to be immigrants from Orchomenos, descendants of the infamous Phlegyans, establishes this border city’s difference from the Phokians (to whose federal organization the Panopeians nonetheless belonged); the rival toponym “Phanoteus” claims the city for Phokis, as a foundation of the Phokian hero Phanotos (perhaps as part of a takeover of the city in the “Archaic” period).¹³

Beyond their precise political force, these traditions manifest Panopeus’s great antiquity, its right to exist as a *polis*, and also the modalities of its existence as a *polis*. The attempt to connect the place, through visible and sensual signs, with the earliest times of humanity, might represent an effort to express the uniqueness of Panopeus in ways that briefly allowed its citizens to escape the issues of local politics (where belonging to the Phokian entity was both necessary and irksome). The various markers of the small city of Narykos, not so far from Panopeus, reflect the same sense of antiquity and uniqueness—and also the way in which specialness is involved in political life, since it allows the city to fend off the claim of hostile neighbors.

My final postulate is that the unity of *polis* forms rests on issues of political power. Panopeus’s uniqueness, just as the proofs of Narykos’s right to *polis*-hood, are part of this constructed, unitary history. One reason why this matters is that

stateness creates the space for local self-government. The concrete forms taken by the latter were, externally, a striving toward some form of autonomy; and internally, a tendency toward the sovereignty of a community of equal citizens, as evidenced in ideology and in practice—and hence toward some form of democracy. This is the point of Pausanias’s checklist of built environment, state institutions, and collective storytelling. Together, such features symbolize but also enact the essential traits of the *polis* as political community; namely, its existence as an autonomous entity, endowed with agency, intent on self-governance, and naturalizing the solidarity of its members through fictions and monuments. The checklist further allowed communities to recognize each other as peers—thus ensuring the broad unity of the phenomenon of the *polis*.

Autonomy and Politics

Autonomy has been one of the main focuses in this book. It is part of the characteristics of the early phases of *polis* formation, namely of the definition of communities and their territorial structuration: hence the importance of warfare, as one of the tools of self-definition. I have also argued that autonomy (as resistance to hegemony and subordination) is one of the leitmotifs of the tragic century (460–360 BCE) and that, after many vicissitudes and changes, it constituted a major outcome of the subsequent great convergence. Military means, human and physical (such as the walls of Panopeus but also the arms of citizen militiamen), remained essential to the *polis* for defense and affirmation throughout its history (above, pp. 266–71, for cases during the second century BCE).¹⁴ Under the integrative pressure of the big Hellenistic states, and then the Roman imperial state, autonomy suffered serious, undeniable erosion; but this process also drove the emergence of various forms of proxies for autonomy, such as the claim to status and dignity through buildings, festivals, and competitions, and generally cultural identity (as at Panopeus or Narykos). These proxies themselves were, by then, very old expressions of the status of *poleis* as participants in a network of peers and also of claims to power and agency (as, for instance, in the Peloponnese down the ages).¹⁵

The importance of autonomy as an essential part of *polis*-hood has been denied by M. Hansen, on the grounds that some *poleis* were subordinate to others, not just in hegemonical structures or even in alliances or federal states (which strains the definition of “subordinate”), but also within direct, close bonds of subjection. For instance, Chairōneia, a *polis*, somehow “contributed to” its bigger neighbor Orchomenos, the regional entity of Boiōtia.¹⁶ Throughout the present work, I argue against this view. I try to establish that autonomy is inseparable from the stateness that Hansen rightly places at the heart of *polis*-hood. The norm of autonomy made relations of subordination highly problematic, indeed unsustainable, and the tension between norm and hegemony structured the whole tragedy of the Hundred Years’ War of the “Classical” period.

This is as true of the great hegemonical drives of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE as of the local relations of dependency. The latter was often a blip, a temporary bargain or a noticeable anomaly (the relationship between Mantinea and Helissōn illustrates all of these: above, pp. 177–78), and the collapse of hegemony, ultimately and by association, did away with the “dependent *poleis*” so central to Hansen’s case.¹⁷ To insist on the central importance of autonomy is not to argue (as German legal historian A. Heuss did) that the *polis* was so essentially free that there were no legal concepts to describe its subjection. On the contrary, such concepts did exist, as pointed out forcefully by E. Bickerman at his most legalist: *poleis* were integrated within empires along a scale of statuses and privileges granted by the ruling power and which, from the start, included the grant of the horizon of liberty itself.¹⁸ But the existence of these concepts is itself predicated on the workings of a self-governing *polis*.¹⁹ Subordination presupposes some bounded, self-governing entity to be subordinated in the first place (since a “subordinate *polis*” is not integrated like a village or civic subdivision). By its very definition, the subordination of the *polis* opens the way to contradictions and tensions that required a spectrum of solutions from dissolution and annexation to breakaway freedom, to proxies for autonomy and the constant, uneasy negotiation that characterizes the condition of the *polis* from the third century BCE onwards.

What was the point of autonomy? Of course, the most obvious advantage is freedom from external exploitation; if this ideal was not attained, proxies for autonomy established the right of the local community to bargain for better conditions, and the self-awareness to pursue collective goals in the face of external interlocutors big and small. Another important function of autonomy was internal to the political community. Autonomy crucially enabled communal decision-making on issues of governance,²⁰ membership, procedure, rules, adjudication, and the administration of public goods. These issues of state power (which constitute another central theme of this book) further intersected with the matrix of power between the rich and the poor. Such an analysis is a simplification of the diversities of local situations, but a simplification created by the ancient institutions themselves, and a crucial instance of the way in which the unity of *polis* forms tended to abstract debates and issues. In spite of local variation in naming and in institutional detail, the outcome of these debates was the constitutional “great convergence” starting in the late fourth century BCE, predicated on democratic institutions with the strong potential to limit elite domination, within an articulate communal ideology that tries to balance public claims and private property, economic inequality and political equality.²¹

The subsequent tensions, persisting into the Roman empire, are predicated on the nature of the great convergence as a social as well as an institutional phenomenon, through the practice of *leitourgia* and honours. The double nature, external and internal, of communal self-government explains why the expression “democracy” or “cities ruled by the people,” *dēmokratoumenai poleis*, can designate both external

autonomy and internal democracy (in our modern terminology).²² When the first-century BCE geographer and historian Strabo narrated (or imagined) the early history of Mytilēnē, he summarized the actions of the politician Pittakos as “dissolving the family monopolies on rule (*dunasteiai*) and restoring autonomy.”²³

Both aspects, external and internal, are predicated on the operation of state power. To place stateness and power at the heart of *polis*-hood is to reaffirm a broader Aristotelian view, whose various tenets are of particular interest here in helping enrich but also confirm our interpretation of the *polis*. First, the Aristotelian focus on political power should be completed by the concept that life in a community raises moral issues—the “living well” (*eu zēn*) which is an important theme of the *Politics*. This aspect constitutes the theme of the following chapter of this book (and also overshadows the next chapters, on interests and domination). Second, an Aristotelian view posits that social relations in the *polis* can be meaningfully simplified to the inherent opposition between a leisured elite (defined by wealth, though often keen to claim innate superiority) and a majoritarian mass of free but not wealthy citizens. Third, the questions of access to and control of political power will directly affect the ways institutions are deployed around interests, especially as conceived by the group that “rules” constitutionally.²⁴ The *dēmos* will favor redistribution, and even more, will try to entrench protection from the rich:

the poor, even if they do not share in honours, are willing to keep quiet, as long as no one exercises arrogant violence (*hubris*) or takes away anything of their property.²⁵

The rich, conversely, aim to maximize economic power. They strive to protect property interests, limit redistribution, and ensure enforceability of contracts (especially in matters of debt and rent).

Finally, one of the main components of an Aristotelian approach is the democratic potential of *polis* forms and concepts that Aristotle grappled with when he wrote on the eve of the great convergence, preferring to speak of *autarkeia* and *politeia* rather than autonomy and democracy. We should perhaps not be so afraid of the latter terms since we mercifully do not live in the fraught world of the later fourth century BCE. Notably, the issues of elite honors and recognition, office-holding, and the distribution of the financial burdens of *polis* life are crucial, and are regularly mentioned in Aristotle’s *Politics*, just as they constitute a resonant theme in *polis* history.

