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- [G. Aresi]

### ***Politeia/politeuō (πολιτεία/πολιτεύω)***

The term belongs to the same lexical family as the denominative verb *πολιτεύω*, first attested in the form *πολιατεύω* in a law from Gortyn dating to the first half of the fifth century BCE, where it refers to young men who have passed puberty and are therefore able “to act as citizens” and to swear an oath before the gods (Gagarin, Perlman, *Laws of Crete* G51, l. 7). The verb is attested with the same meaning in the Great Inscription (Gagarin, Perlman, *Laws of Crete* G72, col. ix, l. 33, mid-fifth century BCE) and, in Elis, in a federal context, in the decree granting citizenship to thirteen (or more) individuals issued by the *koinon* of the Triphylians (Minon, *IED* 28, 399-369 BCE). In lines 3-8, the decree states that “if anyone deprives [them] of *politeia* and removes from public offices those who act as citizens (*πολιτειομένοις*) justly and according to the law, he is impious toward Athena”. Particular attention should also be drawn to the verbal expression οἱ *πολιτεύόμενοι*, which may be used either to denote

the civic body as a whole, that is, all those who share in political rights, or those who most actively exercise citizenship and thus, in essence, “those who govern” (cf. *e.g.* Isoc. 15.132-133).

Like the verb πολιτεύω, πολιτεία also displays a considerable variety of meanings and a high number of attestations; nevertheless, its semantic core consistently refers to the political and collective dimension of the *polis*, never to its physical or spatial aspect. The noun begins to be used from the fifth century BCE onward and is characterized, from its earliest attestations, by marked polysemy. Despite this, “citizenship” and “the right of citizenship” constitute its primary and most widespread meaning. This is first attested by Herodotus, in connection with the seer Tisamenos’ request for citizenship from the Spartans (Hdt. 9.33.5-34.1), as well as by Thucydides, with reference to the citizenship of the father of Gylippus, and by Xenophon, regarding the grant of citizenship by Ephesus to the Selinuntians after the destruction of their city (Thuc. 6.104.2; Xen. *Hell.* 1.2.10; see also Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 54.3).

It is therefore not surprising that the term appears—and is widely attested—with this meaning in honorary inscriptions granting citizenship (and civic rights) to foreigners, as well as in other epigraphic documents from the final years of the fifth century BCE onward, both in Athens (Canevaro 2025) and in the rest of the Greek world. The grant of *politeia* is normally accompanied by other honors, such as *enktesis* (see *s.v.* *enktesis*), *isoteleia* (see *s.v.*), and the like. In particular, *politeia* may refer both to the civic status of the individual and to citizenship understood in a collective sense. In this latter sense—and especially with the meaning “right of citizenship”—the term is used for the first time in epigraphic evidence in the first of the decrees of the Athenian dossier concerning the Samians, published in 403/2 but already passed in 405/4 BCE. This is the *psēphisma* granting Athenian citizenship *en bloc* to the Samian democrats (IG I<sup>3</sup> 127, ll. 19-20, περὶ τῆς πολι|τείας, “concerning the right of citizenship”). It is noteworthy that in the same document the verb πολιτεύεσθαι is used with the meaning “to adopt a constitution” (IG I<sup>3</sup> 127, ll. 12-13: Σαμῖος Ἀθηναῖος εἶναι, | πολιτευόμενος ὅπως ἂν αὐτοὶ βόλωνται, “that the Samians be Athenians, adopting whatever constitution they themselves wish”).

*Politeia* is already employed in this latter sense in the treaty between Athens and Selymbria of 408/7 BCE (IG I<sup>3</sup> 118, ll. 10-12), which states: καταστέσασθαι δὲ Σελυμβριανὸς τὲμ πολι|τείαν αὐτονόμος τρόποι ἢ ὅτοι ἂν ἐπίστωντ |αι, “that the Selymbrians establish their constitution autonomously, in whatever way they wish”. With this meaning, *politeia* is also used by Thucydides in the opening of the most famous section of Pericles’ Funeral Oration (Thuc. 2.37.1: Χρώμεθα γὰρ πολιτεία οὐ ζηλούση τοὺς τῶν πέλας νόμους, “For we have a political system that does not seek to imitate the laws of our neighbours”).

By contrast with the earliest Gortynian occurrences, which preserve—both in the noun and in the verb—the meaning connected with the status of the citizen

(see *s.n. politeis*), the earliest Athenian epigraphic attestations already employ both values from the outset: on the one hand “citizenship” and “the granting of citizenship”, on the other “constitution” and “the establishment or adoption of a constitution”. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the elaboration of the concept of *politeia* as “citizenship” first took place in Crete, whereas the evolution of the use of the term and of the verb—and their resulting polysemy—developed at Athens, which from the second half of the fifth century BCE became the centre of elaboration on the term and the concept of *politeia*. Evidence for this is provided by the further meaning of “government” or “administration of the city”, derived from that of “constitution”, attested in Aristophanes’ *Knights* (Ar. *Eq.* 219: ἔχεις ἅπαντα πρὸς πολιτείαν ἃ δεῖ, “you have everything required for governing”), but also found in Thucydides, with reference to Pericles and the government of Athens (Thuc. 1.127.3), in Aeschines (Aeschin. 3.37), and in Lycurgus (Lycurg. 1.79). With the meaning of “constitution of a state”, and thus “form of government”, the term underwent further development—again in an Athenian context—from the final decades of the fifth century BCE onward, eventually coming to denote the ensemble of laws and shared social and cultural practices of the *polis*. This is the sense found, for example, in Aristotle (*Pol.* 1295a40), where *politeia* is described as “the way of life of the *polis*”, or in Isocrates’ *Panathenaicus*, where *politeia* is said to be “the soul of the city” (Isoc. 12.138).

