

GREEK OLIGARCHIES, THEIR CHARACTER AND ORGANISATION

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Greek Oligarchies, Their Character and Organisation by Leonard Whibley

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LEONARD WHIBLEY

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BY

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PREFACE

THE following dissertation was awarded the *Hare Prize* in 1894. The pressure of other work obliged me to postpone the preparation of it for the press until last year.

For the study of Oligarchic Constitutions in Greece there are no adequate materials. No oligarchic state has left us any historical literature; nor have we the record of the internal working of any oligarchy: in this inquiry, as in most branches of Greek history, we realise how little we know of any Greek states other than Athens. Our conception of oligarchic government, its character and its method, cannot fail to be partial and incomplete. If we except Aristotle's masterly treatise on political ideas and political forms, information on oligarchic constitutions is scattered over a very wide field, extending from the Lyrical poets to Plutarch. Inscriptions yield less that is valuable than we should expect or desire.

The lack of positive knowledge induced me to devote the first chapter to an examination of the place occupied by Oligarchy and Aristocracy in the Greek classification of constitutions. By a study of the definitions, which are, like the political terminology of the Greeks, too often vague and uncertain, we are able to arrive at the impression produced on the minds of the Greeks by the different governments, and thus we catch a reflection of their real character. In the second and third chapters I

have briefly discussed the causes of constitutional change and traced the development of constitutions, in order to show the place occupied by oligarchy in this process. Two Appendices deal with some problems of early Athenian history. In the fourth chapter the varieties of Oligarchy are discussed, and the last chapter is devoted to the organisation of oligarchic government. It is followed by an Appendix on the revolution of the Four Hundred at Athens.

Of modern books, I have made constant use of the second volume of Gilbert's *Handbuch der griechischen Staatsalterthümer*, which contains an invaluable collection of material. Mr Newman's Introduction to the *Politics of Aristotle* I have found most useful and suggestive. I have cited in my notes the other modern works to which I am indebted.

In preparing the work for press it is my pleasure to acknowledge most gratefully the help of Mr W. Wyse, of Trinity College, one of the adjudicators for the prize, who put many valuable notes at my disposal, and the kindness of Mr R. A. Neil, of Pembroke College, and of Mr J. W. Headlam of King's College, who read my proofs and gave me the benefit of many criticisms and suggestions.

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February 3, 1896.

[In the citations of Aristotle's *Politics* I have followed the text of Busemihl's small edition, as well as his numbering of the books. The first volume of Mr Newman's *Politics* is cited as 'Newman, Introduction.' References to Dr Gilbert's *Handbuch* are to the second German edition.]

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CHAPTER I.

THE CLASSIFICATION OF CONSTITUTIONS: THE CLAIMS AND CHARACTER OF OLIGARCHY.

§ 1. *The Popular Classification of Constitutions.*

THE genius of the Greeks, which has given them a sure and lasting preeminence as political inventors and political theorists, made them conscious at a comparatively early date of the variety of governments under which they lived. The ruling element, as Aristotle says, must be one man, or a few men, or the multitude¹: and this distinction, which has served ever since as the basis of classification, is recorded for the first time by Pindar in language that is neither technical nor precise². In his words 'tyranny, the ravening host and the wise wardens of the city' denote monarchy, democracy and oligarchy; and the poet reveals his preference for the government of the few by the choice of the epithets that he employs³. Thus from

¹ Pol. iii 6 1279 a 25 πολιτευμα δ' ἐστὶ τὸ κίριον τῶν πόλεων, ἀνάγκη δ' εἶναι κίριον ἢ ἓνα ἢ ὀλίγους ἢ τοὺς πολλούς.

² Pyth. 2 88 ἐν πάντα δὲ νόμον..... | παρὰ τυραννίδι, χροῖστας ὁ λάβρος στρατός, | χροῖσταν πόλις οἱ σοφοὶ γηρέωντι. Homer Il. ii 204 οὐκ ἀγαθὸν πολυκοιρανίῃ εἰς κοίρανος ἔστω, gives us the first reflection on politics.

³ The political application of the commonest moral epithets is found in Theognis, although he does not expressly moralize on forms of government.

the first we find constitutional forms and political parties described in moral terms, and this tendency did much to confuse the political terminology of the Greeks⁴. The use of such terms could never be altogether consistent, for the advocates of oligarchy and democracy used identical phrases of praise and abuse, and applied them, as might suit their purpose or occasion, to describe opposite parties and different forms of government⁵.

There is no rhetorical commonplace so constantly employed as the comparison of the three constitutions or the contrast of the principles of oligarchy and democracy: it was a universal topic with the rhetors and sophists, who taught their pupils the stock descriptions of each constitution, and directed them to adapt their epithets and suit their conclusions to the taste of their audience⁶. By the time of Herodotus this criticism of constitutions was already in fashion, and the scientific terms of monarchy, oligarchy and democracy had been introduced⁷. The his-

⁴ It will be seen below how inconsistent and ambiguous the use of many political terms is.

⁵ It would be beside my purpose to discuss this subject here: but there is abundant evidence in the orators that the epithets and qualities, which are supposed to have acquired a special political application in the mouths of oligarchs, were employed in an absolutely opposite way by speakers wishing to say pleasant things to a democracy. Instances could be quoted of *εὐνομία*, *εὐταξία* and *σωφροσύνη* (the particular virtues of oligarchies) attributed to the democratic constitution: while *κωτηρία*, *μοχθηρία*, *θβραι* and the like are supposed to be innate characteristics of oligarchy.

⁶ Examples of this practice are quoted in the text: it is described in Isocr. xii 111 τοῖς τοιοῦτοις ἐπειδὴν ἀσθῆναι τοῖς τόποις προκατειλημμένοι... ἐπὶ τὸν λόγον οἶμαι τρέψασθαι τὸν περὶ τῶν πολιτειῶν.

⁷ Thus *μοναρχία*, *τυραννία*, *δημοκρατία* occur in the debate in iii 80—82. He uses *δημος* there to describe democracy: but in vi 43 *δημοκρατία* is found.