The Trouble with Aristotle: *Polis* as Society

An Aristotelian approach to the *polis* is deeply concerned with which group will rule over it or at least in it (the rich, the poor, the “best,” an individual), and in whose interest. Hence, such an approach entails a constant awareness that institutions matter deeply for their practical consequences. However, it is immediately

obvious that politics and more generally life in the *polis* were more than just a question of Aristotle-style institutions, be they deliberative, executive, or legal.²⁶ The Athenian Agora is clearly a site of government²⁷ and civic ideology,²⁸ monumental, inscribed, and enacted, the space of officeholding, inscribed law and honorific monument. Yet the Agora was also a space filled with the stalls, screens, and stands of retailers and craftsmen: a market for myriad commodities, a place to get services such as haircuts or commodities such as pottery or enslaved workers, and the venue for informal encounters. The members of the deme of Dekeleia in the mountain of northern Attica used to meet at a particular barbershop, next to the Herms (that is, pillar-statues of the god Hermēs set up by former magistrates next to the Stoa of the Archon-King).²⁹

The “Aristotelian” institutional workings of deliberation, administration, or adjudication not only took place cheek-by-jowl with daily social activities but were directly impacted by a sphere of extra-institutional power (D. Gottesmann) in the form of “stunts” or gestures such as supplication or social performances outside the institutional venues, or even before institutionalized entities such as the Assembly or the jury-courts. The performance of grief and mourning by the relatives of Athenian servicemen lost at sea after the battle of Arginoussai in 406 BCE influenced the outcome of the trial of the Athenian generals, accused *en bloc* of failing to save them. Reputation, public opinion, and gossip served to police the Athenian community in the absence of any strong administrative and coercive structure.³⁰ The city of Athens was a space of multiple extra-institutional, informal experiences and of interactions between individuals and groups involving citizens, immigrants, enslaved workers. These interactions cannot be defined by or limited to the terms of political institutions and formal citizenship, yet were constitutive of social life in what K. Vlassopoulos (taking a leaf from a book by the radical social theorists Sara M. Evans and Harry C. Boyte) termed “free spaces” of creativity and agency.³¹ As B. Krigg notes, Plato famously portrays in the opening of his *Republic* a scene where “elite citizens and wealthy metics mingle and are at ease in each other’s company”—in the house of one Kephalōn, a metic and the father of Lysias, also a metic and a specialist *logographos* who produced speeches for Athenian citizens to use in court.³²

An extra-institutional viewpoint acts as an invitation to consider the *polis* not just as citizenship and access to political institutions, but to embrace its whole breadth as a society of associations, a field where individuals are members of multiple overlapping groups, reflecting multifaceted identities. After all, even Aristotle in the *Politics* admitted that not only were there multitudes of *poleis*, but that each *polis* itself was a multitude.³³ To reuse a term favored by Aristotle, the city is made up of *koinōnīai*, or communities. These include the civic subdivisions that have been a familiar feature of our narrative of *polis*-hood. For instance, in the early *polis* we have seen kinship-based or kinship-adjacent groups—clans (*genē*), “brotherhoods,” tribes—but also locality-based associations. The demes of Attica, formalized in the “Kleisthenic” reforms of 508 BCE and an integral part of Athenian society

for the subsequent three centuries or so, are the best-known example. Local groups were organized in larger structures, such as the cultic association in northeast Attica, the Marathonian Tetrapolis).³⁴ Other associations grouped individuals around shared activities or interests (financial or professional): associative life is already taken for granted in a law attributed to the early sixth-century BCE reformer Solōn.³⁵

Associations were everywhere in the *polis*. They could be as simple as a group of commensals or drinking partners; as focused as a funerary club (such as the *temenitai*, gathering citizens, foreigners, women, for religious activities including the maintenance of members' tombs);³⁶ as specific as an organization of metalworkers in Tlōs in 150 BCE, or of market gardeners in a city of Roman-imperial Asia Minor, Thyateira;³⁷ as elaborate as the associations in Hellenistic Rhodes whose multi-barreled names declared complex histories of formation and cultic practice.³⁸ One example is the *Eranistai Samothrakiastai Hermaistai Aristobouliastai Panathēnaistai hoi sun Ktesiphōnti* ("The Members of the Mutual Fund of Worshipers of the Samothrakian Gods, of Hermēs, founded by Aristoboulos, celebrators of the Panathenaia, under the direction of Ktesiphon"). Associations even had their own chapters. Thus the *Panathēnaistai systrateusamenoi syskanoi*, the "celebrators of the Panathenaia, on campaign together, who are tent-mates" formed their own *koinon*.

An essential part of the associative life was the feasting whose traces are ubiquitous in *polis* history.³⁹ Examples include the dining groups or "herds" of youth of Crete in the seventh and sixth centuries BCE; the festive gatherings of citizen, foreigner, and enslaved, paid for by benefactors in the late second century BCE; and the feasts celebrated in third-century CE Palmyra in honor of certain gods, and to which admission was gained by presenting clay tokens.⁴⁰ The associative phenomenon is thus a major part of *polis* history, in spite of all the changes in *polis* forms. It has rightly received sustained scholarly investigation (notably because it intersects with interest in the history of religions in the Roman empire, especially that of Judaism and Christianity). This phenomenon has usually received piecemeal, period- and context-specific explanations. But when we see that the associative phenomenon can be interpreted both as a reaction to democracy (in the Classical *polis*), and a reaction to oligarchy (in the Roman-era *polis*), we might realize that prevalence of the associative phenomenon might have some more general, structural connection with the *polis* form.

But what is left of the *polis* itself, if we disassemble it down to a field within which individuals associated at a number of levels and scales, and across multiple associations? A natural follow-up would be to say that, to all intents and purposes, these associations *were* the *polis*. After all, Polybios (albeit in a satirical portrayal) described late third-century BCE Boiōtia as overtaken by drinking and feasting associations ("there were many Boiotians for whom there were more dinners per month than days assigned in the calendar").⁴¹ But what would such a statement as "the associations were the *polis*" mean? It claims that the associative level was

where meaningful interactions occurred, notably in the realms of economic collaboration, religious performance, and the microdynamics of social power. It also posits that the associative phenomenon was constitutive of the *polis* in a more fundamental or real way than political and governmental institutions were. The choices and agency of social actors to interact with other actors, according to a number of factors (including discourses, ideas, or nonhuman conditions), seem to result in a criss-crossing, shifting network of constantly performed relations. But according to what principles? The answer can only be local and context-bound (thus challenging my postulate of the *polis* as a unitary phenomenon).

In this view (inspired by Bruno Latour's actor-network theory), the aggregate of relations is what really matters in the history of the urban settlements of the eastern Mediterranean.⁴² The Roman-era *polis* might gain by being viewed as the aggregate of elite families, their power of patronage, and the social interactions of the professional associations. Indeed, the shrines and even the *agora* of many cities, from the fourth century BCE onwards, exhibit side-by-side honorific statues dedicated by the *polis* (represented institutionally as the People, or the People and the Council) and statue portraits set up by civic subdivisions, associations, or especially families: the *polis* appears as a field of multiple actors and transactions.⁴³ These manifestations are not devoid of a political dimension but they take place at a remove from the veil of formal political institutions of the *polis*. Indeed, we might choose to view these manifestations as the real locus of power and politics—as has been explicitly proposed for the “Archaic” *polis* (above, pp. 139–40) or the “Indian Summer” of the *polis* (above, pp. 284–85).