Of particular significance is the emergence and diffusion of *politeia* as an autonomous literary genre. Its earliest attestation is the anonymous *Constitution of the Athenians*, whose much debated dating may go back to the 420s BCE. The use of the term in the sense of “form of government” subsequently found extensive development in Platonic philosophical thought (see *e.g.* Plato, *Resp.* 562a and 544a-b) and, above all, in Aristotle, with the publication of the *Constitutions of the Greek poleis*. The literary genre of the *Politeiai* appears in a wide variety of forms, some of which focus not—or not primarily—on the institutional aspects of the *polis*, but rather on the way of life of a political community. This is partly the case for the Aristotelian *politeiai* (Erdas 2017), but also for Xenophon’s *Lakedaimonion Politeia*, where attention is directed to the customs of the community. From this usage also derives the meaning of *politeia* as a “system” or “way of life” (Dem. 20.122).

At a theoretical level, the term is instead subjected to systematic analysis in Aristotle’s *Politics*. Here *politeia* is employed across the full range of the semantic nuances discussed above, including the sense—derived from its original meaning—of “body of citizens” (Arist. *Pol.* 1292a 34; see Bordes 1980). In Aristotle’s elaboration of its multiple meanings, several aspects are particularly significant: the use of the term to denote a specific form of government, according to the well-known definition at *Pol.* 1278a 37-39; the relationship between *politeia* and the civic body, *politeuma* (Lévy 1993; Maffi 2018, on the role of laws); the use of

*politeia* as an expression of the unity of the city and as a principle guiding the actions of citizens toward a common purpose (Poddighe 2022); and, above all, the inquiry into the very definition of *politeia* that permeates Book 3, especially *Pol.* 1274b 38-41, which has given rise to differing interpretations concerning the meaning of “citizen” itself and the parameters of inclusion within the *polis* (Blok 2017; Faraguna 2025; see *s.v. politēs*).

Alongside philosophical reflection, the reconsideration of the Athenian constitution, arising from the codification of the *patrios politeia* in the last years of the fifth century BCE, exerted a strong influence on the usage and dissemination of the term (Loddo 2025). From the first occurrence of the expression in a fragment of the sophist Thrasymachus of Chalcedon (D-K 85 B1), the nebulous character of the ancestral constitution allowed individuals with different political orientations to invoke the past to mask institutional changes, presenting them under the guise of continuity between past and present. This discourse applies both to the *poleis* (*Xen. Hell.* 3.4.2) and to federal entities (*Xen. Hell.* 5.2.14), without interruption from the Classical age (*Thuc.* 8.76.6; *Arist. Ath. Pol.* 29.3, 34.3) to the Hellenistic period (Nikouria: *IG XII* 7, 506, ll. 11-15; Miletus: *Milet* VI 3, 1049, ll. 10-12; Ios: *IG XII* 5 *Suppl.* 168, ll. 1-5).

From the intensive efforts of research, expansion, and systematization of ancestral laws that took place in Athens, the concept of *politeia* emerges more clearly defined; at the same time, it gradually diverges from its original meaning of “citizenship” and acquires an increasingly political connotation, as evidenced by the sense of “democratic government” that began to spread in the early decades of the fourth century BCE (see, in addition to *Arist. Pol.* 1279a 39, for example, *Isoc.* 4.125 and *Dem.* 6.21; 1.5).

At the same time, however, reflection on the citizen and his participation in the *polis* emerges and develops also through the use of the expressions *μετέχειν* or *μεταδοῦναι τῆς πολιτείας* (see *s.v. metechō*; Filonik 2025), a theme explored in depth in Aristotle’s *Politics* (e.g., *Arist. Pol.* 1290a 7-13), but already present in Lysias (*Lys.* 12.77) and in the works of Isocrates, particularly in the *Panegyricus*, the *Areopagiticus*, and the *Panathenaicus*. In fact, Isocrates delineates in some passages of these works the figure of a sort of *archomenos politēs* (cf. *Arist. Pol.* 1277a 20; see *s.v. politēs*), which entails a significant limitation of the rights of citizens who do not belong to the *beltistoi* and of participatory engagement: the people may elect magistrates and hold them accountable, but they do not enjoy passive suffrage; they may exercise judicial power, but they apparently have no access to deliberative authority. Concerning himself, Isocrates conceives the exercise of his own role as a citizen not so much as a frequent attendee of assemblies and courts, but rather as a counselor and teacher (σύμβουλος [...] καὶ διδάσκαλος: 15.95; cf. *Ep.* 8.7) of the more politically active fellow citizens.

The consolidation of the concept of *politeia* in historical-political reflection, and its presence in honorary decrees from the fourth century BCE onwards,

gradually led to the specialization of the term into two main meanings: that of “citizenship”, attested in epigraphic documentation as an honorary grant, and that of “constitution” or “form of government”, documented, for example, in the sixth book of Polybius’ work dedicated to constitutional forms (see, e.g., Polyb. 6.3.5; 6.9.10). Elsewhere, this second sense takes on a more general meaning, which is also widely attested in Hellenistic sources, namely “state” (Polyb. 12.25g.1; 22.4.2).

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### ***Politēs* (πολίτης)**

The term *πολίτης* (*πολιάτας*, *πολήτης*) primarily refers to citizens as members of the political community and holders of political rights. In its earliest attestations, the term is always used in the plural and it is employed generically to refer