In such a deconstruction of the institutional view, there is no justification for the centering of the citizen as stakeholder with access to political institutions. Membership in the *polis* dissolves into a fluid play of multiple, indeterminate statuses.⁴⁴ The significant characteristic of Classical Athens becomes not the citizen/noncitizen dichotomy but the many gradations of privileges and spaces of agency for inhabitants, including resident foreigners and even slaves. As part of this picture of generalized fluidity, we might underline the fact that Athenian citizens could be punished by the forfeiture of political rights and access to the *agora*, or even subject to corporal violence in certain circumstances, thus blurring the distinction between enslaved and free.⁴⁵ In Classical Sparta, citizens who had proved cowardly in battle and went by the infamous name of “tremblers” could be partially disfranchised by losing the right to buy and sell, as well as being cut off from the contacts of normal sociability; such second-class citizens joined the ranks of “Inferiors” which included impoverished Spartiates but also bastard children of half-Spartiate birth (above, pp. 195–97). Another example of unevenness in the field of social status is the privilege given to Spartiates from the *oba* of Amyklai (a locally based civic subdivision) of attending the festival of the Hyakinthia, even when serving in the army (in 391 BCE, the practice resulted in a disastrous military defeat on the line of march).⁴⁶

As with the case of the Spartiates from Amyklai, differences ran even within the group of fully enfranchised adult male citizens. Some of these differences were formalized: even in democratic Athens, census requirements for office never were officially abolished. Other differences were created by multiple differences and inequalities in wealth, leisure, access to resources and social capital. For instance, access to institutional workings must necessarily have been different for citizens according to proximity to the urban center that the *polis* never ceased being, and this difference was exacerbated by wealth and class. Rural wealthy citizens might have multiple residences or networks of guest friends to tighten bonds with the urban center; the rural poor, on the other hand, might show up in town a few times in their lives. This at least is how Cocceianus Diōn imagined a rustic citizen relating to the urban center of his *polis* (above, pp. 347–48). Under the Roman empire, the *polis* often appears under the guise of a bundle of multiple groups: the young men, the people who frequent the *gymnasion*, the old, the “other citizens,” the dwellers-by, the foreigners, the Romans, the landowning noncitizens (often wealthy members of other cities). . . .⁴⁷ We will revisit these barriers and inequalities in the *polis* (chapter 19).

A particularly rich example of *polis* as social complexity is offered by Rhodes. This was a “new” *polis* created in 408 BCE out of the synoikism of three original *poleis* (Ialysos, Kameiros, and the spectacularly well-documented Lindos), but it also was a territorial entity comprising a center (the island) and outlying territories on the Karian mainlands and on the islands (fig. 15.2).⁴⁸ The tiny island of Symē or the long rocky island of Karpathos were both integrated into the Rhodian entity, but seem to have had “inhabitants” who were not full citizens.

Inscriptions document complex local organization and diversity: for instance, “those living in Symē” gathered in a corporation (*koinon*) to honor a full citizen of Rhodes, thus showing the coexistence of citizen and noncitizen in the same social space.⁴⁹ The members of Lindos (one of the three original *poleis* on Rhodes) defended their exclusive access to priesthoods and rites, against the claims of citizens from outlying regions on the island and on the Karian mainland. The mainland areas were annexed shortly after 305 BCE by the Rhodian state and assigned to demes belonging to one of the original three cities. Yet, the original Lindians successfully defended their nativist privilege, in a hearing before the Rhodian state (they celebrated their victory in a monumental inscription). As C. Thomsen notes, “not a single Lindian citizen from a deme in the Peraia or on Karpathos ever held an office or a priesthood in Lindos,” but the original Lindians felt free to legislate concerning sacred matters in the overseas “Lindian” demes.⁵⁰ The consequence was that overseas Rhodians could hold office in the central Rhodian state, but were excluded from the original three cities; Rhodian citizenship was separated by history and geography into patterns of privilege and exclusion.

Furthermore, the diffusion of the *polis* model generated complexities and diversities in the citizen body.⁵¹ An example is the presence, in second-century BCE Philadelpheia (in Lydia), of an “association of the citizens and of the ephebes under

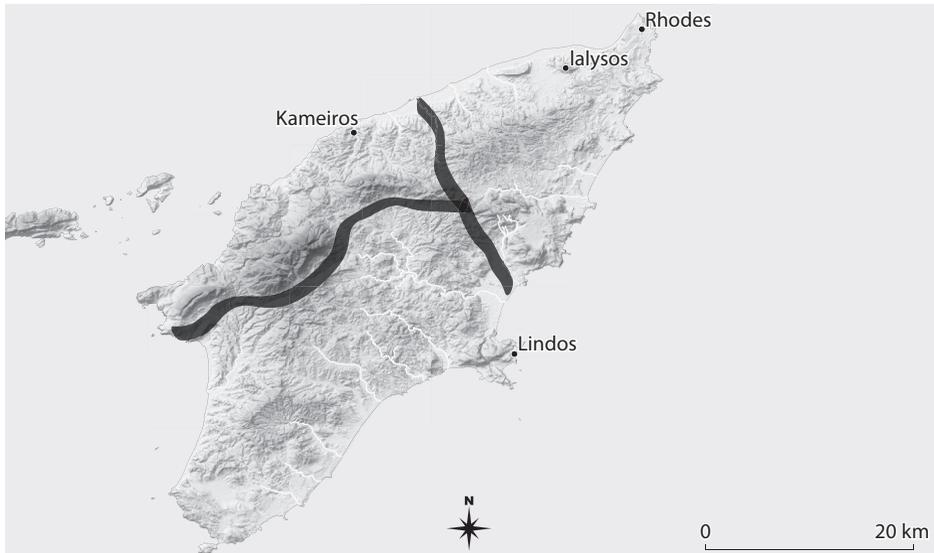


FIGURE 15.2. Rhodes and its subdivisions. After Thomsen 2020.

Nikanōr,” honoring the latter official: these might be citizens of a Hellenistic military foundation installed in the midst of a rural settlement (the inscribed stele recording the honor was found 5 kilometers away from the city). The end result of the process was the situation, in at least some Roman-era *poleis*, whereby urban dwellers and members of the socioeconomic elite had become a formally recognized citizen body, with rights not enjoyed by the rural inhabitants (above, p. 342). Even without such formal statuses, civic ceremony distinguished between the Council, officeholders, members of special groups of grain-dole recipients, and other citizens. The *polis* begins to look more like an early-modern city, with a spectrum of statuses and privileges.⁵²

Participation and Performance

If citizenship itself was not a matter of institutional definition, then what was it? To define membership away from merely institutional definitions shifts our focus to a wide array of participatory activities, which were political in the sense of community-forming, without being strictly about politics in the narrow sense. In 403 BCE, the historian Xenophon writes, Kleokritos, the herald of the initiates of Eleusis, a most august personage in Athens, invited the oligarchical party to lay down arms:⁵³

Fellow citizens (*andres politai*), why do you drive us out? Why do you want to kill us? We never did you any harm, but we have shared with you in the most

solemn rites and sacrifices and the most magnificent festivals, we have been companions in the dance and fellow festival-goers and fellow soldiers, and we have braved many dangers with you both by land and by sea in defense of the common safety and freedom of both of our parties. By the gods of our fathers and mothers, by our ties of kinship and marriage and comradeship—for all these many of us share with one another—cease, out of shame before gods and men, to do wrong against your fatherland . . .

This portrayal of citizenship in action is deeply political but not institutional in the strictest sense: it is about the public performance of gestures and activities. In addition to any institutional functions, and its workings as an open venue of fluid social interactions, the *agora* was often a space for the performance of rituals; for instance, the choruses, processions, and dances we can guess at in “Archaic” Athens or Argos, but also in later periods.⁵⁴ At Priēnē around 100 BCE, the *agora* could transform into a processional avenue with spectators on either side, some sitting under familial statue groups, others on a low flight of steps. The huge, portico-lined public square of third-century CE Smyrna was not only the setting for the informal interactions hinted at by graffiti, but also the venue for the execution of Christians, a type of event which constituted violent mass happenings in an urban context.⁵⁵ As we have seen, the performed nature of citizenship is a very striking feature of the early *polis*. This could take the form of social performance in the small groups of the feast and the drinking group, or of self-styling in body and vestments (for instance, regulated flaunting of markers of luxury such as horse-rearing or long hair) with a view to manifest and conform to group identity. In A. Duplouy’s striking formulation, citizenship was a *habitus* rather than a matter of institutions.⁵⁶

Such manifestations were performative (in the technical sense of Austinian speech-act theory, by which statements act on the world). Just as felicitous performance created eminence and distinction for competitive elites, it constructed the group and established membership in it, based on “uptake” (to use the Austinian term): that is, acceptance in the fluid world of interactions, associations and statuses.⁵⁷ *Polis* as the practice of a mode of life invites an anthropological analysis centered on identity, symbol, and memory—themes close to the so-called Paris School and its structuralist analysis of the *polis*. Nor are such phenomena limited to an “Archaic” period. The practice of citizenship is equally centered on participation in festival culture in later centuries, in fifth- and fourth-century BCE Athens, or during the “Indian Summer” of the second century BCE. At Kolophōn ca. 100 BCE, as we have seen, long honorific decrees for good citizens describe a whole register of actions: acting as an advocate for the city and holding office, but also sporting competition, sacred travel, sacrifices and dedications, money lending and pledges, festivals, public entertainment (*akroamata*), distributions of meat or cakes to citizens and foreigners alike, and lavish feasts for special age groups (the young and the elders). Similar pictures emerge from other cities in the Hellenistic

period, in different contexts (for instance, Teōs in 203 BCE, when it reengineered its social life around ruler cult for the Seleukid ruler Antiochos III, or Priēnē in its honors for great benefactors).⁵⁸

To appropriate an Aristotelian term once again (or simply to return the term to its original noninstitutional context), we might describe the *polis* as concerned with *koinōnia* in the sense of partaking or communion. Religious ritual and experiences formed a central part of *polis* as communion; indeed, religious ritual, especially animal sacrifice and the consumption of sacrificial meat, was a major part of the shared activities of the human community and of the institutional officeholders. Partaking in sacred matters is occasionally described as a constituent part of being a citizen, when citizenship is shared between communities or granted to individuals: new citizens are allowed to have “a share in the sacred matters, which all the other citizens share in.”⁵⁹ Officeholders are honored for the successful accomplishment of the sacred duties of sacrifice and ritual.⁶⁰ The *polis* was what the *polis* did, and what the *polis* did was to worship and to honor the gods, through ritual events and material manifestations. “The core of the *polis* was its bond with the gods,” as J. Blok writes.⁶¹ Such concerns were the first item of business transacted in meetings in many *poleis* (a special mark of honor was to have priority access to the Assembly “after the sacred matters”).⁶²

One of the signs of the emergence and consolidation of the *polis* is the building of monumental temples to patron deities, which unifies the community and relates it to a network of its peers (through competition and by analogy),⁶³ and the religious nature of civic monuments and spaces never abates. The *agora* itself was a sacred space, filled with shrines. The city’s main deity, honored in its most important shrine and festivals, could represent the community in visual shorthand (for instance, at Aizanoi; fig. 13.2); the synekdoche is already present on “Archaic” coinage (for instance early Athenian coinage with the head of Athēna) and lasts down to the cult of patron saints in Late Roman cities.⁶⁴ The nature of the *polis* as a compact between a human community and the world of the gods is visible not just in the participatory nature of *polis* religion, but also in the claims it makes on its inhabitants. Festival activities reached out to individuals within the whole diverse social space of the community; they imposed the physical, bodily, and spatial performance of participation in the form of leisure, special clothing or accessories such as crowns, and installations such as domestic altars.⁶⁵

To see the *polis* as essentially a religious organization takes us far from Aristotle’s institutional focus on political power. In this capacious performance- and participation-based model, the adult male citizen and his involvement in political institutions are no longer the measure for all things, or at least the touchstone for the nature of the *polis*. Women, for instance, are taken to be as full members of the community. Notably, citizen women fulfil an important part in the cultic affairs that are a central part of civic activities, as participants in festivals, or as holders of religious office.⁶⁶ The latter could be highly visible (as with the priestesses of Athens),

or more discreet (as on Hellenistic Rhodes, where female deities were served by female priestesses, but without the latter being prominent in the honorific record).⁶⁷ The complementarity of male magistrates and female priestesses appears explicitly in the negotiations between the two *poleis* of Medeōn and Steiris in Phokis when the two cities joined in civic union (*sumpoliteia*): “let it not be possible to force the Medeonians to serve (*leitourgein*) in office at Steiris, if they have been archons, *xenodikai*, exactors, *damiourgoi*, priests, hierarchs, and, among the women, if they have served as priestesses.”⁶⁸

Furthermore, citizen women transmitted citizen status through legitimate birth, in democratic Athens from 451 BCE onwards, as well as many other (perhaps most) cities in the subsequent centuries (for instance, Kōs or Rhodes)—this seems a clear indication of the full integration of women within the *polis* as community. By guaranteeing citizen status, they also transmitted the right to participate in the ritual life of the *polis* as sacred community of religious interaction with the gods. Crucially, women perpetuated the *polis* by biological and social reproduction, by bringing forth legitimate citizen children. They ensured the inheritance of citizen property and hence the continuity of households in the *polis*.⁶⁹ In this view of the *polis*, women are fully *citizens*, and even children are citizens, inasmuch as both groups participated in the *polis*'s religious life. Their presence as citizens and full members of the *polis* can serve as an emblem for a history of the *polis* as a society that is not dominated by adult male elite presences.⁷⁰ Hence, logically, women could be the recipient of citizenship grants in other cities; indeed, this is duly documented in epigraphical documents from the third century BCE onwards. In such a history, what need of Aristotle's focus on institutions, what need of the state at all?

Bringing the State Back In

There is much force to a critique of banal Aristotelianism in any history of the *polis*. The costs of my basic choice of looking at the *polis* not as a history of settlement and society but as a history of political institutions, have haunted this book, as continuously setting the limits of what can be said. An example of the dilemma is the way in which specialists in Hellenistic epigraphy are perhaps all too comfortable defining and identifying a *polis* with a stroke of the pen, in reference to a list (admittedly an inductively constructed and well-documented list) of institutions and status markers: a *polis* is not a village or a town, has political institutions, is recognized by peers and imperial masters. The catalogues of *theōrodokoi* (hosts for official sacred envoys) enumerate *poleis* as clearly defined political communities recognized by other *poleis*. This sort of history leaves out a lot, even if I have tried to pay some attention throughout the narrative to social relations, cultural identity, ecology, and economics. Yet this sort of critique within a “new social history” of the *polis* is also problematic in major ways. In what follows, I would like to make a plea for the centrality of the state, a plaidoyer for bringing the state back in, even

or perhaps especially in a social-cultural history of the *polis*—but in full awareness of the consequences of this intellectual move.⁷¹

It is true that in the case of the *polis*, we are dealing with a distinctive type of state, reflecting its very nature and constitutive processes. The nature of the *polis* complicates any attempt to understand the importance of institutionalized state power, because of the immediacy of relations between state and members—a dimension that is itself deeply ideological (as all constructions of the state must be). The nature of the *polis* as citizen-state is manifested by its constant designation as a noun (the *ethnikon*) in the masculine plural: the Priēnians, the Athenians, the Hērakleiotēs. The trope is ubiquitous in narrative, but also in such media as civic coinage, where the *polis* (a singular noun) can be completed by the *ethnikon* in the plural, in hybrid grammatical constructions that show the equation between the abstract concept of *polis* and its sense of a community of citizens (see above, p. 374, on the case of Apameia in Syria). A striking image of this nature of the *polis* as society is given by the urban plan of Priēnē. As suggested by F. Rumscheid, Priēnē was not structured by public spaces of power but deliberately created as the sum of modules for private houses, themselves determined by the standardized size of the dining couches for small gatherings. The whole grid plan of Priēnē is generated by the needs of the citizen household and the face-to-face meetings of citizens in modular groups.⁷²

The *polis* can be expressed as the sum of its members; alternatively, it can be described as “the common thing” of its members, the *koinon*, for instance *to koinon tōn Delphōn/Ilieōn . . .*, “the commonality of the Delphians” or “. . . of the Ilians.”⁷³ The word can be understood as describing community, but it also has the sense of the “common property” of that human community. The *polis*, a community, was materialized as the sum of the members’ property, interests, and claims. The territory was the aggregate of its members’ real estate, so that land ownership was long restricted to citizens. When the Ephesian priest of Artemis was allowed to own land at Priēnē, he was forbidden from holding property contiguous to the border, lest his ownership allow Priēnē to claim his property as part of the territory of Ephesos. Conversely, a friend of the Seleukid king Antiochos I, given an estate from the royal land, was allowed to attach it to the civic territory of any city he chose.⁷⁴ This aggregative and immediate conception of the *polis* explains why public goods such as proceeds from mines or the windfall of elite gifts, were distributed to individual citizens, throughout the *polis*’s history (for instance above, pp. 122–23, 337, 342, 364).

The immediacy of the *polis* influenced its stately manifestations. An obvious characteristic of the *polis* is the thinness of its apparatus. In the *polis* there is no real bureaucracy. The “remembrancer” of Datala in “Archaic” Crete was not a scribe but a member of the political community, even if his functions were to be kept in his family (above, p. 107). The allotment machines in the courts of democratic Athens were not run by technicians, but by average members of the jury, who were drawn by lot (above, p. 184). Specialist bureaucrats with power are generally absent in the

polis (though cities do have salaried doctors or architects); many state functions are devolved onto public slaves, which reify state functions as a function of ownership by the citizens rather than as an autonomous entity with the agency and the will to pursue its own separate interests and logic.⁷⁵ The Hobbesian Leviathan is not a figure that the ancient Greek *polis* would have recognized itself in, even if it could represent itself with personifications.⁷⁶ The normal regime of alternance in power-holding, the love of large colleges, the constant resort to accountability, are also functions of the immediacy of the *polis*.

The thinness of state operations in the *polis* is not a result of technological or conceptual limitations. The *polis* had emerged out of the ruins of palatial polities that had two markers of an entrenched, active state, namely monarchy and scribal bureaucracy at the service of extraction and accumulation (above, pp. 25–29). The important processes took place during the Early Iron Ages, where communities grew in the leaderless, nonhierarchical world of the “clustervilles” (above, chapter 2). This world may have been comparable to the Tupi-Guarani anarchic formations studied by the anthropologist Pierre Clastres,⁷⁷ in its characteristics of weak executive power, community claims on the service and property of the prosperous few, and internal solidarity (as seen notably in mass participation in external conflict). All these Clastresian traits would characterize the *polis* in its history; they survived institutionalization, or perhaps drove the particular path to institutionalization in the *polis*’s history.

In view of the immediacy of the links between *polis* and society, it has proven tempting to call the *polis* a stateless society.⁷⁸ In what precedes, following the analysis of M. Hansen, I have consistently argued against this interpretation on the basis of what I see as clear signs of stateness—starting with autonomy, but especially focusing on the existence of written laws, institutionalized forms of legitimate power, and automatic processes of governance. No doubt the immediacy of the relationship between *polis* and citizens shows that the *polis*, as a citizen-state, was also a “society-state” (to coin a phrase) in which Clastresian characteristics determined the face of the state and the level of its operations. Yet this immediacy did not diminish the existence of institutions, nor their precise goal, which was the administration, protection, and even production of *to koinon*, the shared goods of the citizen community. Immediacy cut both ways: because of the nature of the *polis* as community and as the aggregation of the citizens’ goods, the *polis* could also issue claims on all of its members’ activity and their goods, to protect itself as common project.⁷⁹ The sense of collective project was manifested in various forms of “bigness,” such as vital common spaces and structures (walls, meeting places, shrines) and public goods (such as drinking water; fig. 10.6): these have been obvious features throughout my narrative of *polis* history.

“Society-state” is ideological. As a representation of the relationship between *polis* as state personality with means of enforcement and control over public goods, and *polis* as human society, it is based on identification and elision. The latter operations allowed the society of citizens to imagine itself as the synekdoche for the whole human

ecology that lived in the territory of the *polis*. This identification was particularly intense in democratic *poleis* such as Athens, where the extensive franchise fostered the sense that the citizens were the whole society, to the point that M. Canevaro argues that there was no popular culture separate from official or elite culture, only a *polis* culture that was also the culture of the People, including that expressed by the political institutions of the city.⁸⁰ This culture, as we have seen, was generalized as *polis* culture, starting early on. The poetics of *polis* as society can be seen at work in the fragmentary document that opens this book, showing the *koinon* of the islanders taking a decision for the safety of “the Herakleiotēs and all those who inhabit the island.”

But this example only makes all the clearer that the *polis* as society-state is closely bound with institutional power—in fact, with power over the remaining, noncitizen members of society. Thus, the citizens of Hērakleia imagine themselves as the community of islanders, but are aware that they are taking decisions that affect others who do not have a say in the Assembly, the society of “all those who inhabit the island.” The *polis* of Megara passed a decree validating an honorific decision taken by one of its *kōmai* (villages), Aigosthena: the decision was inscribed “so that the people knows how to honor those who do good for the *polis* or for the *kōmai*.”⁸¹ More starkly, the citizens of the new city of Aphrodisias-Plarasa duly passed a decree (88 BCE), decided by the Council and the People, to support a Roman governor during the First Mithradatic War by sending an armed sortie that included resident foreigners (*paroikoi*) and slaves. They declared that “our whole people, with wives, children and our whole livelihood” were ready to risk all for the Roman cause.⁸² Neither the wives nor children, let alone the slaves and *paroikoi*, had any say in the decisions that directly impacted their lives. The point is that institutions mattered: elections, sortition, votes, officeholding, law-making, sitting in judgment, fining, taxing, expelling—all the operations of deliberation, decision-making, judicial decision, and implementation constituted legitimate governmentality and hence a very direct, binding form of power in the *polis* with far-reaching effect on its denizens.⁸³

The existence of extra-institutional, informal interactions, structured by diversity and negotiation, does not cancel out the force of autonomous institutional power as wielded by the entitled group of citizens, and the concomitant asymmetries.⁸⁴ To ignore institutional power, or to minimize its reach, comes at the risk of several confusions. One is believing that the tautologous survey of extra-institutional interactions (which are, indeed, extra-institutional) amounts to demonstrating that they somehow displaced institutional power, or prevented elections from having consequences (to borrow an expression from modern political cant). The second is mistaking a number of social metaphors and performances for social reality, an error which amounts to merely fulfilling the ideological function of such metaphors.

True, the Aristotelian *Constitution of Athens* records sacred matters as an important concern of the Assembly—but the latter also handled matters such as defense, food supply, or edilitary administration. The grant of citizenship in the *poleis* often specified “participation in divine matters and office-holding” as the salient facts of

civic activity.⁸⁵ Likewise, the public examination of citizen candidates for office made sure that they were good family men, that they participated in religion, but also that they served the *polis* in war and paid their dues and taxes.⁸⁶

In what follows, I propose to show that the immediacy of the relations between state and society only reinforces the validity of an Aristotelian approach to the *polis*: rather than being shaped by social relations, institutional power, embodied in the state, constituted social relations and identities. For instance, *polis* institutions distributed, as the outcome of formal workings, crucial recognition in the form of honor in the community (*timē*), in preliminary evaluations (*dokimasiai*), in the examination of performance and expenditure (*euthynai*), and in honorific decrees (above, chapter 10).⁸⁷ To posit the primacy of the institutional entails clarifying the relationships of society and politics; the consequences of the exercise will also occupy us for the rest of this book.

The *Polis* as Civic Society

The *polis* generated its own metaphorical images as a *civic society* (to coin a phrase calqued on “civil society”). This was a function of stateness but also dissimulated it in multiple ways. One form of civic society was the ubiquitous interlocking and nested system of constituent subdivisions, which I have insisted on in my earlier account. These subdivisions include dining groups (whose formalization was an important part of the early *polis*), gentile pseudo-kindreds (“brotherhoods,” etc.) constituting larger “tribes” named after divine figures or legendary heroes, and local settlements or wards (often grouped in larger units such as “tribes”). Subdivisions only exist as parts of the civic whole, and fulfil vital functions for the *polis* as state. The most basic function fulfilled by “tribes” (and the like) is to mediate membership of the *polis* (as is clear from forensic evidence from Athens, but also the generalized practice of assigning new citizens to subdivisions and tribes).⁸⁸ Civic subdivisions also served to organize the citizen body for military duties, distribute fiscal burdens or material benefits, structure political institutions such as officeholding, service on the Council, or even pay for assembly attendance (as attested at Iasos).

Civic subdivisions also follow civic protocols—for instance, in keeping a regular schedule of meetings and ritual celebrations, respecting rules and laws, and implementing institutionalized scripts such as holding officeholders to account and honoring them. Above, we saw examples at Hellenistic Milētos, Mēthymna or Samos (p. 333). They especially worked to entrench civic institutions (mass decision, accountability, and redistribution), and civic ideology. When Aristotle proposed restraining elite officeholders’ acquisitiveness by holding them accountable in the Assembly, he also imagined giving the “brotherhoods” an official role by entrusting them with public bookkeeping.⁸⁹

Such subdivisions, though they look like descent groups or associations, are civic institutions in themselves from the time of the early *polis* down to the Roman em-

pire.⁹⁰ In Roman-era Prouusias on Hypios, city neighborhoods set up and no doubt worshipped at altars of Saviour Zeus “on behalf of the *polis*.”⁹¹ As the Prouasian neighborhood cults show, the function of apparent multiplicity was to ensure unity and solidarity out of the social diversity of the *polis*. In their constant coming together, the multiple subunits of civic society reenacted the obscure origins of the *polis* (as an institution, but also in the case of every individual city-state): rites were about rights, specifically the right to the city. A particularly elaborate and instructive example comes from second-century BCE Bargylia (above, p. 273). This Karian *polis* increased the honors of their deity, Artemis Kindyas, by distributing public funds to civic subdivisions and to the various bodies of civic magistrates in order to subsidize the raising of oxen for a bovine beauty contest and for ultimate sacrifice and consumption. The distribution took place according to a law of the city (duly passed through institutional mechanisms and involving an amendment). It benefited the tribes, the magistrates, the resident foreigners as a group.⁹² The parallelism between the tribes and the magistrates as constituent parts of the institutional workings of the *polis* is striking; metics are constituted as a quasi-civic group within the *polis*.

What the boutrophic subsidies at Bargylia show is the close link between ritual performance and civic institutions. Rituals mobilize institutional means but also act as a proxy for membership and access to institutions. The case of Bargylia also illustrates the propensity of institutions to metaphorize and to naturalize themselves. This analysis can fruitfully be applied to the ritualized performance of citizenship, as described above (notably for the “Archaic” *polis*): such performance is closely related to the institutional aspects of the *polis*. Rituals and performance enact the entitlement that is institutionalized citizenship, namely access to the protection of person and property, to decision-making, and to honor and recognition. This was already the central insight of the anthropologizing approach practiced by the “School of Paris” spearheaded by J.-P. Vernant and P. Vidal-Naquet, namely that rituals and discourse dramatized inclusion and reinforced solidarity among the citizen group.⁹³

Additionally, participation and rituals embody real goods in themselves. The *polis* provided consumables such as partaking of animal protein or diluted but vitamin-rich, psychotropic, and addictive ethanol-based drink,⁹⁴ paid for by political processes of redistribution or semi-voluntary elite generosity. Further public goods that flowed as a result of entitlement were economic, such as cash or grain (distributed for free or sold cheap thanks to collective means). Finally, the *polis* also provided, as an entitlement of membership, emotional satisfactions: the feeling of belonging to a community, the sense of ownership over space, territory, built environment, and history, or the collective and orderly communion with the supernatural in order to honor the gods, ask them for favors, and offer thanks.⁹⁵ The nature of the *polis* as purveyor of emotional or affective goods also appears in occasions of ceremonial mourning in public funerals (at Pergamon, provided for all citizens) or consolation decrees for the death of promising elite citizens.⁹⁶ Indeed, all those were part of the “good life” that the *polis* procured for its members (rather than the contemplative

life that Plato and indeed Aristotle wished for), and gave participation and performance real substance and desirability.

The metaphors of participation were all the more important because the *polis* did not clearly define citizenship as a bill of rights (though a concept of *dikaia*, “just and right things,” did emerge).⁹⁷ Participation in rituals offered a visible symbol of membership as well as a means of accrediting the members of the political community. The close connection between the *polis* as institution and the ritual performance of identity is visible everywhere, notably in the cardinal genre of the honorific decree. In this type of document, the city displayed itself as the play of institutions and politics, morphing into civic ritual and monument through stereotypical gestures such as the repeated proclamation of honorific crowns, or through normed repertoires such as honorific inscriptions or even portraits in painted or sculpted forms. The hot city of politics turned to the cold city of ritual and imagery.⁹⁸

My account of the *polis* gives much attention to reading the literature of state found in the honorific register. A simple example, recently published, from the *polis* of Karthaia on the island of Keōs (early third century BCE) illustrates the proximity of ritual and political institutions. A citizen “receives praise for continuous service as a good citizen,” on the following grounds:

Since Theoklēs the *archōn* in earlier times shows continuous zeal for the people and now having entered the office of *stephanēphoros* he completely offers the sacrifices to the gods well and with zeal, and takes care of the citizens, spending on many items out of his own resources, and he administers all the other things related to his office well and with zeal . . .

Theoklēs’s reward was to be a crown, a proclamation in civic festivals, and a yearly gift of fifteen drachmas for him to offer sacrifice—all three items of expenditure being met out of public funds and paid out by the city treasurer.⁹⁹ The importance of religion is obvious: sacrifices are mentioned first, as an important part of the duties. But they are not the only part and this decree does not show that the direct point of the *polis* was religious communion. Religious ritual is a sublimated, generalized, acceptable showcase for the administrative activities of the *stephanēphoros*; the decree shows the role of religion as a token and a proxy within institutional workings—and as an image or a mythology that *polis* gives of itself, to itself, and to others. The genre of the honorific decree is entirely about producing these stylized images of a “cold city” of ritual. As we have seen above, other sources allow us to reconstruct practical activities by officeholders (notably in the Roman-era city of Plutarch or Cocceianus Diōn); we will later try to revisit some images in search of what conflicts or tensions they might hide.

The workings of statuses and gender similarly should be viewed as functions of the *polis* as state and the centrality of the entitled adult male citizen. Diverse statuses in the *polis*, favored or indeed disfavored, were defined in relationship to citizenship as participation in institutions, especially judicial, but also political (since the non-

citizens were defined by access to the former but not the latter). In other words, such statuses work by being like the “full” or “complete” citizen of Aristotle—or by subtracting certain properties of citizenship, such as socioeconomic rights but also participatory rights. The position of citizen women (*politides*) in the *polis* was likewise defined in relationship to male citizenship as held by participants in political institutions.¹⁰⁰ It reflects a civic order produced by negotiations between the citizen stakeholders in the institutions of decision- and law-making; women’s roles and functions, notably in transmitting property and perpetuating citizen households, are ultimately regulated by those institutions. If we accept my suggestion that participation in ritual and performance are civic fictions, acting as very real metaphors for participation, female participation in these rituals at festivals or through the representative function of priestesses, can be viewed as another constituent metaphor of civic order. In the city of Medeōn (quoted above), the detailed and varied roster of functions fulfilled by men contrasts with the solitary mention of priesthoods for women.

The function of gender within debates about citizenship can clearly be seen in the generalized practice of defining citizenship through birth from two citizen parents (already mentioned above), a practice that was inaugurated in mid-fifth century BCE Athens but spread to other *poleis* during the great convergence.¹⁰¹ This norm can be interpreted as democratic in that it extended to the whole population the elitist concern with birth, and hence constructed an aristocratic metaphor for citizenship consistent with the *polis*’s conception of itself as a descent group. This latter conception was itself an appropriation of aristocratizing claims of descent from a great founder (hence elite groups named in *-idai*, “descendants of . . .” a hero). The same process can be seen in the extension of the name “descendants of Aiakos” (*Aiakidai*) or “descendants of Nēleus” (*Nēleidai*) to the whole citizen body of Aigina or Milētos.¹⁰²

The effect of this shift in definition was to reduce and diffuse elite power in multiple ways. Double citizen descent annulled the value of the foreign marriages that had been one avenue for elite distinction and international networking;¹⁰³ it made citizen women valuable independently of wealth. Secondly, double citizen birth had to be validated by civic institutions: it forced members of the social elite to canvass for legal recognition by the small-scale subdivisions that were the entry points to the citizen body, thus submitting the transmittal of property (both essential to elites) to the decision of citizen peers, who would be exercising political equality, and were necessarily nonelite in terms of wealth. In other words, the issues negotiated by the double citizen descent are closely bound to issues of political power in the Aristotelian terms of mass and elite.

The democratic nature of the institution of double-citizen birth is clearly shown by the decision of the elite, by late Hellenistic and Roman times, to pursue multiple citizenships.¹⁰⁴ Another elite strategy was to offer women and children for office-holding, *leitourgiai*, and benefactions, in order to recreate social distinction.¹⁰⁵ Elite women and children played roles in the power strategies of male citizens, reflecting

the authority of the male heads of households (again, a very Aristotelian situation, but also a strategy of distinction that is already found in the variation in burial practice in the Early Iron Age and early Archaic period).¹⁰⁶ Gender is a token in issues of institutional and social power.

In short, I am here suggesting that a whole swathe of the phenomena grouped above under the portmanteau heading of “*polis*-as-society”—subdivisions, rituals, performed identities, statuses, gender—should be viewed as functions of the Aristotelian *polis* of political institutions and debates about power between mass and elite. Moreover, I am arguing that these functions were metaphorical, and hence ideological—and that much of the noninstitutional interpretations of the *polis* have merely taken the ideological force of these metaphors too literally (for instance in arguing that citizenship *was* performance, or that different but equal roles of citizenship were distributed by gender). Indeed, their precise function was to naturalize political relationships of obligation and participation into pseudo-organic, “social” relationships. Political metaphor transcended institutionality by reifying participation *per se* rather than political power, and hence mystifying the issues of power and access at the heart of citizenship. However, the realities of institutional power were clearly defined and starkly operative. The Milesians allowed their Olbiopolitan kinsmen free access to cultic participation but asked them to register if they wanted to actually participate in officeholding. They further expressly specified, when granting citizenship, that the latter gave access to cultic activities, officeholding “and all the other things.”¹⁰⁷ The same expressions appear in grants of citizenship by Eurōmos or Eretria.¹⁰⁸

Without wanting to diminish the central importance of religion, ritual, and belief as part of the real experience and emotional life of preindustrial communities (at the mercy of endless contingencies, starting with the vagaries of weather for agricultural production), and without wishing to adopt a purely functionalist interpretation of the sacred, I also propose seeing *polis* religion as performing the same mystifying role as other political metaphors. To see the *polis* as a group bonded by its relation to the gods was a heightened discourse about community, with political implications (without necessarily being the result of a deliberate, instrumentalizing choice). When the young citizen men of Athens graduated from their two-year military service in the *ephēbeia*, and swore an oath not to abandon their “sacred weapons” (*hiera hopla*), there was nothing sacred about the weapons in themselves (they were given to the epebes from 335 BCE onwards, but the phrasing of the oath might be older). Sacrality is a metaphor for the interests of the community, defended by the citizens’ bravery in warfare.

The epebic oath hence allows us to appreciate the force of the expression *hiera kai hosia*, which the epebes swear to defend and which is common in Athenian discourse to describe public life: “sacred things (*hiera*) and righteous things (*hosia*).” The latter expression does not imply that the *polis* is a religious association but uses religious discourse to give an exalted description of its civic workings. It

is analogous to the bigness of the public actor in administrative dealings, or to the logical primacy of the *polis* in Aristotle's sociology of *polis* origins.¹⁰⁹

The various elements sketched out above constitute a particular model of power. To use concepts developed within Foucauldian theory, what we see is singular to the *polis*. In contrast with the world of the "indifferent shepherd" of pre-Christian autocratic rule, the realm of the "good shepherd" of Christian kingship, or the *raison d'État*-focused model of modern governmentality,¹¹⁰ the *polis* is structured by specific conditions (autonomy, political equality) but expresses them through the naturalizing and familial metaphors of civic society, which produce *civic capital*. I propose this term—a calque from "social capital" (M. Putnam), on which more below—to describe the conjunction of several phenomena.

First, civic capital describes the power of the "Aristotelian" *polis* to naturalize and embed itself by achieving credibility among its citizen population as well as the population at large that the *polis* represents. Next, the term designates the actual benefits that the *polis* distributes to its citizen stakeholders as symbols of participation as well as real public goods. Finally, civic capital includes the degree of access to institutional power afforded to citizens through participation in institutional processes as well as the workings of civic society. All these are illustrated in the case of the publicly funded ox-raising by the "tribes" of Bargylia or, just across the modern Gulf of Güllük, in the Karian *polis* of Iasos, by the recently published decree of a tribe, the Agelaeidai, in honor of their main official. This document illustrates the well-known imbrication and articulation of religious ritual, civic ideology and norms, and institutions. Most strikingly, the meetings of the "tribe" were supervised by officials named as the *prytaneis*, which might be the same officials the "tribe" chose to serve to preside over the Council and the Assembly, thus imbricating the civic subdivision closely into *polis* institutions, and creating avenues for access and interaction between the level of the subdivision and the structures of *polis* governance.¹¹¹

Civil Society in the *Polis*

Though civic society presented itself as a whole world of social relations, its fictions left much out in the urban center and the rural territory of a *polis*. Groups and constituencies organized themselves in the forms of associative life that we mentioned earlier (clubs, cultic groups, and so on), and that have attracted a great deal of attention in recent scholarship. Even Aristotle, in a difficult passage about what constitutes a *polis* and distinguishes it from a mere society of humans, notes that "there arise in the cities connections, brotherhoods, sacrifices and pastimes for the sake of living together"; these are the products of friendship and sociability as well as practical collaborations for profit or protection.¹¹²

What is most remarkable is that these private associations, which we can consider part of *civil society* rather than the civic structures of state, nonetheless make a point of closely imitating the institutional forms and discourses of the *polis*. Just

as civic subdivisions do, they gather in assembly, follow procedures and rules, pass resolutions after deliberations, manage common goods (funds or land), hold officials to account, and honor good members for generosity toward the commonality. Such institutional behavior is well attested at Athens, where religious associations, family associations, and groups of soldiers hold officials to account for their management of common finances, and honor them with decrees.¹¹³ The practice is widespread: we have seen examples from Hellenistic Milētos or Rhodes, and from Roman-imperial Palmyra, where associations of caravan-merchants honored civic politicians as their benefactors but also as good citizens (above, p. 386).

Such forms of *koina* (associations) behave like the *koinon* or association par excellence, namely the *polis* itself. The values they celebrate in public, through honors, proclamations, monuments, and permanent inscriptions are civic, as observed by C. Thomsen when studying the “civic aspirations” of the associations of Hellenistic Rhodes.¹¹⁴ A *thiasos* (religious association) at Kallatis, on the eastern coast of the Black Sea, honored a member who fought well for the *polis*, and similar associations at Argos celebrated the city’s victory over the dynast Kassandros. Associations did not just promote their own interests but displayed their awareness of belonging to the *polis*.¹¹⁵ They honor public figures such as benefactors or officeholders, contribute *leitourgiai* to the *polis*, or try to work as a quasi-civic subdivision in the absence of official subdivisions, as in the case of associations of soldiers, local citizens, and Athenian residents in the fortified settlement of Rhamnous in Attica. Another case is the group of “those living on Symē,” not quite recognized as a corporate body by the *polis* of Rhodes after annexation, but capable of honoring Rhodian office holders (above, p. 420).¹¹⁶

The hegemony of civic models and *polis* ideology is evident. We precisely do not see informal, extra-institutional power, but quasi- or would-be institutional aspirations. One explanation lies in the effect of the great convergence. The latter universalized the discourse of common decision-making and accountability as the main means for political and social interaction. This discourse, conversely, had deep and ancient roots in majoritarian, consultative decision-making by small associations such as kinship groups (actual or fictive).¹¹⁷ The *polis* model also spread by capillary diffusion, since it was reproduced in the workings of civic society in the assemblies and meetings of the civic subdivisions. The mimicry of the *polis* by the groupings of civil society can be considered as an imitation of the civic subdivisions, whose social impact they hence extended and magnified (this may be another aspect of “civic capital”). A final explanation is that the adoption of *polis* institutions and discourse, in the prolongation of the system of civic subdivisions, was the only way for nonpublic associations to achieve visibility and efficacy in the social space of the *polis*, for instance by distributing civic-like skills and competences, or giving groups the shape necessary for recognition within the *polis*.

The “inhabitants” of Symē, without any formal status in the huge *polis* of Rhodes, used institutional forms and civic ideology to interact with Rhodian citizens (and

convert them from landowners into quasi-civic benefactors) and the Rhodian state. This example confirms that the medium and the price for access to social capital in the *polis* was mimicry of its institutions and the adoption of its structures, discourses, and its values. The result of this alignment of civil society on civic society is that at least in the most visible manifestations, civil society constructed itself as secondary to and articulated on the civic society of *polis* institutions. It is hence unclear how the level of “civic” interactions helped Rhodian elites to gain political ascendancy in the assembly at Rhodes (as C. Thomsen proposes); that is, how civil society allowed for conversion of informal power into “civic capital” or simply power. Civil society in the *polis* certainly worked to produce social capital (trust, bonds, access to formal and informal avenues of power), and we will return below to these aspects of *polis* life; but even this intermediate level, at the intersection of institutions and social practice,¹¹⁸ appears saturated with the institutional and discursive presence of the *polis*, rather than pluralist.

In what precedes, I have proposed distinguishing between a civic society that naturalized institutional power and a civil society that aligned itself on civic society, in an acknowledgment of power in the *polis*. This simplification of social life has the advantage of helping us see more clearly what it is that we are trying to capture within the social histories we write for the *poleis*. The distinctions are important because it is all too easy to write about the fictions and metaphors the *polis* generates about itself as if these were its total social history, and because the *polis* itself was so closely bound with these representations of itself as society. I am hence arguing for a much more unitary vision of the *polis* than the recent emphasis on associativeness might allow for, or than the image proposed in 1965 by P. Jones for the medieval Italian city-state. Jones writes that the latter “was never unified, but always throughout an association of communities and powers.” (It is only fair to say that this vision of the medieval city has in turn been challenged in recent scholarship.)¹¹⁹ The multiplication of associations of workmen or professional artisans in the Roman imperial *polis*, in contrast with the generally guild-free social life of the *polis* in earlier periods (say the fifth century BCE, or the *polis* that emerges out of the great convergence) might be a response to exclusionary and oligarchizing tendencies during the Roman empire, creating the need for corporate entities for solidarity or bargaining, even if the drift toward oligarchy should not be exaggerated and democratic institutions remained present (above, chapter 13).¹²⁰

The question remains of what social life existed beyond the field saturated by *polis* institutions and ideology; that is, in the “free spaces” (the workshop and the field, the barber’s seat, the tavern, the street, the house) that K. Vlassopoulos sees as existing interstitially in the *polis*. This is a crucial question for the possibility of a social history of the *polis* that is not just the rehearsal of its fictions about itself as society; below, I try to explore some spaces where we can see life beyond the *polis*’s fictions. As we shall see, such spaces appear, surprisingly, in Priēnē, which we have often studied as a prime example of *polis* institutions and civic society. In addition,

B. Gray has argued that a considerable amount of thought and attention was paid to the costs of exclusion, and that the second-century BCE experiments in social practice were not (just) oligarchizing experiments run by elite citizens, but also attempts at inclusion and extension.¹²¹ All the same, the impact on noncitizens of the structures of exclusion, their agency, and their negotiated realities, were perhaps ineluctable. The experiences of the noncitizen and citizen-adjacent will be the poignant themes of this social history of the *polis* outside of the *polis* (chapter 19). For the purpose of this chapter, what matters is that this tripartite division—civic society, civil society, social remainder in free spaces—allows for an exploded view of the *polis* rather than the confusions between social and institutional that I attempt to dispel in this chapter.

The Consequence of Institutionalism

Beyond the methodological and theoretical problems of a social history of the *polis*, my focus is the shape of the Aristotelian *polis*: constituted as a citizen-state, structured by political institutions around autonomy and democracy, but endowed with a mirror image in the form of rituals, performance, and associations. These constituted a civic society on which civil society aligned itself. This form, that stabilizes during the Hellenistic period, proved durable and suitable for diffusion in the Roman empire, especially in Anatolia, the Levant, and Egypt. There, the transition of local communities to *polis* status or the imposition of *poleis* on local contexts entailed a broad and general reshaping of landscape, settlement, and population, into the modular forms of the *polis* (above, chapter 14)—this holds true even for Palmyra, which uniquely promoted the local dialect of Aramaic to a public language while making it fit within the parameters of civic discourse. The significant impact of *polis* forms on the “Roman Near East” is a cornerstone of F. Millar’s extraordinary survey of the region; the transformation of urban centers, the spread of *polis*-style institutions, including to the countryside.¹²² But this reshaping was also shallow, leaving unaffected vast areas of social life. If men wore the *himation* and *chiton* in the poses of the restrained Greek citizen, and displayed themselves as officeholders and *leitourgoi*, women retained traditional costume and, presumably, cultural roles in the household, religious life, and local societies. The dichotomy is visible, famously, in the funerary reliefs from Palmyra (always labeled in Aramaic, the local language, rather than the Greek used in the public sphere alongside Aramaic), but also elsewhere in the Roman Near East. For instance, on a funerary column from Qarataba in modern Lebanon, the representation of voluminous local costume, complete with headdress, forces the two female portraits to be shown with much smaller faces than on the two male busts (fig. 15.3).¹²³ It constitutes one example of the social residue, sometimes considerable, beyond civic society and civil society.

This is the consequence of my focus on political institutions. Of course, engagement with noninstitutionalist social and cultural history enriches and nuances any



FIGURE 15.3. Limestone gravestone found near Qartaba, Lebanon, on the territory of ancient Berytos. H 197 cm. National Museum, Beirut, 3977.

institutionalist interpretation of the *polis*—and, ironically, brings us back to the broader concerns of the Aristotelian view. In arguing for the power of institutions to impose binding decisions, and hence the central importance of access to state institutions for the definition of membership, I have drawn attention to the *polis*'s desire to naturalize itself, by presenting itself through metaphors of participation and societal articulation and, consequently, the idealizing nature of *polis* institutions. Institutions make moral claims about community (which helps explain the religious bent of much of *polis* discourse and political rituals). Here we have returned to the question of the Aristotelian good life in the city, as a moral good. The ideal *polis* is a dominant feature of discourses about and by the *polis*, starting in the early poetry that was present at the emergence of the *polis*, but continuing into the archive of documents produced by the city-states of the great convergence. This cluster of ideas deserves careful unpacking (chapter 16). But the ensemble of political ideas is also an ideology, not just in the sense of a set of concepts and arguments but also as a discourse, often contradictory, that allows for power struggles and bargains: the study of the *polis* of institutions leads to an *institutionalist* inquiry, where we study the pursuit of interests within the bounds of rules and path-dependency (chapter 17): it will turn out that we have never left the Aristotelian city of rich and poor.